

Articles

Jihadi Competition and Political Preferences

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Abstract

While known and feared as the most dangerous global jihadi group, since 2014 al-Qaida has only been involved in one attack in the West. In the same period, al-Qaida's renegade affiliate and current competitor, the Islamic State, has organised or taken responsibility for as many as 38 attacks, thus legitimately positioning itself as the primary threat against the West and pioneer of the global jihad movement. This article argues that the contestation and competition that emerged between the two groups as a result of their split in February 2014 is part of the explanation of the dramatic change in the enemy hierarchy, or political preferences, of the two most dominant Sunni jihadi groups. Furthermore, the article explains how the inter-group competition also prompted the definition of other jihadi actors, identified as the internal enemy, into the enemy hierarchy of al-Qaida and the Islamic State, although to a different extent.

Keywords: Al-Qaida; Islamic State; jihadism; strategy; competition; target selection

Introduction

The period 2014-2016 saw a record high number of jihadi plots in Europe [1], and, more broadly, in the West. Not only have jihadi groups or sympathisers never attempted on such a regular basis to conduct attacks against the *far enemy* in the West, but the main perpetrator responsible for such attacks has also shifted. Since 9/11 we have expected attacks against the West to come from al-Qaida (AQ), or one of its affiliates, but since 2014 the primary perpetrator of such attacks has, in fact, been the Islamic State (IS) [2] although al-Qaida continues to emphasise the importance of external operations in the West. Simultaneously, this time-period witnessed a hitherto unseen scale of 'domestic' jihadi campaigns against the *near enemy*. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, the Sahel-region, Somalia, Chechnya, the Philippines, and the Afghanistan-Pakistan region have all suffered from active jihadi campaigns of varying intensity whereby the primary enemies have been national governments and opposing religious groups. Interestingly, this intensification of the jihadi struggle against both Western targets and national governments in the Muslim world correlates with the emergence of the most momentous example of intra-jihadi contestation and competition witnessed in modern times. It began on February 3, 2014, when al-Qaida declared that the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham was no longer an al-Qaida affiliate.[3]

Studying the importance of ideology in terrorists' target selection, Drake has argued that "there is no single cause which can adequately explain terrorists target selection".[4] This article endeavours to examine to what extent the intra-jihadi contestation and competition [5] which emerged in early 2014 can be considered one of several causes that has affected how prominent Sunni jihadi groups, namely al-Qaida and the Islamic State, have prioritised their enemy hierarchies. Next to the increase in attacks and plots in the West, an important change occurred in the wake of *jihadi competition*. The Islamic State became more hybridized in its discourse and operations, targeting both local and global enemies. Al-Qaida, on the other hand, continued with its local focus, adopted after the Arab Spring. While losing the capability to launch centrally controlled external attacks, AQ nevertheless continues to promote global jihad rhetorically. In addition, the jihadi competition has emphasised the importance of a frequently neglected enemy category, *the internal enemy*, referring to other groups within the jihadi current. For both al-Qaida and the Islamic State the internal enemy has become of increasing importance, but the two groups have approached this sensitive issue in very different ways.

A convincing argument has been made that the Islamic State's external focus was a result of the launch of the international coalition against the group in Syria and Iraq.[6] Another argument is that such expansion

of operational focus is a natural extension accompanying its transformation from a local jihadi group to a transnational caliphate. The intention here is not to discredit any of these explanations, but to present a complementary one; that the inter-group competition similarly has affected the enemy targeting hierarchy of al-Qaida and the Islamic State, based on two distinctive logics. To show this, the article is divided into four parts. The first part discusses the concepts of contestation, competition and political preferences and how they may relate to one another. The second part presents the methodological approach and challenges of the research, including a discussion of the main empirical material used for the analysis. The third part briefly looks at historical examples of how the behaviour of jihadists has been affected by contestation and competition, while the fourth part zooms in on the relationship between al-Qaida and the Islamic State. This last part examines how the discourses and behaviour of al-Qaida and the Islamic State in relation to their political preferences have been before and after the competitive environment emerged. It is argued that competition played a part in the increasing hybridization of the Islamic State while it strengthened al-Qaida's re-orientation that was initiated already before the split between the two groups.

Contestation, Competition and Political Preferences

Contestation and competition between jihadi groups, or more broadly between insurgents and terrorist groups, is nothing new.[7] Della Porta explains that "radical organizations, like other political organizations, aim at attracting sympathizers through structure, actions, and frames that are apt for propaganda. In doing this, clandestine organizations compete in a crowded organizational field, in which they need to outbid their competitors".[8] The question here is how the dynamics of such competitive environment potentially affects the behaviour of these groups. Until the rise of the Islamic State, the jihadi movement appeared unified until 2013, with al-Qaida at the top of the hierarchy [9], representing the greatest threat to the West. However, since 2014 the vast majority of attacks and plots in the West have been linked one way or the other to its renegade affiliate, while al-Qaida has continued with a strong discursive focus on the far enemy. The simple argument would be that the Islamic State has been better at attracting actors in the West sympathetic to the jihadi cause and that al-Qaida as a result simply has not been capable of mobilising and orchestrating the kind of attacks it once became so infamous for. Although al-Qaida certainly has found it increasingly challenging to mobilise people due to the competition from the Islamic State, this argumentation is not satisfactory.

It is an often-held belief that al-Qaida is the main proponent of global jihad focused on the far enemy and believing that the establishment of the caliphate can wait. In contrast, the Islamic State was initially portrayed as a local and revolutionary group focusing on the near enemy and the resurrection of an Islamic state that would qualify as a caliphate.[10] On occasions this difference has been explained through the strategic maxims of Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji. Al-Suri (in addition to his often forgotten argument of open fronts) argued in favour of de-centralised jihad consisting of small, unaffiliated cells that attack in the West, a strategy – it is argued [11] – that corresponds to al-Qaida's strategic outlook post-9/11.[12] The Islamic State, on the other hand, has been following the ideas of Abu Bakr al-Naji, originally an al-Qaida ideologue. These stressed the importance of conquering and holding territory where an Islamic state can emerge and from where the jihadi campaign will continue.[13] Perhaps this strategic distinction did hold sway at some point and helped explain the strategy of al-Qaida and the nascent Islamic State in the past, but the global and revolutionary/local labels attached to the two groups fit less and less. In fact, this problem of labels, or certain typologies, was already addressed in 2009 by Hegghammer in an article on ideological hybridization, claiming that in recent decades almost all jihadi groups have been hybrids in terms of their enemy hierarchy, focusing both on the far and near enemy, although at varying degree and with temporal change.[14]

Several authors have already discussed the 'competition for jihadi supremacy' between al-Qaida and the Islamic State.[15] Most often they look at the trajectory of the groups, their ideological differences [16], the polarising effect of competition [17], and which one of the groups is most successful.[18] Some good recent studies on the jihadi threat against the West have been conducted, but mainly with a focus on the Islamic State. One conclusion has been that the Islamic State's interest in and/or ability to strike the West emerged in mid-2014 and since then the group has been the main jihadi threat based on number of committed attacks and planned plots.[19] Few

thoughts, however, are given to how the *rivalry* between the two groups may affect their behaviour. Despite this relative absence of academic attention, we can rest assured that the internal competition certainly does matter to these groups.[20] Since 2014, almost not a single magazine, statement or speech has been published by AQ and IS without mentioning the other, explicitly or implicitly condemning the other. In the eyes of the Islamic State, al-Qaida has deviated from the correct jihadi methodology (*manhaj*) of Osama bin Laden [21]; its members have even been called the ‘Jews of Jihad’ [22] while ‘wanted dead’ posters for Zawahiri and other leading al-Qaida figures have been published. From the al-Qaida perspective, the Islamic State are extremists (*ghuluw*) or *khawarij*, who broke their pledge of allegiance (*bayah*) to al-Qaida and unrightfully claimed to be the sole legitimate proponents of jihad despite not commanding the necessary authority. Thus, when al-Qaida in January 2014 established al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) the emerging competition with the Islamic State most likely played a role.[23] Something similar can be said about both groups’ strategic attitude to attract pledges of allegiance from other groups.[24]

Perhaps the most explicit treatment of the competitive dynamics between the two groups and their behaviour is Clint Watts’ article ‘*Deciphering Competition Between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State*’. Watts differentiates between *escalating* competition and *destructive* competition to explain two modes of behaviour resulting from the internal competition. Escalating competition is when groups attempt to “outpace each other through expansive competition and it occurs when competing groups separate geographically and the perpetration of successful attacks leads to gains in notoriety and subsequent increases in resources.” Destructive escalation on the other hand is “when terror groups attack each other”; it “arises predominately from internal splits when terrorist factions occupy the same terrain”.[25] Watts’ argument is that from the summer of 2013 until the caliphate was proclaimed in late June 2014 the two groups’ relationship was characterised by destructive competition and only after the caliphate it took on an escalating character, which – he claims – from the perspective of the jihadists is positive. This, however, does not really fit with the realities on the ground as the competitive relationship is better explained as having both destructive and escalating features since the fall of 2013. However, it became increasingly more destructive as time went on. Attacks from one group on the other continue to this very day. The Islamic State’s excommunication (*takfir*) of al-Qaida’s Jabhat al-Nusra came at a later stage and not immediately after the split.

In the terrorism literature, the concept of *outbidding* has been the dominant theory to explain the effect of competition between terrorist groups on their behaviour.[26] The logic of outbidding is to demonstrate a group’s capabilities, commitment and intentions relative to other groups. This logic was indeed evident in Mia Bloom’s research on how both religious and nationalistic Palestinian groups adopted suicide bombings as a tactic to keep up with the popularity of Hamas.[27] Using a quantitative approach to study the likelihood of outbidding as the result of competition between terrorist groups, Nemeth nuanced Bloom’s argument by arguing that in some contexts competition is more likely to lead to less violence and thus not to outbidding. However, Nemeth claims this is mainly valid for left-wing terrorist groups and not for religious groups. For those he concludes, similarly to Bloom, that competition often does indeed lead to a process of outbidding. [28] Although most studies of outbidding processes have focused on the tactical level, the theory can plausibly be extended to a strategic level as well. This can help us to understand how the struggle for power between al-Qaida and the Islamic State influences the groups’ strategic decision *which* enemies to attack.

In this context, competition is understood to occur when groups that share an ideology (or an almost similar ideology) start targeting each other through words and/or actions or when they adopt new strategies and/or tactics clearly caused by the success of a rival group. This is in line with Nemeth’s view of competition between groups that *share* an ideology as well as with Donatella Della Porta’s idea of intra-movement competition between groups emerging from the same *social movement family*.[29] Even though discursive and, in some instances, military attacks of one group against the other did occur during 2013, local cooperation between al-Qaida and Islamic State members was still feasible.[30] Hence, it is more plausible to propose that intra-movement competition really emerged only from February 2014 onwards when the two groups officially split, cooperation was no longer taking place and infighting became a regular occurrence. Watts is, of course, correct when observing that competition both provides risks and opportunities. The emergence of the Islamic

State undoubtedly influenced how other jihadi groups, including al-Qaida, were perceived - both regarding their *radicalness* and in terms of the threat they pose. Therefore, it presented al-Qaida with an opportunity to position itself in a positive light in contrast to the Islamic State's barbarity. The risk for al-Qaida, however, was that it would be overtaken and considered more or less obsolete. This, in fact, has been a clear objective of the Islamic State as it has strived to become the most prominent jihadi group on the market and its strategy to achieve this feat has been to do what other groups do, but do it better. If the Islamic State came to be perceived as the strongest challenger to the enemies of the *ummah* [Islamic community] both locally and globally then there would be no room for other jihadi groups, including al-Qaida.

