The Roots of Salafist Terror: An Analysis of the Growth of Violence in the Middle East from 1991-2010

Tyler D. Abboud
University of Colorado Boulder, tyler.abboud@colorado.edu

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The Roots of Salafist Terror: An Analysis of the Growth of Violence in the Middle East From: 1991-2010

By:

Tyler D. Abboud

Dept. of International Affairs, University of Colorado at Boulder

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Thesis Adviser:

Dr. Gregory Young, Dept. of International Affairs

Defense Committee:

Dr. Vicki Hunter, Dept. of International Affairs

Dr. Aysegul Aydin, Dept. of Political Science
ABSTRACT

Tyler D. Abboud: The Roots of Terror
Under the Direction of Gregory Young

Though originally ascertaining that both blowback and interest sharing were the primary causal factors giving rise to Salafist terrorism from 1991-2010, the project found evidence supporting the idea that the two concepts are related instead. Blowback, specifically from “direct interventions,” increases interest sharing by providing Salafist terrorist groups with the means to expand their objectives to make their fight seem like that of ordinary citizens thereby swelling their numbers. It can also lead to the unification of various groups who previously may have had no common goals. In turn these intertwining phenomenon lead to more attacks and damage done by Salafist terror groups. Blowback can particularly rear itself if the intervening state utilizes a level of force that is neither light nor heavy and falls within a middle ground of troop numbers. The intervening states in the Middle East pursued that avenue, which ultimately led to the increase in Salafist terrorism.
Preface

This project culminates in work that actually began when I was a freshman starting at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Being infatuated with the Middle East, even from a very young age, I knew that it is what I wished to have my future research focus on. As an individual of Arabic heritage, the Middle East means a great deal to me. As such I wish to one day see peace dominate the region instead of conflict. Obviously as one man I cannot complete that gargantuan task, but by researching the roots of terrorism I can certainly get a step in the right direction.

Though primarily I did the work in this project it was not without the major assistance of many people. The obvious thanks go first to my parents, both of whom inspired me to always discover and learn as much as possible from an early age. As both of them pay for my tuition, a major thanks is in order for them in that vein too, as this project would not be possible without those dollars. Furthermore, I would like to thank my girlfriend Megan, because without her I do not think I would have the collegiate work ethic I have today necessary to complete this project. I would also like to thank all three of my advisers, each of whom assisted this project in their own helpful way. Without them this work would probably not be complete.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Americans are inundated with constant coverage of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), and quite often the news is rather bleak. One need not be an academic to determine that the GWOT, or as President Barrack Obama refers to it the “War on Al-Qaeda,” has not gone according to plan. Far from being a model of success, the Middle East today appears more plagued with violence and instability than it did on September 11, 2001, and certainly more so than any time in recent history; this despite the fact that over the course of the last ten years in monetary terms, the United States has spent approximately $1.283-1.6 trillion fighting the GWOT.\(^1\) That number does not even include the extra $1.3 trillion the US is estimated to be spending in veterans care either.\(^2\) Corresponding with those unfathomably high levels of spending is a 58% increase in the number of Salafist Islamist terror groups and a tripling in the number of attacks attributed to such groups according to the RAND Corporation.\(^3\) Fatalities resulting from terrorism have increased fivefold since 2000, which is the year before the GWOT began.\(^4\) Discovering the why of these disastrous results will be the focus of the study. Particular emphasis will be placed on globalization and blowback from various military decisions.

Chapter 2: Hypothesis

The two reasons accounting for a proliferation in Salafist terrorism from 1991-2010 are:

1. **Globalization:** Rapid communication and the spreading of norms have increased Salafist terror group’s ability to engage in interest sharing. Which is the capability for various Salafist terror groups with related interests to disseminate to the broad public and bind together in order to participate in the coordination of a common goal (i.e. the destruction of an un-Islamic state).

2. **Blowback:** Primarily from American military decisions, such as the liberally applied drone and air strikes or the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. This category will be subdivided between “direct” and “indirect” intervention tactics. The blowback effect most likely occurred from 2001-2011.

**Chapter 3: Terminology**

In a declassified report on the overthrow of Iran’s Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953, the CIA defined blowback as the “unintended consequences of US governmental activities abroad.” Though it was written with covert operations in mind it is certainly a concept that can apply to overt ones as well. Specifically overt decisions like direct and indirect military interventions. Globalization is a highly abstract term. As such it is somewhat more difficult to accurately define. Bernal’s definition suffices to explain the basics: the “process in which the barriers to the flow of international goods, services, capital, money, and information are being increasingly eroded or eliminated.”

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5 Bernal Santa-Olaya, Elena Begona, Sharon Bissel, and Ana Cortes. "Effects of globalization on the efforts to decriminalize abortion in Mexico." *Development* 42.4 (1999): 130-133.
It is somewhat of a truism in international relations that terrorism is difficult to define. Therefore a clear-cut definition of terrorism must be provided so as to avoid misconstruing terrorist attack data. For that purpose, the definition professed by the University of Maryland’s Global Terrorism Database (GTD) will be used. The GTD defines terrorism as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation.” That definition is also the exact same as the one professed by Lafree and Dugan. The emphasis being on “non-state actor.” The definition is generally agreed upon by academic and legal scholars and is largely in keeping in line with other definitions of terrorism from the FBI’s to the Department of Defense. Some may find it controversial to not include states as part of that definition, which is understandable, as they can certainly engage in terrorist activities of their own. However, the purpose of the study is not to discover the factors giving rise to state terrorism and it would do a disservice to the conclusions to attempt to do so and incorporate that extra factor in.

The attack data will concern only those that occurred in a Middle Eastern country, not those originating from a certain country. Essentially this means that the 9/11 attacks, though coming from a cell in Germany and financed from a Salafist group of Arabs in Afghanistan, would not count as part of the data. The Al-Qaeda attack on the USS Cole in the Yemeni port of Aden in 2000 however, serves as an example that will count towards the data. The distinction is important. Choi states that in a globalized world the

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differences between “domestic” and “transnational” terrorism are largely arbitrary.\(^7