Interestingly, from the perspective of the power struggle within the global jihadi movement, two distinctive mechanisms seem to be at play. For the Islamic State a process of *outbidding* began around 2014 as a way of challenging the supremacy of al-Qaida. The Islamic State's escalation of gruesome tactics such as videotaped decapitations and burning captives can be considered examples of outbidding on a tactical level while its increased focus on international targets amounted to outbidding on a strategic level. Based on Kydd and Walter's identification of outbidding as one of five logics for terrorist action [31], Novenario has studied Islamic State and al-Qaida magazines and she also concludes that Islamic State's *Dabiq* magazine shows a much higher percentage of the use of outbidding strategy compared to the al-Qaida magazines (42% to 23%). [32] Already concerned about its popular image well before the rise of the Islamic State, al-Qaida has been hesitant to follow the example of its more violent competitor, despite its initial success, and has stuck with a more cautious approach of hedging bets. Hedging bets is understood as a more conservative approach whereby an actor abstains from taking a clear position with the aim of not making a future mistake. In the case of al-Qaida, it seems likely that, as part of its changed strategy, it has largely abstained from organising or directing attacks in the West with the objective to win the support of local populations in its areas of operations. At the same time AQ continued to stress a Western focus in its discourse in order not to lose support from its more radical constituency. Alternatively, it could be argued that the decline in al-Qaida's Western attack is a direct result of its diminishing international attack capability, mainly caused by the loss of core operational figures. Although this certainly had an impact, it does not explain the almost complete halt in Western attacks and planning in a satisfactory manner - as will be elaborated later on. Belittling the importance of intra-movement dynamics on political preferences, a strong argument can be made that the uptick in Western attacks was a consequence of the call for attacks by Adnani as a retaliation to the launch of the international anti-Islamic State (and later against al-Qaida as well) coalition bombing attacks on IS positions. [33] This also fits with the general framing of retaliation employed by the Islamic State. It seems unlikely, however, that the launch of the international campaign would cause the Islamic State, a previously nationally (or regionally) focused group, to become the lead proponent of global jihad and, furthermore, it does not help us understand the logic behind al-Qaida's behaviour.

Methodological Reflections

The best way to study a group's political preferences, or enemy hierarchy [34] is to examine its discourse and behaviour, i.e. on whom it actually focus its attacks on. Therefore, I examine quantitatively and qualitatively how senior group leaders have defined the enemy in their official speeches and statements and what kind of actors the two groups have been targeting. The time-period starts in 2010 and goes until June 2017. It is divided into two periods: 2010 to 3 February 2014 (characterised by no competition) and 4 February 2014 to 30 June 2017 (characterised by competition). I am aware that some level of competition certainly was present while the Islamic State was still part of al-Qaida, especially in the period April 2013 to February 2014, but to simplify the analysis, the intersections are made according to formal events that affected the inter-group relations. The examination begins in 2010 to facilitate an analysis of the group discourse and behaviour for a longer period *before* the competitive environment emerged and even before the Arab Spring erupted. I have compiled a database of attacks and plots in the West (understood as Europe, the United States, and Australia) related to either al-Qaida (including its affiliates, except al-Qaida in Iraq) or the Islamic State covering the period 2010 until June 2017. The selection criteria for attack/plot inclusion follows that of Nesser and Hegghammer

in their assessment of the Islamic State's commitment to attacking the West.[35] This implies that attacks/plots that are not orchestrated by a group, but merely claimed afterwards or that the perpetrator somehow indicates affiliation with, or sympathy for, one group are included. Creating similar databases for attacks/plots against the near enemy and the internal enemy would be desirable but is simply not feasible due to the vast number of attacks. Hence, this aspect will be dealt with qualitatively. Of course, some may argue that it does not make sense to look at the Islamic State prior to 2014 independently as it was still believed to be an affiliate of al-Qaida and therefore operating under al-Qaida's directives. However, as history clearly shows, the Islamic State's predecessor was not afraid of acting in accordance with its own ideas - no matter what the opinion of the al-Qaida leadership was. How the group prioritised its enemies prior to the split with al-Qaida is thus considered an expression of whom it considered as its main adversaries. The reason for studying the discourses and operations of the groups before and after the competitive environment emerged is to find out if and how the groups have changed - how they define their enemies and to what extent they act upon it.

The study of jihadi groups' political preferences, i.e. which enemy jihadi groups focus on, has already been initiated by a few excellent scholars. The traditional distinction, popularized by Fawaz Gerges' work on Sunni militancy, is that of the *near* and the *far* enemy. It has been widely used in academia and in political analyses. [36] Hegghammer subsequently offered a more elaborate and nuanced typology that provides five different rationales for violent (and non-violent) behaviour.[37] For the purpose of this research, however, a simple typology to distinguish enemy hierarchies is sufficient. In addition to Gerges' categories of the near and far enemy, I will add a third: the *internal* enemy. The internal enemy is the definition of another jihadi actor (individual or group) as an enemy. More than ever this extremely sensitive category has become relevant in the era of intense intra-jihadi contestation.

Sources and Database

The sources used to analyse the discursive identification of the enemy are speeches and statements from the most senior group figures as these are considered the most authoritative persons when it comes to defining the enemy hierarchy of the group. For al-Qaida, I rely on speeches and statements from group leader Osama bin Laden and, after his death, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Seven speeches of bin Laden from the period 2010-2011 and 40 speeches and statements from Ayman al-Zawahiri from 2011-2017, totalling 47, are included. For the Islamic State and its predecessor, I look at speeches and statements from its leader and spokesperson. It includes one speech by late emir Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, 10 speeches from the Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, 19 speeches by the late spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, and three speeches by the current spokesperson Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir (totalling 33). Although some speeches and statements may have been missed, the included material is considered sufficient for a trustworthy examination of how the two groups have defined their enemy hierarchy in the covered period. For an overview of the material, see Appendix A.

The database developed by this author includes jihadi attacks and plots connected to al-Qaida and the Islamic State respectively, for the period 2010-2017. It builds upon existing databases collected by Hegghammer and Nesser on Islamic State related attacks in the West from January 2011 through June 2015 [38], Nesser on jihadi attacks and plots in Europe [39] and Orton on Islamic State's external attacks.[40] However, the database has been expanded and updated to fit the purpose of this research. For the Islamic State, a total of 38 attacks and 32 plots are included and for al-Qaida five attacks and 20 plots. For an overview of attacks and plots, see Appendix B. All attacks and plots have been categorised based on their connection to either the Islamic State and al-Qaida, using the four categories presented by Orton: *controlled*, *guided*, *networked* and *inspired*. [41] This allows for excluding only loosely connected attacks and plots. The focus is on *controlled* and *guided* attacks that have some level of active group engagement.

The Enemy Hierarchy of al-Qaida and the Islamic State

Despite the contentious nature of the 9/11 attacks within al-Qaida, the attack certainly cemented the group as the primary proponent of global jihad and the foremost jihadi threat to Western security. In al-Qaida's view,

however, establishing an Islamic state let alone a caliphate could wait as the priority was to cut what it termed ‘the head of the snake’, meaning external states supporting Arab regimes - foremost among these the United States. Initially, when the Islamic State of Iraq expanded into Syria in 2013, it was seen as more locally oriented, focusing on creating an Islamic state in Iraq and Syria and mainly advocating defensive jihad against Muslim rulers. In two separate speeches from 2007 and 2008, respectively, its former leader, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, had argued that “The rulers of Muslim lands are traitors, un-believers, sinners, liars, deceivers, and criminals” and that “[we believe that] fighting them is of greater necessity than fighting the occupying crusader.”[42] Today’s priorities of the Islamic State have become much more hybridised. Interestingly, this shift in priorities fits well with the organisational trajectory of splitting with al-Qaida and engaging in a momentous struggle for jihadi authority. The next section looks into how the two groups’ leadership have defined the enemy discursively. This is followed by a section on what actors the groups have been fighting in the 2010-2017 period.

The Discursive Definition of the Enemy

Al-Qaida and the Islamic State both regularly publish official speeches, statements, magazines, videos etc. Often such publications, partly at least, deal with whom they consider the legitimate enemy or what enemy that should be prioritised at a given time. Here I study leadership statements from the period 2010-2017 of both groups. I consider such statements particularly indicative of which enemy the groups should fight or, at least, what enemy hierarchy the groups would like to be associated with. The statements have been divided into the two defined periods – the first ranging from 2010 to January 2014 characterised by an absence of competition and the second, from February 2014 to July 2017, characterised by intra-movement competition. As these statements always discuss a wide range of issues, including talking about all enemies in condemnatory language, only direct calls for attacks against a certain enemy are included. Table 1 shows the number of times the near, far or internal enemy has been defined as an explicit target in the given period.

Al-Qaida leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri			
	Near enemy	Far enemy	Internal enemy
2010 - January 2014 (19 speeches/statements)	8 times	10 times	0
February 2014 – July 2017 (28 speeches/statements)	8 times	9 times	0
Islamic State leaders Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and spokespersons Abu Muhammad al-Adnani and Hassan al-Muhajir			
2010 - January 2014 (12 speeches/statements)	9 times	1 time	0
February 2014 – July 2017 (21 speeches/statements)	14 times	11 times	2 times

Table 1: Al-Qaida leaders’ calls for attack against the near, far and/or internal enemy.

In the period 2010 to January 2014, 19 statements by al-Qaida leaders, Osama bin Laden (seven statements in 2010-2011) and Ayman al-Zawahiri (12 statements from 2011-2014), have been included. As Table 1 shows, calls for attacks against both the near and the far enemy have been regular in the discourse of the al-Qaida leaders, illustrating an example of almost perfect hybridization. Interestingly, in his seven statements from 2010 until his death in May 2011, Bin Laden called for attacks against the West on five occasions, while he at no point called for similar attacks against apostate governments. When al-Zawahiri took over the leadership of al-Qaida this picture changed as the near enemy became the main focus for a period. Some might argue that this shows al-Zawahiri’s consistent focus on the near enemy back from his time as leader of the Egyptian Al Jihad group, never really subscribing to global jihad to the extent Bin Laden did. However, a better explanation is probably

the occurrence of the Arab Spring which al-Zawahiri tried to capitalise on. Especially in 2012, al-Zawahiri's full focus was on the local rather than the global struggle. This changed in 2013 and from July to September of that year, the al-Qaida leader published three statements calling for attacks against the US. In his *General Guidelines for Jihad* he argued that "The military work firstly targets the head of (international) disbelief, America and its ally Israel, and secondly its local allies that rule our countries" and that the mujahideen should "(a)void entering into an armed clash with the local regimes, except if forced to do so".[43] A few days later he elaborated that "keeping America in tension and anticipation only costs a few disparate attacks here and there, meaning as we defeated it in the guerrilla warfare in Somalia, Yemen, Iraq and Afghanistan, so we should follow it with that war on its own land".[44] This 'renewed' focus on the far enemy came about in April 2013, at the time when tensions started to emerge between the Islamic State and al-Qaida.

In the same period, the Islamic State leadership, represented by Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and quickly replaced by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and its spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, issued 12 statements. In stark contrast to the discourse of the al-Qaida leaders and very much in continuation of Abu Umar's early statements, the leaders of the Islamic State almost exclusively called for attacks of the near enemy, meaning the Iraqi government and Shiite militias. Illustrative of this discourse, al-Adnani explained that "(y)our first enemy is the [Shi'ites], and after them the Jews and the Crusaders".[45] A year later, he was supported by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's instigation of attacks: "So rise, O lions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and cure the frustration of the believers and attack the hateful Rafidah [Shi'ites], the criminal Nusayris, the Party of Satan [Hezbollah] and those who come from Qum, Najaf and Tehran." [46] Only in July 2012 did the Islamic State leader threaten the US by saying: "As for your [US] security, your citizens cannot travel to any country without being afraid. The mujahideen have launched after your armies, and have sworn to make you taste something harder than what Usama had made you taste. You will see them in your home".[47] Interestingly, in the last two statements, in January 2014, al-Adnani and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi both intensified the rhetorical focus on the far enemy without explicitly inciting to attacks. In his speech *The Pioneer Does Not Lie to His People*, al-Adnani said that "(a)lthough the Americans are a primary enemy, too, the danger posed by the Rafidah is greater and their harm is more severe and deadly on the Ummah than the Americans." [48] In this period, neither al-Qaida nor the Islamic State leaders called for attacks on the opposite group, *the internal enemy*. In his *guidelines* from September 2013, al-Zawahiri mentions for the first time the internal enemy as a potential conflict focus, but instead of calling for attacks, he commands that aggressiveness from other Muslim groups be only responded with minimal force. Two months earlier, in July 2013, al-Adnani was slowly grooming his group's sympathisers for a fiercer attitude towards competing jihadi factions when stating that "the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant faces the fiercest wars, and it has in this field three foes: the disbelievers with all their trumpets and media; the apostates from among us with all their sects and bad scholars; and the people of desires and false innovations, and those Muslims who follow deviant methodologies, and not only that, but even from some of those who are counted from among the mujahideen." [49]

The official split between al-Qaida and the Islamic State in early February 2014 (the Islamic State, of course, claims this had already happened in October 2006) critically affected both groups' discourses, but in very different ways. For al-Qaida, Zawahiri continued a hybridized discourse, emphasising attacks on both the near and the far enemy, but at the same time he started to spend considerably more time discussing other jihadi groups, namely the Islamic State, again without ever calling for attacks against the group.[50] Especially his *Islamic Spring* lectures dealt with the Islamic State; in these he tried to position al-Qaida as the group following the correct jihadi methodology (*manhaj*). Although he continues to call for attacks against the near enemy [51], he is nevertheless consistent in defining the far enemy as the primary enemy. In April 2015 al-Zawahiri said: "So I see that we should focus now on moving the war to their own home and the cities and installations of the Crusader West, led by America" [52] and in two statements from November and

December, respectively, he said: "The first matter is striking the West and specifically America in its own home, and attacking their interests that are spread everywhere",[53] adding: "We must move the battle to the enemy's own home, especially Europe and America, because they are leaders of the contemporary Crusader campaign".[54] His calls for attacks against the Saudi and Egyptian governments and the Ba'athists-Nusayri-

Rafidah alliance fade in comparison. A similar identification of the far enemy as the primary enemy is echoed by al-Qaida's affiliates. Abdulmalik Droukdel, the leader of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), called, in March 2017, on his group to attack French cities.[55] In the magazine *Al Masra*, the new al-Qaida outfit *Jama'at al-Nusrat al-Islam wa-l-Muslimeen* identified France as enemy number one.[56] For al-Qaida's affiliate in Yemen, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the West is defined as the ultimate enemy although AQAP had intensified its anti-Shia rhetoric since 2014 .[57] A similar message can be found in Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent's (AQIS) new *Code of Conduct* from June 2017.[58] In Zawahiri's own statement *Sham will submit to none except Allah*, from April 2017, he warned in a clear reference to his former affiliate now known as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham that the mujahideen in Syria should be careful about not becoming too nationalist when focusing its actions.

The new competitive environment also led the Islamic State to adopt a much more hybridised focus in its leaders' discourse. Already in March 2014, Islamic State spokesman al-Adnani had asked rhetorically "Who is it today that are the bitter enemies of America? (...) Who is it that enrages them? Who is it that threatens their security? (...) There is no doubt that they are the mujahideen, but I ask you by Allah, O seeker of Jihad, is the Islamic State not on the top of this list? "[59] Four months later, but still one month prior to the first airstrikes by the international coalition against the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi started to call for attacks against Western crusaders, and as coalition airstrikes intensified, so did the Islamic State's rhetoric. In September 2014, al-Adnani pronounced his now infamous order: "kill a disbelieving American or European – especially the spiteful and filthy French – or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State".[60] In January 2015, he said "we renew our call to the muwahhidin in Europe and the disbelieving West and everywhere else, to target the crusaders in their own lands and wherever they are found." In the same speech he calls upon his supporters to destroy the Saudi monarchy, but simultaneously promotes a familiar global jihadi argument saying "There is no difference whether they are present or not, for the real rulers of the lands of al-Haramayn are the Jews and crusaders, not Salman or Bin Nayef".[61] This certainly does not sound like Abu Umar al-Baghdadi in 2007-2008 or even 2010. Around this time, however, the near enemy still appeared to be the main enemy of the Islamic State, but this was about to somehow change when al-Adnani in May 2016 called for sympathisers to focus on Western attacks rather than emigrate and fight the near enemy. "O slaves of Allah, O muwahhidin!" he said, "If the tawaghit [tyrant] have shut the door of hijrah [migration] in your faces, then open the door of jihad in theirs. Make your deed a source of their regret. Truly, the smallest act you do in their lands is more beloved to us than the biggest act done here; it is more effective for us and more harmful to them".[62] Illustrative of an important difference between the Islamic State and al-Qaida, al-Adnani continued arguing that all targets were legitimate and even what some considers civilians would be the best of targets.[63] Al-Adnani's successor, Abu Hassan al-Muhajir, has continued this new hybridised rhetoric, calling for attacks against both the near and the far enemy in each of his three statements.

Although the two groups officially had split at this point in time, exchanging harsh words for one another, and in the context of Syria they were quickly to be caught in infighting, their leaders were still hesitant to explicitly call for attacks against the other part. At no point did al-Zawahiri cross the line and call for attacks against the Islamic State and in the initial period of infighting his commander in Syria, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, even instructed his Jabhat al-Nusra fighters to stay passive in case of Islamic State attacks and not retaliate under any circumstances.[64] The absence of explicit calls for attacks on the Islamic State does not imply that al-Zawahiri had not discussed the group and its transgression against al-Qaida. Especially in the second lecture of *the Islamic Spring* he opens up for a discussion of the renegade al-Qaida affiliate, defining the boundaries for when jihadis are either with or against the group.[65] Islamic State leaders initially showed a similar hesitance to call for attacks against other jihadi groups after the split, but on several occasions al-Adnani came close to crossing this 'sacred' line. In his two statements *This is not Our Method, and It Will not Be* and *Apologies Amir al-Qa'ida* from April and May 2014, respectively, he gets as close as possible, but he stays on the path of clarifying the relationship between the groups. In October 2015, however, this was no longer enough, as al-Adnani, in a clear reference to al-Qaida, said,

“We will divide the groups and break the ranks of the organizations. Yes, because there is no place for groups after the revival of the Jama’ah (the Khilāfah). So away with the organizations. We will fight the movements, assemblies, and fronts. We will tear apart the battalions, the brigades, and armies, until, by Allah’s permission, we bring an end to the factions, for nothing weakens the Muslims and delays victory except the factions.”[66]

Indicative of how sensitive the issue of proclaiming takfir on another well-respected jihadi faction was, is the fact that the Islamic State did, to this author’s knowledge, not officially pronounce takfir (excommunicate) on al-Qaida (or rather Jabhat al-Nusra) before November 2015. Locally on the battlefield, it happened well before and in its propaganda material, it took important steps in the direction such as in the article series *The Allies of al-Qa’idah in Sham* in Dabiq; here it finally culminated in part five of the series: Jabhat al-Nusra is referred to as apostates. Yet this delay clearly shows the sensitivity in proclaiming it loud and clear.

Fighting Which Enemy?

Rhetoric is one thing, actions another. This section looks into how the groups’ discursive identification of the enemy corresponds to what enemies they are actually fighting. Using quantitative and qualitative material, it is divided between the *near enemy*, the *far enemy*, and the *internal enemy* to offer a nuanced depiction of how enemy hierarchies have been prioritised.

The Near Enemy

Based on their operations, it would probably be correct to argue that the near enemy, understood as national regimes and affiliated actors, such as security forces, has consistently been the enemy of highest priority for both al-Qaida and the Islamic State since 2010. Although known for core AQ’s focus on the West and especially the US, al-Qaida’s affiliates’ focus has been on fighting national actors. Of course, the Arab Spring and the opportunities public protests created have to some extent facilitated this. However, arguably it is more a result of a new approach of al-Qaida as dictated by Osama bin Laden in an internal letter to Atiyyatullah in May 2010 and reiterated the following year in a letter from Atiyyatullah to Nassir al-Wuhayshi, the leader of AQAP.[67]

This local focus has been striking in all of al-Qaida’s main conflict arenas including Yemen, the Sahel, Syria, and Somalia. The fight against local regimes was only intensified after the conflict with the Islamic State broke-out as al-Qaida affiliates around the region saw its chance to position themselves as legitimate defender of local Muslims, sometimes in contrast to the Islamic State, and sometimes to other rebel factions. Historically perceived as the ‘most dangerous’ and ‘international’ of al-Qaida’s affiliates, AQAP in Yemen has almost exclusively focused its attacks on government and Houthi forces.[68] Similarly in Syria, al-Qaida’s affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra was explicitly ordered not to launch attacks in the West and rather direct its actions against the regime and, to some extent, the Islamic State. Al-Qaida’s affiliate in the Sahel and North Africa, AQIM, has continued a combination of a local and a global focus, as previously explained by Filiu.[69] However, there is no doubt that the near enemy is the main operational focus while the far enemy (especially France) is attacked with words rather than actions and exclusively in the Sahel region and not in France. In Somalia al-Shabaab’s main enemies have been Somali, Kenyan, and Ethiopian security forces and politicians.

For the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in the period from 2010 till early 2014, the Iraqi regime and the country’s Shia population were the main enemies. This was already the case before 2010 and continued until ISI separated from al-Qaida in February 2014. On a few occasions prior to 2014, ISI had been connected to foreign plots, but five out of a total of six attacks took place between 2004 and 2005 [70] and the vast majority of its attacks have been directed against the government or Shia targets.[71] Although the Islamic State’s enemy hierarchy became much more hybridized from 2014 onwards when the far and internal enemies started to take up more focus, it nonetheless continued to fight national regimes, most extensively in Syria and Iraq, but also in Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Nigeria and Afghanistan [72] (attacks have also taken place in other Muslim majority countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Tunisia, Turkey, Bangladesh, and the Philippines). Since the Islamic State is present in several active war theatres, this prioritisation of the near enemy - including its Shia component - will continue

as the local struggle is a matter of survival and legitimacy. Of course, this is especially the case in Syria and Iraq as the Islamic State is here fighting the Assad and Abadi regimes and their militant Shia supporters on several fronts. In places like Sinai and Libya, after being expelled from Sirte, the group could have opted to change its priorities, but it appears to stick to a focus on national targets.

The Far Enemy

Since 2010, al-Qaida has been connected to five attacks in the West, but four of these took place before 2014 and thus before strong competition with the Islamic State became a fact. On the other hand, the Islamic State has been connected to 40 attacks between 2010 and June 2017; 38 of these occurred after the group split from al-Qaida (see Figure 1). The split between the two groups thus represents a catalyser for a changing enemy hierarchy within the Islamic State and likely also reinforced al-Qaida's strategic plans. The wave of international attacks started in May 2014 when Mehdi Nemmouche, a young French man who had fought in Syria in the ranks of the Islamic State, killed four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. This was prior to the launch of the international coalition force's anti-Islamic State campaign, but really took off in the Fall of 2014. After the attack in Brussels, it emerged that Nemmouche was coordinating with Abdelhamid Abaaoud who was a central figure in the Islamic State's external operations.[73] The Islamic State had decided to launch an external operations campaign that a few months later would escalate and once again in the Summer 2015, after the group directed a large number of operatives to initiate a wave of violence in Western Europe.[74] In fact, according to Dutch intelligence, the Islamic State had begun, as early as late 2013, to put in place a specific internal structure to conduct external operations.[75]

As already touched upon by Hegghammer and Nesser, many attacks related to jihadi groups either because they explicitly claimed them or were due to other factors, have in fact little connection with the central organisation either through a direct command to carry out the attack not to say training with the group to prepare for an attack. If we only take into consideration attacks that have been either *controlled* (meaning attacks where operatives have been trained and have received specific instructions on targets and timing) or *guided* (meaning operatives receiving endorsement to attack and maintaining communication with the organisation during the preparation) [76], the picture remains almost the same as the total number of attacks connected to the two groups indicates (see Figure 1). Controlled or guided Islamic State attacks in the West similarly began in May 2014. These have consistently occurred at a high rate, peaking in the first half of 2016. For al-Qaida the picture is a little different as the group has only been responsible for one controlled or guided attack in each period. Although al-Qaida's rate of external operations in the West has never been comparable to the Islamic State's post-2014 attacks, the low number of attacks and plots after 2010 and particularly from 2014 forward indicates that al-Qaida did shift its code of conduct around 2010 and that it stayed true to, if not even reinforced, this strategy after the emergence of intra-jihadi competition.[77]

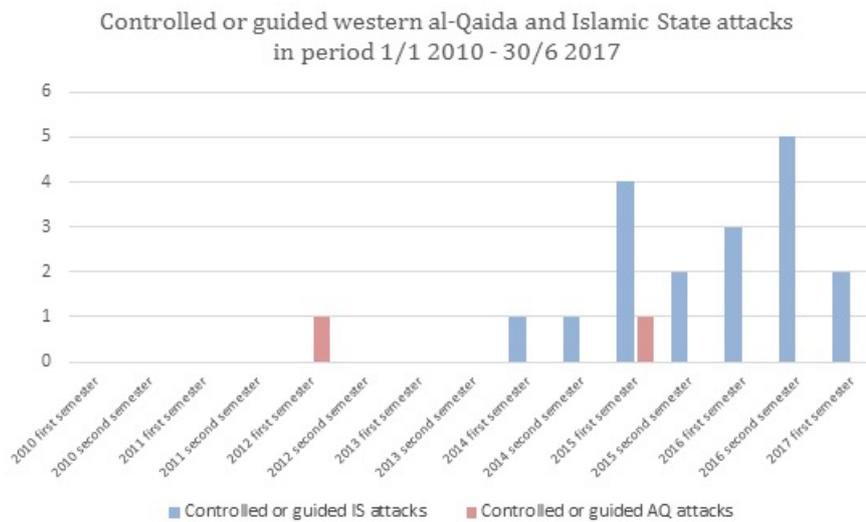


Figure 1

If we are to expand the examination to also include known plots related to the two groups, the conclusion remains the same (see Figure 2). Figure 2 shows plots that showed signs of control or guidance from one of the two organisations since 2010. Although information related to such plots is often scarce, it should be the same for both organisations and thus not entail any bias for one group or the other. The development of the number of plots corresponds well with the development in attacks as Islamic State related plots were discovered from February 2014 (none before) while al-Qaida related plots were of more frequent occurrence before 2014.

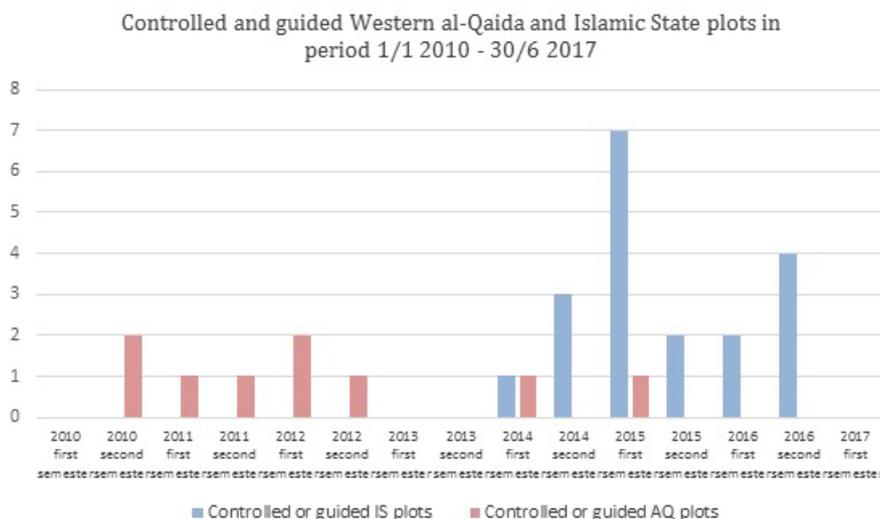


Figure 2

Examining the attacks and plots together, there is a clear image that up until February 2014, al-Qaida was the main jihadi threat against Western targets although this threat has often been exaggerated. The Islamic State was at this time still considered an al-Qaida affiliate, but in theory could have adopted a more international focus in line with AQAP, but this was not the case. Both numbers of executed attacks and plots linked to the organisations show that al-Qaida (one attack and seven plots from 2010 to February 2014) and not the Islamic State’s predecessor (neither attacks nor plots from 2010 to February 2014) prioritised Western attacks. These numbers are in strong contrast to the post-February 2014 period where the Islamic State (18 attacks and 19 plots from February 2014 to June 2017) has positioned itself as the main proponent of global jihad,

leaving al-Qaida in the backseat (one attack and two plots from February 2014 to June 2017). Although the extremely high numbers of Islamic State related attacks and plots since February 2014 should be viewed in the context of the situation in primarily Syria and Iraq (and thus hardly compare to the pre-2014 period), the ratio between Islamic State and al-Qaida attacks and plots does indicate a shift in priorities and capabilities. As mentioned, the emergence of Islamic State attacks in the West is often framed as ‘retaliation’ for Western military engagement in the Middle East and certainly such retaliation helps account for the critical escalation that occurred in 2015-2016, not least due to the effects it had on mobilisation. However, it does not explain why it started in the first place.

Al-Qaida has suffered from diminishing capabilities to conduct external operations in the last decade. Between 2008 and 2009 the group lost several central external operations operatives [78] and in 2010 and 2011 lost important administrative coordinators.[79] Perhaps the most devastating blow, however, was arguably the shifting allegiance of al-Qaida sympathisers in the West after the split with the Islamic State since many potential AQ recruits chose to support its renegade affiliate IS.[80] Despite these operational setbacks, there are no indications that al-Qaida does not enjoy sufficient support among Western jihadi sympathisers or that it has lost so much of its operative capability that it can no longer coordinate or guide attacks in the West. Al-Qaida continues to have supporters in the West and foreign fighters among its ranks in battle zones, including more senior people who could function as entrepreneurs and coordinators. In his 2015 interview with al-Jazeera Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, then emir of al-Qaida’s affiliate in Syria, remarked that he had “received guidance [from al-Zawahiri] not to use Syria as a base for attacks against the West or Europe so that the real battle is not confused”.[81] This was most likely similar for al-Qaida’s affiliates in Yemen, Somalia and North Africa.

The Internal Enemy

Compared to the near and far enemy, the issue of fighting the internal enemy is much more sensitive both from a jurisprudential (*fiqh*) perspective, as it touches upon the illegality of shedding Muslim blood which should be avoided because it may lead to *fitna* (internal discord), and from a strategic perspective. Hence, fighting the internal enemy, understood as other groups that are considered part of the Sunni jihadi community and sharing a somehow similar ideology to oneself, rarely occurred before contestation erupted between al-Qaida and the Islamic State. Examples do exist, of course, especially from Afghanistan and Algeria which saw the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA) and other jihadi groups at each others throats, but it was never institutionalised the same way as it became from January 2014 onwards. The conflict between al-Qaida and the Islamic State started already in April 2013 when the latter expanded its activities into Syria and declared that Jabhat al-Nusra had become part of the Islamic State - a claim that was quickly rejected by Nusra-leader Jawlani and by Ayman al-Zawahiri.[82] However, between April 2013 and February 2014 the inter-group relationship was not a full-blown conflict and reconciliation efforts were ongoing. When exactly the first armed aggression of one group against the other occurred is unknown. But the first high-level attack was in late September 2013 when the Islamic State killed Jabhat al-Nusra’s emir in Raqqa, Abu Sayyed al-Hadrami, just a few months after Jabhat al-Nusra had taken the city from Assad forces. According to Abu Firas al-Suri, a leading Nusra-figure, the reason Jabhat al-Nusra did not react more forcefully was because of the delicate timing of the killing which was during peace negotiations between the two groups.[83] Yet it could also have been due to the order issued by Jawlani not to respond aggressively at this stage.[84] From a Zawahiri letter dating May 2014 to Tareq Abdulhalim, Hani al-Sibai, Iyad Qunaybi, Abdullah al-Muhaysini, Muhammad al-Hassem, and Sami al-Uraydi we even know that this non-aggression command originally came from Zawahiri himself.[85] Alongside tensions and reconciliation efforts, the two groups still managed to collaborate in the Summer 2013 in coordinated attacks against the Assad regime. The last major joint operation was probably the one code-named ‘Liberation of the Coast’ in August 2013 as the inter-group relationship turned increasingly hostile one month later.[86] Not only was al-Hadrami killed but so was a senior Ahrar al-Sham member Abu Obeida al-Binnishi and the following month the Islamic State escalated the situation when it beheaded an Ahrar al-Sham fighter in Aleppo.[87] The Fall 2013 thus witnessed an emerging inter-group conflict mainly led by the Islamic State’s expansionist ambitions in Northern Syria, but not an all-out war as was about to come.

From January 2014 onwards, the conflict between Syrian rebel groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, escalated substantially, mainly as a result of the Islamic State upscaling its aggression. In what has been termed the *jihadi civil war*, most groups turned against the Islamic State after it killed Ahrar al-Sham's emir in Aleppo in January 2014 and a few months later Jabhat al-Nusra's emir in Idlib [88]. Yet perhaps the most influential event was the killing of Abu Khalid al-Suri, a founding member of Ahrar al-Sham and a long-time al-Qaida ally, by Islamic State suicide bombers on 21 February. On 14 January 2014, Ahrar al-Sham published a fatwa that legitimised fighting the Islamic State [89]. Although a similar aggressive attitude was not followed by al-Qaida affiliated ideologues, Jabhat al-Nusra did engage most substantially in the fight against the Islamic State from this point on. After the killing of al-Suri, Jabhat al-Nusra leader al-Jawlani wanted to step-up aggression against the Islamic State, but he referred the decision to the three acknowledged jihadi scholars Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada al-Filastini and Abu Sulayman al-Ulwan.[90] As explained by Abu Sulayman al-Muhajir, two of the three scholars advised not to escalate the infighting. As a result Jabhat al-Nusra decided to respond only to Islamic State aggression when absolutely necessary.[91] Nonetheless, since February 2014 the internal enemy has been a regular priority on the enemy hierarchy of al-Qaida and the Islamic State although the latter's aggressiveness towards other jihadi groups including al-Qaida has been much fiercer.

Thus, despite scholars like al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada continuing to argue for non-aggression and only accepted retaliation against the Islamic State.[92] Infighting between jihadi groups is now of regular occurrence in Syria and, less so in other areas, where both groups are present. For example, after announcing its Wilayat Khorasan in January 2015, the Islamic State similarly started to fight the Taliban.[93] While al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada emphasised that focus should be on the local regimes and the Shia militias and neither on the far enemy nor the internal enemy, the Islamic State eventually proclaimed takfir on Jabhat al-Nusra, thus enabling a further escalation of the infighting. The sensitive nature of attacking other jihadi groups is underlined precisely by the hesitation of the Islamic State to officially proclaim takfir on Jabhat al-Nusra (or al-Qaida more generally) despite regularly attacking its soldiers. To this author's knowledge, the first example of the Islamic State excommunicating the al-Qaida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra was in December 2015 in its magazine *Dabiq* when it referred to the group as apostate. A more formal explanation of the legitimacy of attacking Jabhat al-Nusra came in an internal Islamic State document numbered '175' in June 2016. Before that, already back in 2014, local Islamic State commanders declared takfir on Jabhat al-Nusra to facilitate the group's expansion in areas under Nusra's control. One example, as documented by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi from Wilayat al-Furat dating 8 January 2015, when the Islamic State calls for Jabhat al-Nusra fighters to repent.[94] Another early example is a series of tweets from 2014 by Abdur-Rahman al-Marzuqi, an Islamic State *shar'i* [legal scholar], in which he claims to provide evidence for Jabhat al-Nusra's apostasy.[95] Although such hostility towards other Muslims and even jihadists is a rather new phenomenon on this scale, the fight against the internal enemy has since 2014 become either a necessity or a priority of several jihadi groups. While the Islamic State has certainly been the main aggressor, other groups, including al-Qaida affiliates, do consider it legitimate to target other jihadi factions in practice.[96]

Intra-Movement Competition and the Far, Near, and Internal Enemy

Drake is right in arguing that ideology is hugely influential in groups' definition of their enemy hierarchies, but so is the context these groups find themselves in. One important element of the context is the degree of intra-jihadi contestation and potential ensuing competition. Neither al-Qaida nor the Islamic State have changed their ideology, understood as the political objectives they strive to achieve, sufficiently to explain any dramatic changes in attack patterns. My argument here is that strategic considerations, the Islamic State's caliphate claim, and the intra-movement competition have influenced what targets the two groups have focused on. After an initial period from April 2013 to February 2014 characterised by uncertainty and emerging tensions, the intra-movement conflict has subsequently infested and dominated the dynamics of Sunni jihadism. The January 2015 twin attacks in Paris, one by the Kouachi brothers against Charlie Hebdo and claimed by al-Qaida and the other by Coulibaly, pledging allegiance to the Islamic State, are interesting in this context as Coulibaly allegedly

aided the Kouachi brothers. This shows that it took some time for the jihadi rivalry to manifest itself outside the Middle East region. A similar cooperation now is highly unlikely if not unthinkable.

Comparing the discourses and actions of al-Qaida and the Islamic State before and after competition between them emerged, some striking developments stand out. Not surprisingly, the focus on the near enemy has been constant for both groups, but the main jihadi threat against the West in the post-February 2014 period was no longer al-Qaida, as we had become accustomed to believe, but the Islamic State. Already in March 2014, al-Adnani claimed the Islamic State presented the most severe threat against the West and if looking at the numbers of attacks a few years after his speech, one would have to agree with him. The sudden rise in Islamic State executed attacks and plots in the West testify that the group is now prioritising Western attacks and that it has gained the sympathy of many a *lone mujahid* [holy warrior] who previously would have conducted attacks in the name of al-Qaida. Holding the numbers up against the discourse of the Islamic State leaders, it becomes evident that the group's Western focus is not just the result of random jihadi sympathisers conducting attacks in the name of the group or exclusively retaliation against the international coalition, but founded in a desire to position itself as the leading global jihad proponent. Between 2014 and mid-2016, almost no matter what reason led you to sympathising with the jihadi project, the Islamic State rather than al-Qaida would tick the box as the group to join.[97] This is not irrelevant in an extremely competitive environment where the potential for recruitment and funding is relatively scarce.

As explained, the decrease in al-Qaida attacks in the West is probably partly a result of a conscious strategic decision. Al-Qaida knows how important it can be to prioritise enemy hierarchies in certain periods in order not to put too much pressure on oneself by opening new fronts. This was part of the message Osama Bin Laden had sent to his deputy, Atiyatullah al-Libi, in May 2010; it has been promoted by al-Zawahiri as well.[98] For several years, al-Qaida has tried to strike a delicate balance between maintaining its image as the leading global jihad proponent and winning the sympathy of a broader spectrum of the Muslim population. The latter would entail refraining from unpopular indiscriminate attacks in the West and not opening too many battle fronts; two issues that the former to some extent depended on. This challenge was only exacerbated when the Islamic State launched its wave of attacks against the far enemy. As a reaction, al-Qaida continued its discursive focus on the far enemy. In some instances, like the Islamic State inspired attack in Nice in June 2016, AQAP even applauded the attack, but besides the January 2015 attack against Charlie Hebdo al-Qaida has not targeted the West and barely plotted such attacks. Especially in 2014, rumours started to emerge that al-Qaida was indeed planning attacks in the West as stories about the so-called *Khorasan Group* flourished, but whether the small unit of senior al-Qaida figures that relocated to Syria were in fact working on external operations remains uncertain. So far there has been nothing to show besides talk. Countering this suspicion, it has been reported that Sanafi al-Nasr, who was briefly the leader of the Khorasan Group, was involved in local efforts in the March 2014 Latakia offensive.[99] The approach followed by al-Qaida has been to discursively attack the West and, in some cases, trying to capitalise on the Islamic State's attacks against the far enemy. Illustrative of this approach is a video from Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (NIM), the al-Qaida affiliate in Sahel, in which a fighter says "Our targets are firstly France then Mali and all apostates".[100] Although NIM occasionally does target French soldiers in the region, the majority of attacks are directed against local targets, while the group has not been connected to any attempted attacks against France in Europe in the last few years.

At an early point in September 2013, it seemed the Islamic State agreed when al-Adnani claimed "it is wise to neutralize enemies and reduce the fronts. It is foolish to open up several fronts and fight everyone".[101] Yet soon afterwards IS escalated the infighting with other rebel groups, including local al-Qaida affiliates in addition to the near and far enemy. This introduction of a new category, the *internal enemy*, into the enemy hierarchy of jihadi groups is a testimony to the competitive and exclusivist nature of the jihadi current. It has forced jihadi groups to find legitimising rationales for fighting actors that naturally and historically have been considered allies and, in extreme cases, it has even entailed labelling other jihadists as apostates. Afghanistan in the 1990s witnessed similar episodes of inter-group infighting and Salafi muhajireen [emigrants] labelling non-Salafi mujahideen apostates.[102] However, this was only a minor issue at the time and not comparable in scale to what we are witnessing now. In the jihadists' own words, what has been playing out since early 2014

is nothing less than a *fitna* (social discord) [103]- something already feared by most contemporary jihadists' ideological reference point, ibn Taymiyya, who famously had noted already centuries earlier that 'sixty years of tyranny are better than one night of *fitna*'.

Concluding Remarks

Jihadi groups are typically put in boxes when it comes to whom they fight, often without such conclusions being the result of any in-depth research. Until recently, al-Qaida was known as the most prominent proponent of global jihad while its renegade affiliate, the Islamic State in Iraq, now simply known as the Islamic State, focused on the near enemy. This article has shown that the intra-jihadi competition that emerged in early 2014 has critically changed this stereotypical perception; the result being important changes in the enemy hierarchies of the two most prominent Sunni jihadi groups:

Increasing hybridisation of the Islamic State's enemy hierarchy as it has adopted a strong focus on the far enemy both in discourse and in action.

Decreasing hybridisation of al-Qaida as it has refrained from attacks against the West, except through speech.

The introduction of a new enemy category, the *internal enemy*, referring to the definition of another jihadi actor/group as a legitimate target.

Interestingly, the dynamics set in motion by the intra-movement competitive relationship critically affected the enemy hierarchy both in terms of scope, priorities and categories. Not only did the Islamic State overtake al-Qaida as the main perpetrator of attacks in and on the West, but its aggression towards other jihadi groups also led to the introduction of the extremely sensitive category of the *internal enemy* into the enemy hierarchy of several of the most prominent groups. Two different mechanisms help to understand this development. For the Islamic State a process of intra-jihadi *outbidding* led to the strategic expansion to focus on the far enemy, while for al-Qaida a logic of *hedging bets* strengthened an already adopted new strategy to win the hearts and minds of Muslims through distancing itself to the excessive violence of the Islamic State.

As Hegghammer already explained, enemy hierarchies are not static but dynamic. Thus, the decrease of al-Qaida attacks in the West should not lead to the conclusion that it is no longer a global jihadi group, but rather that preferences, or capabilities, have temporarily changed as a result of the context. In recent months, as the Islamic State has experienced successive failures, al-Qaida leaders have once again stepped up their discursive attacks against the West. The most prominent agitator for renewed attacks in the West has been Hamza bin Laden, the son of Osama, who is currently working his way up the al-Qaida hierarchy. In five of his six speeches so far he has called for attacks against the West. In a similar tone, AQAP-leader Qassim al-Rimi, in a video dating 7 May 2017, encouraged lone wolf attacks in the West. According to a prominent al-Qaida member in Syria, these threats are not just empty talk. "I do think we will see renewed attacks in the West by AQ" he told this author, continuing "now that HTS [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham] broke its ties completely [with al-Qaida], AQ are not restricted by any risks for Syria anymore".[104]

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Appendix A: Overview of al-Qaida and Islamic State Statements

ISLAMIC STATE 2010 - January 2014			
Title	Author	Year	Month
Prevent Them, Don't Kill Them	Abu Omar al-Baghdadi	2010	March
The State of Islam will Remain Safe	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2011	August
I Exhort You to One Thing Only	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2012	May
And O the Wind of Paradise	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2012	June
But Allah will not Allow except that His Light should be Perfected	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2012	July
And Give good news to the believers	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2013	April
So Leave Them Alone with their Fabrications	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2013	June
Remaining in Iraq and the Levant	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2013	June
They Will Do You No Harm, Barring a Trifling Annoyance	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2013	July
May Allah be With You, O Oppressed State	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2013	September
The Pioneer Does Not Lie to His People	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2014	January
No title	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2014	January
ISLAMIC STATE February 2014 – July 2017			
Title	Author	Year	Month
Then let us invoke the curse of Allah upon the liar	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2014	March
He will surely establish for them their religion which He has preferred for them	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2014	April
This is not Our Method, and It Will not Be	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2014	April
Apologies Amir al-Qa'ida	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2014	May
What Comes To You Of Good Is From Allah	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2014	June
This Is the Promise of Allah	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2014	June
A Message to the Mujahideen and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2014	July
Al Nuri mosque khutba	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2014	July
Indeed, You Lord is Ever Watchful	Abū Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2014	September
Even if the disbelievers despise such	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2014	November

Say Die in your Rage	<i>Abū</i> Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2015	January
So they kill and are killed	<i>Abū</i> Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2015	March
March Forth Whether Light or Heavy	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2015	May
O Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah	<i>Abū</i> Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2015	June
Say to those who disbelieve “You will be overcome”	<i>Abū</i> Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2015	October
“So Wait, Indeed We, Along with You, Are Waiting”	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2015	December
And Those Who Lived [In Faith] Would Live Upon Evidence	<i>Abū</i> Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami	2016	May
This is what Allah and his Prophet promised us	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi	2016	November
You will remember what I have told you	Abu Hassan al-Muhajir	2016	December
So be Patient. Verily, the Promise of Allah is True	Abu Hassan al-Muhajir	2017	April
And When the Believers Saw Al-Ahzab (the Confederates)	Abu Hassan al-Muhajir	2017	June

AL-QAIDA 2010 - January 2014			
Title	Author	Year	Month
No title	Usama bin Laden	2010	January
To Obama	Usama bin Laden	2010	February
No title	Usama bin Laden	2010	June
Pauses with the Method of Relief Work	Usama bin Laden	2010	October
Help Your Pakistani Brothers	Usama bin Laden	2010	October
From Sheikh Usama bin Laden (May Allah Protect Him) to the French People	Usama bin Laden	2010	October
No title	Usama bin Laden	2011	January
“And the Noble Knight Dismounts”	Zawahiri	2011	June
To the People of Pakistan On the American Attack on Pakistan Army in Mohmand	Zawahiri	2012	February
To Our People in the Place of the Revelation and the Cradle of Islam	Zawahiri	2012	March
Why Did We Revolt Against Him? A Message of Hope and Glad Tidings to Our People in Egypt ep 9	Zawahiri	2012	Unknown
Yemen Between a Departing Agent and a Deputy Agent	Zawahiri	2012	Unknown
A Message of Hope and Glad Tidings to Our People in Egypt ep 11	Zawahiri	2012	September
46 Years After the Year of the Naksa	Zawahiri	2013	July
General Guidelines for Jihad	Zawahiri	2013	September
Faith defeats arrogance	Zawahiri	2013	September

The 65th Anniversary of the Founding of the Occupation State of Israel	Zawahiri	2013	Unknown
An Urgent Call to Our People in al-Sham	Zawahiri	2014	January
Liberation from the Circle of Futility and Failure	Zawahiri	2014	January

AL-QAIDA February 2014 – July 2017			
Title	Author	Year	Month
The Reality Between the Pain and the Hope Part 1 & 2	Zawahiri	2014	April
A Testimony to preserve the Blood of the Mujahideen in Shaam	Zawahiri	2014	May
Answers to the Esteemed Shaykhs	Zawahiri	2014	May
Zawahiri establishes AQIS	Zawahiri	2014	September
Islamic Spring Part 1	Zawahiri	2015	March
Islamic Spring Part 2	Zawahiri	2015	April
Islamic Spring Part 3	Zawahiri	2015	April
Islamic Spring Part 4	Zawahiri	2015	April
Islamic Spring Part 5	Zawahiri	2015	October
Islamic Spring Part 6	Zawahiri	2015	October
Let's unite to liberate Jerusalem	Zawahiri	2015	November
Support your prophet	Zawahiri	2015	December
Islamic Spring Part 8	Zawahiri	2016	January
The Levant is Entrusted Upon Your Necks	Zawahiri	2016	January
Killing of Mujahideen by Al Saud regime	Zawahiri	2016	January
Hasten to ash-Shaam	Zawahiri	2016	May
Upon Promise to Continue	Zawahiri	2016	May
Islamic Spring Part 7	Zawahiri	2016	June
Islamic Spring Part 9	Zawahiri	2016	July
Eulogy for Abu Basir	Zawahiri	2016	July
Brief Messages to a Supported Ummah 1 "Who Protects the Quran?"	Zawahiri	2016	August
Brief Messages to a Supported Ummah 2 "Do Not Be Divided"	Zawahiri	2016	August
Brief Messages to a Supported Ummah 3 "Allah Allah Fi Al-Iraq"	Zawahiri	2016	August
Brief Messages to a Supported Ummah 4 "One United Structure"	Zawahiri	2016	August
Those who defy Injustice	Zawahiri	2016	September
Brief Messages to a Supported Ummah 5 "To Other than Allah We Will Not Bow"	Zawahiri	2017	January
Brief Messages to a Supported Ummah 6 "Shaam will submit to none except Allah"	Zawahiri	2017	April
Brief Messages to a Supported Ummah 7 "One Ummah, One War on Multiple Fronts"	Zawahiri	2017	June

Appendix B: Al-Qaida and Islamic State (-linked) Attacks and Plots in the West

DATE	“NAME”	COUNTRY	TYPE
ISLAMIC STATE ATTACKS 2010 – JANUARY 2014			
Dec/2010	Stockholm bombings	Sweden	Networked
19/09/2012	Paris kosher grocery market	France	Inspired
ISLAMIC STATE ATTACKS FEBRUARY 2014 – JUNE 2017			
24/05/2014	Jewish Museum in Brussels	Belgium	Guided
24/09/2014	Melbourne Police Stabbing	Australia	Inspired
20/10/2014	Quebec Car attack	Canada	Guided
23/10/2014	NYC Axe attack	USA	Inspired
15/12/2014	Sydney hostage taking	Australia	Inspired
20/12/2014	Tours knife attack	France	Inspired
07/01/2015	Coulibaly attack	France	Guided
14/02/2015	Copenhagen attack	Denmark	Inspired
19/04/2015	Villejuif assassination	France	Guided
03/05/2015	Garland attack	USA	Guided
26/06/2015	Lyon gas factory attack (St.-Quentin-Falla- viev)	France	Guided
21/08/2015	Amsterdam-Paris high-speed train shooting (Thalys train)	France-Holland	Controlled
04/11/2015	University of California Merced Stabber	USA	Inspired
13/11/2015	Paris attack (Bataclan, Stade de France, restaurants)	France	Controlled
02/12/2015	San Bernardino attack	USA	Networked
07/01/2016	Paris Axe threat	France	Inspired
11/01/2016	Marseille machete attack	France	Inspired
26/02/2016	Hannover police stabbing	Germany	Guided
22/03/2016	Brussels bombing	Belgium	Controlled
12/06/2016	Orlando night club attack	USA	Inspired
13/06/2016	Magnanville police officer killed	France	Guided
14/07/2016	Nice Promenade attack	France	Networked
18/07/2016	Wurzbug Axe train attack	Germany	Guided
24/07/2016	Ansbach bombing	Germany	Guided
26/07/2016	Normandy church attack	France	Guided
06/08/2016	Charleroi attack	Belgium	Networked
01/09/2016	Christiania attack	Denmark	Inspired
17/09/2016	St Cloud shopping mall attack	USA	Inspired
01/10/2016	Malmö shiaangreb	Sweden	Guided
28/11/2016	Ohio University attack	USA	Inspired
19/12/2016	Berlin Christmas market	Germany	Guided
22/03/2017	London Parliament attack	UK	Inspired
07/04/2017	Stockholm Truck attack	Sweden	Guided
22/05/2017	Manchester attack	UK	Guided

03/06/2017	London Bridge and Borough market attack	UK	Networked
06/06/2017	Notre Dame attack	France	Inspired
19/06/2017	Paris Champs-Élysées 2 attack	France	Networked
20/06/2017	Brussels Central Station	Belgium	Inspired
ISLAMIC STATE PLOTS 2010 – JANUARY 2014			
None -			
ISLAMIC STATE PLOTS FEBRUARY 2014 – JUNE 2017			
Feb/2014	Riviera Plot	France	Controlled
Jul/2014	Creteil plot	France	Guided
17/09/2014	Baryalei-Azari plot	Australia	Guided
25/09/2014	Surgeon plot	UK	Networked
Oct/2014	Vienna teenager plot	Austria	Guided
06/11/2014	Remembrance Day plot	UK	Inspired
Jan/2015	Cornell Capitol plot	USA	Inspired
15/01/2015	Verviers plot	Belgium	Controlled
10/02/2015	Fairfield plot	Australia	Networked
21/02/2015	Ohio Plot	USA	Guided
10/03/2015	Ceuta plot 1	Spain	Guided
Apr/2015	Velentzas/Siddiqui plot	USA	Networked
18/04/2015	Anzac day plot	Australia	Networked
Apr/2015	Fort Riley plot	USA	Inspired
Apr/2015	Catalonia plot	Spain	Networked
08/05/2015	Greenvale plot	Australia	Guided
21/05/2015	West Chester Plot	USA	Guided
02/06/2015	Usamaah Rahim plot	USA	Guided
Jun/2015	NYC aeronautics student plot	USA	Inspired
19/06/2015	Morganton Plot	USA	Guided
14/07/2015	Luton Plot	USA	Guided
30/12/2015	NYC NYE Plot	USA	Guided
14/01/2016	Kundby plot	Denmark	Guided
02/06/2016	Dusseldorf Plot	Germany	Controlled
10/08/2016	Ontario Plot	Canada	Guided
04/09/2016	Notre Dame Plot	France	Guided
10/09/2016	Schleswig- Holstein Plot	Germany	Controlled
21/09/2016	Roanne Plot	France	Guided
25/09/2016	Nice Plot	France	Networked
Feb/2017	Montpellier plot	France	Networked
Mar/2017	Venice Rialto bridge Plot	Italy	Networked
Apr/2017	Marseille Plot	France	Networked
AL-QAIDA ATTACKS 2010 – JANUARY 2014			
May/2010	Roshonara Choudhry's stabbing of Stephen Timms	UK	Inspired
Mar/2012	Merah attacks	France	Controlled

Sep/2012	Cannes-Torcy attack	France	Networked
Apr/2013	Boston bombing	USA	Networked
AL-QAIDA ATTACKS FEBRUARY 2014 – JUNE 2017			
07/01/2015	Charlie Hebdo attack	France	Guided
AL-QAIDA PLOTS 2010 – JANUARY 2014			
Feb/2010	Rajib Karim Heathrow plot	UK	Guided
Jul/2010	Davud cell	Denmark (and other places)	Controlled
Sep/2010	Europe Mumbai plot	UK, France and Germany	Controlled
Dec/2010	London Christmas plot	UK	Networked
Feb/2011	Aldawsari plot	USA	Inspired
Apr/2011	El-Kebir plot	Germany	Controlled
Jun/2011	Seattle Military Processing plot	USA	Networked
Sep/2011	Irfan Naseer plot	UK	Guided
Nov/2011	Pimentel NYC plot	USA	Inspired
Jan/2012	Osmakac Tampa plot	USA	Inspired
Apr/2012	Luton Cell	UK	Guided
May/2012	AQAP plane bomb plot	USA	Controlled
Aug/2012	Gibraltar plot	Spain	Networked
Sep/2012	Chicago bar plot	USA	Inspired
Oct/2012	Federal reserve bomb plot	USA	Networked
Nov/2012	Qazi brothers plot	USA	Guided
Mar/2013	Marignane plot	France	Networked
Dec/2013	Wichita bomb plot	USA	Inspired
AL-QAIDA PLOTS FEBRUARY 2014 – JUNE 2017			
Jun/2014	June 2014 UK plot	UK	Guided
Feb/2015	Mohamud plot	USA	Guided

Notes

- [1] Petter Nesser, Anne Stenersen, and Emilie Oftedal, "Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (2016): 3 - 24.
- [2] Sam Mullins, "The Road to Orlando: Jihadist-Inspired Violence in the West, 2012-2016," *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 6 (2016): 26 - 30.
- [3] Statement published by al-Qaida on 3 February 2014 titled "bayan bishan 'alaqah jama'at qa'idat al-jhad bijama'ah al-dawlat al-islamiyya fi-l-'iraq wa-l-sham) [Statement on the relationship between the group Qaida al-Jihad and the group of the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham].
- [4] C J M Drake, "The Role of Ideology in Terrorists' Target Selection," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10, no. 2 (1998): 54.
- [5] The intra-jihadi competition is not just relevant in the context of political preferences. Other studies on the effects of intra-jihadi competition could adopt a focus on legitimate ways of establishing the Islamic caliphate, the implementation of sharia, attitudes to establishing alliances (through a focus on al-wala' wa-l-bara'). A concrete example that intra-jihadi competition does translate to changes in action is witnessed in Yemen where the local al-Qaida affiliate, AQAP, has adjusted its behaviour after the emergence of a Yemeni Islamic State affiliate. For information, see: Elisebeth Kendall, "Al-Qaeda and Islamic State in Yemen: A Battle for Local Audiences," in Simon Staffell and Akil N., Awan (Eds.) *Jihadism Transformed : Al-Qaeda and Islamic State's Global Battle of Ideas*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 89 -110.
- [6] Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015): 14-30.
- [7] Although jihadists have often contested and competed with each other, little academic work has been done on such contestation, fragmentation or competition. Two important exceptions are Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) and the work done by the CTC's Harmony Program, especially Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (Eds.), *Self Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al Qa'ida and Its Periphery* (West Point: CTC Harmony Project, 2010). Insights from the Social Movement Studies literature can be found in Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Framing Jihad: Intramovement Framing Contests and Al-Qaeda's Struggle for Sacred Authority," *International Review of Social History* 49, no. S12 (December 2004): 159-177. In contrast, scholarly work on jihadi cooperation has recently flourished with important works such as Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad : Understanding Cooperation among Terrorist Actors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Barak Mendelsohn, *The Al-Qaeda Franchise : The Expansion of Al-Qaeda and Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Michael C. Horowitz and Philip B.K. Potter, "Allying to Kill: Terrorist Intergroup Cooperation and the Consequences for Lethality," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 2 (2012): 199-225. resource sharing, joint training exercises, and operational collaboration. They build alliances and lesser partnerships with other formal and informal terrorist actors to recruit foreign fighters and spread their message worldwide, raising the aggregate threat level for their declared enemies. Whether they consist of friends or foes, whether they are connected locally or online, these networks create a wellspring of support for jihadist organizations that may fluctuate in strength or change in character but never runs dry. [This book] identifies types of terrorist actors, the nature of their partnerships, and the environments in which they prosper to explain global jihadist terrorism's ongoing success and resilience. [This book] brings to light an emerging style of 'networked cooperation' that works alongside interorganizational terrorist cooperation to establish bonds of varying depth and endurance. Case studies use recently declassified materials to illuminate al-Qaeda's dealings from Iran to the Arabian Peninsula and the informal actors that power the Sharia4 movement. The book proposes policies that increase intelligence gathering on informal terrorist actors, constrain enabling environments, and disrupt terrorist networks according to different types of cooperation." -- Introduction -- Part I. Understanding contemporary terrorist cooperation. The puzzle of terrorist cooperation -- Actor spectrum : organizations, networks, and entrepreneurs -- Shifting environment : ideology, social media, and armed conflicts -- Contemporary terrorist cooperation : a holistic typology -- Part II. Terrorist cooperation in the global Jihad. Pre-9/11 cooperation in the global Jihad -- Post-9/11 cooperation in the global Jihad -- High-end cooperation : Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)
- [8] Donatella Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 151.
- [9] Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State" (Brookings Doha Center, 2015), 8.
- [10] Celine Marie I. Novenario, "Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 11 (2016): 953-967; Kendall, "Al-Qaeda and Islamic State in Yemen: A Battle for Local Audiences," 102; Cole Bunzel, "Jihadism on Its Own Terms" (Hoover Institution, 2017), 8.
- [11] See, for instance, Paul Cruickshank and Mohannad Hage Ali, "Abu Musab Al Suri: Architect of the New Al Qaeda," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no. 1 (2007): 1-14.
- [12] Abu Musab Al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, 2004.
- [13] Abu Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 2004 (Translation by Will McCants 2006).

- [14] Thomas Hegghammer, “The Hybridization of Jihadi Groups,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 9 (2009): 26–45.
- [15] Examples include Nelly Lahoud and Muhammad Al-`Ubaydi, “The War of Jihadists against Jihadists in Syria,” *CTC Sentinel*, March 2014; URL: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-war-of-jihadists-against-jihadists-in-syria> ; Katherine Zimmerman, “Competing Jihad : The Islamic State and Al Qaeda,” *Critical Threats Project*, September 2014; Charles Lister, “Jihadi Rivalry: The Islamic State Challenges Al-Qaida” (Brookings Doha Center, 2016); Daveed Gartenstein-Ross et al., “Islamic State vs. Al-Qaeda: Strategic Dimensions of a Patricidal Conflict,” no. December (2015); URL: https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/12103-islamic-state-vs-al-qaeda/ISISvAQ_Final.e68fdd22a90e49c4af1d4cd0dc9e3651.pdf ; Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, The Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Simon Staffell and Akil N. Awan Eds.), *Jihadism Transformed : Al-Qaeda and Islamic State’s Global Battle of Ideas* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016).
- [16] See, for example, Hassan Abu Hanieh and Mohammad Abu Rumman, *The “Islamic State” Organization: The Sunni Crisis and the Struggle of Global Jihadism* (Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015).
- [17] See, for example, Will McCants, “The Polarizing Effect of Islamic State Aggression on the Global Jihadist Movement,” *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 7 (2016): 20–23 and Tore Refslund Hamming, “The Al Qaeda–Islamic State Rivalry: Competition Yes, but No Competitive Escalation,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2017, 1–18.
- [18] See, for example, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Bridget Moreng, “Al Qaeda Is Beating the Islamic State,” *Politico*, April 2015.
- [19] Hegghammer and Nesser, “Assessing the Islamic State’s Commitment to Attacking the West”; Nesser, Stenersen, and Oftedal, “Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect.”
- [20] Another important effect of the competition is the fragmentation that it caused within existing groups and jihadi communities. An example of the first is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In 2016 it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, but in June 2016 one part of the group once again sided with al-Qaida/Taliban. A great example of the second type of fragmentation is provided in Wagemakers’ analysis of the shift in ideological alliances in Jordan between the *Zarqawiyyun* and *Maqdisiyyun*; see Joas Wagemakers, “Jihadi-Salafism in Jordan and the Syrian Conflict: Divisions Overcome Unity,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2017, 1–22.
- [21] Abu Muhammed Al-`Adnani, “This Was Not Our Method, and It Will Not Be,” *Chabab Tawhid Media*, April 17, 2014.
- [22] Abu Maysarah Al-Shami, “The Jews of Jihad: Dhawahiri’s Al-Qa’idah,” 2016.
- [23] Novenario, “Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines.” For a more nuanced analysis of the establishment of AQIS, see Anne Stenersen, “Al-Qa’ida’s Comeback in Afghanistan and Its Implications,” *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 9 (2016): 21–27.
- [24] See for instance Lister, “Jihadi Rivalry: The Islamic State Challenges Al-Qaida.”
- [25] Clint Watts, “Deciphering Competition Between Al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State,” *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 7 (2016): 1–6.
- [26] A rather similar notion to outbidding is that of *competitive escalation* proposed by Donatella Della Porta. Competitive escalation happens when two or more social movement organisations within the same social movement family compete and the use of violence increases as a result of this competitive relationship. Della Porta considers such escalation in the context of protest cycles and argues that escalation of violence primarily occurs in the initial period of the protest cycle. See Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* and Hamming, “The Al Qaeda–Islamic State Rivalry: Competition Yes, but No Competitive Escalation.”
- [27] Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill : The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
- [28] Stephen Nemeth, “The Effect of Competition on Terrorist Group Operations,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58, no. 2 (2014): 336–362.
- [29] Della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, chap. 3. See also: Mayer N Zald and Bert Useem, “Movement and Countermovement: Loosely Coupled Conflict,” *CRSO Working Paper* 302, 1983, 1–31; Eitan Y. Alimi, “Relational Dynamics in Factional Adoption of Terrorist Tactics: A Comparative Perspective,” *Theory and Society* 40, no. 1 (2011): 95–118.
- [30] In August 2013, al-Qaida’s Syrian outfit, Jabhat al-Nusra, cooperated with the Islamic State in ‘Operation Liberation of the Coast’. See Charles Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2015), 157.
- [31] Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 49 - 80.
- [32] Novenario, “Differentiating Al Qaeda and the Islamic State Through Strategies Publicized in Jihadist Magazines.”
- [33] Hegghammer and Nesser, “Assessing the Islamic State’s Commitment to Attacking the West”; Nesser, Stenersen, and Oftedal, “Jihadi Terrorism in Europe: The IS-Effect.”
- [34] The terms ‘political preferences’ and ‘enemy hierarchy’ are used interchangeably throughout the article.

- [35] Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West."
- [36] Fawaz A. Gerges, *Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Inc., 2007). Gerges went to Cairo on a McArthur Fellowship, to interview (Arabic is his first language)
- [37] Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 6.
- [38] Hegghammer and Nesser, "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West."
- [39] Petter Nesser, "Islamist Terrorism in Europe, A History", Chronology of Jihadism in Europe 1994-2015: <http://www.hurstpublishers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Islamist-Terrorism-in-Europe-Appendix.pdf>.
- [40] Kyle Orton, "Foreign Terrorist Attacks by The Islamic State, 2002-2016" (The Henry Jackson Society, 2017).
- [41] Ibid.
- [42] Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," 10. The two speeches referred to are: Abu'Umar al-Baghdādī, "Wa'd Allāh," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 22 September 2008. Transcript in Majmu', 76–82 and Baghdādī, "Qul innī 'alā bayyina min Rabbī," Mu'assasat al-Furqān, 13 March 2007. Transcript in Majmu', 12–16.
- [43] Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "General Guidelines for Jihad," *As-Sahab Media*, September 2013.
- [44] Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "Faith Defeats Arrogance," *As-Sahab Media*, September 2013.
- [45] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "I Exhort You to One Thing Only," *Al-Furqan Media Foundation*, May 2012.
- [46] Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, "Remaining in Iraq and the Levant," *Al-Furqan Media Foundation*, June 14, 2013.
- [47] Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, "But Allah Will Not Allow except That His Light Should Be Perfected," *Al Furqan Media Foundation*, July 2012.
- [48] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "The Pioneer Does Not Lie to His People," *Al-Furqan Media Foundation*, January 2014.
- [49] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "They Will Do You No Harm, Barring a Trifling Annoyance," *Al-Furqan Media Foundation*, July 2013.
- [50] Over time al-Zawahiri's criticism of the Islamic State intensified, especially since mid-2015, and although he had never referred to the group or its leaders as apostates (*murtadd*) he has labelled it *khawarij*.
- [51] Especially in A Testimony to preserve the Blood of the Mujahideen in Shaam, see Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "Testimony to Preserve the Blood of the Mujahideen in Shaam," May 2, 2014.
- [52] Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "Islamic Spring Part 2," April 2015.
- [53] Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "Lets Unite to Liberate Jerusalem," *As-Sahab Media*, November 2015.
- [54] Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "Support Your Prophet," December 2015.
- [55] Abdulmalik Droukdel, "Bénédictions et Félicitations Pour l'Union Des Mujāhidīn Du Sahara," *Al-Andalus*, March 2017.
- [56] Abu Al-Fadl Iyad Ag-Ghali, "Al-Masra Tahaawur Al-Sheikh Aba Al-Fadl Iyaad Ghaali," *Al Masra*, April 2017.
- [57] Kendall, "Al-Qaeda and Islamic State in Yemen: A Battle for Local Audiences," 101–102.
- [58] AQIS, "Code of Conduct," *As-Sahab Media*, June 2017.
- [59] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "Then Let Us Invoke the Curse of Allah upon the Liar," *Al-I'tisaam Media Foundation*, March 2014.
- [60] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "Indeed, You Lord Is Ever Watchful," *Al Hayat*, September 2014.
- [61] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "Say, 'Die in Your Rage!,'" *Al Hayat*, January 2015.
- [62] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "That They Live by Proof," *Al Hayat*, May 2016. See also in the Islamic State' magazine *Dabiq*, issue 15, the article titled "Why we hate you and why we fight you" from July 2016; it elaborates on why the group fights the West.
- [63] In the Code of Conduct by AQIS, guidelines for whom are considered legitimate targets are provided. Civilians are indeed considered illegitimate targets.
- [64] Author's interview with Danish foreign fighter, Copenhagen, June 2017.

- [65] A few months later, probably the strongest attack against the Islamic State was delivered by Adam Gadahn in the second edition of the magazine *Resurgence*.
- [66] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "Say to Those Who Disbelieve 'You Will Be Overcome,'" *Al Hayat*, October 2015.
- [67] For Bin Laden's letter to Atiyyatullah, see *SOCOM-2012-0000019*; URL: <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Letter-from-UBL-to-Atiyyatullah-Al-Libi-4-Translation.pdf>, and for Atiyyatullah's letter to al-Wuhayshi, see *Letter from Atiyah to Abu Basir*; URL: <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl2017/english/Letter%20from%20Atiyah%20to%20Abu%20Basir.pdf>.
- [68] Kendall argues that AQAP's role in Yemen has indeed been challenged by the Islamic State's Yemen *wilayah* and that AQAP has adjusted its behaviour to this new competitive environment. See Kendall, "Al-Qaeda and Islamic State in Yemen: A Battle for Local Audiences," 108.
- [69] Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The Local and Global Jihad of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib," *The Middle East Journal* 63, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 213–226.
- [70] Brian Fishman, *Redefining the Islamic State: The Fall and Rise of Al-Qaeda in Iraq*.
- [71] ISI launched several military campaigns from 2010 onwards and all of them focused on national targets. One example is the campaign 'Axe of al-Khalil [*the Friend*]' launched by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on March 18, 2010 with the objective to target Iraqi political parties.
- [72] Islamic State vs AQ New America report, DIIS report, Jihadism Transformed book.
- [73] Rukmini Callimachi, "How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze," *New York Times*, March 29, 2016; URL: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/europe/isis-attacks-paris-brussels.html?_r=1.
- [74] Jean-Charles Brisard and Kevin Jackson, "The Islamic State's External Operations and the French-Belgian Nexus," *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 11 (2016): 8–15.
- [75] Government of the Netherlands, "Threat of Attack on the Netherlands Remains Realistic," July 11, 2016; URL: <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2016/07/11/threat-of-attack-on-the-netherlands-remains-realistic>.
- [76] Orton, "Foreign Terrorist Attacks by The Islamic State, 2002-2016," 2.
- [77] E.g. for an overview of jihadi-related attacks and plots in Europe in the period 1994-2015. Some have been connected to al-Qaida. See Petter Nesser, "Appendix: Chronology of Jihadism in Europe 1994-2015": URL: <http://www.hurstpublishers.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Islamist-Terrorism-in-Europe-Appendix.pdf>.
- [78] Saleh al-Somali, Abu Sulayman Jazairi and Osama al-Kini, all occupying the position of 'head of external operations', were killed between 2008-2009. Additionally, al-Qaida's arguably two most important senior operatives, Sayf al-Adl and Abu Muhammad al-Masri, have been imprisoned one way or the other in Iran since the early 2000s.
- [79] Al-Qaida's 'General Managers' Mustafa al-Yazid and Atiyyatullah al-Libi were killed between May 2010 and August 2011.
- [80] Examples include the Sharia4Belgium and its Danish version called 'Kaldet til Islam'. The leader of Kaldet til Islam, Shiraz Tariq, shifted allegiance to the Islamic State after his emigration to Syria; so did most of the other members of Kaldet til Islam.
- [81] For the full interview with Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, see URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EVaBgSAJ3o> (accessed 17 November 2017)
- [82] Charles Lister, "Profiling Jabhat Al-Nusra," *Brookings Analysis Paper*, July 2016.
- [83] Abu Firas Al-Suri, "Silsalah Al-Shahada II," *Al Basira*, March 2014.
- [84] Author's interview with Danish foreign fighter, June 2017. This conciliatory tone is also heard in Jawlani's speech "Allah, Allah, in the Field of al-Sham" from 7 January 2014 and again in the speech "A Message of Support and Acceptance for the "Initiative of the Ummah" from 24 January 2014.
- [85] Ayman Al-Zawahiri, "Answers to the Esteemed Shaykhs," *As-Sahab Media Productions*, May 2014.
- [86] Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, 148 and 160.
- [87] *Ibid.*, 171 and 175.
- [88] Hamming, "The Al Qaeda–Islamic State Rivalry: Competition Yes, but No Competitive Escalation."

- [89] Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, 192.
- [90] Abu Muhammed Al-Jawlani, "I Wished for You to Eulogize Me," *Al-Manara Al-Baydha Media Foundation*, February 2014.
- [91] Abu Sulayman Al-Muhajir, "Interview with Abu Sulayman Al-Muhajir," *Al Basira*, 2014; URL: <http://jihadology.net/2014/04/12/al-basirah-foundation-for-media-production-presents-a-new-video-message-from-jabhat-al-nusrah-an-interview-with-abu-sulayman-al-muhajir/>.
- [92] "Fatwa by Some of the Scholars of Jihad Regarding the IS Group's Attack on the Mujahideen," [ADD LOCATION!], June 2015.
- [93] Martha Turnbull, "Local and Global Jihadist Narratives in Afghanistan: The Impact of the Decline of Al-Qaeda and Rise of 'Islamic State,'" in: Simon Staffell and Akil N. Awan (Eds.) *Jihadism Transformed : Al-Qaeda and Islamic State's Global Battle of Ideas*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 149.
- [94] See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents," 2015, Specimen 1B.
- [95] Abdur-Rahman al-Marzuqi's tweets can be found at URL: <https://justpaste.it/MarzuqiTakfirOfJN> [accessed 2 August 2017].
- [96] There are several examples of al-Qaida attacking other jihadi groups than the Islamic State thus illustrating that the internal enemy is considered a legitimate enemy.
- [97] Hegghammer discusses the variation in motivations of foreign fighters when joining jihadi groups; see Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 1 (2013): 1–15.
- [98] Paul Cruickshank, "Al-Qaeda's New Course Examining Ayman Al-Zawahiri's Strategic Direction," *IHS Defense, Risk and Security Consulting* May (2012).
- [99] Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, 212–213.
- [100] Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen video titled "Repulsion of the Transgressors", produced by NIM's al-Zallaqa Media Foundation, and was issued on *Telegram* on 26 May 2017.
- [101] Abu Muhammed Al-'Adnani, "May Allah Be With You, O Oppressed State," *Al-Furqan Media Foundation*, September 2013.
- [102] Mustafa Hamid and Leah Farrall, *The Arabs at War in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015).
- [103] E.g. see Al-Muhajir, "Interview with Abu Sulayman Al-Muhajir."
- [104] Author's interview with prominent al-Qaida member based in Syria, 22 May 2017.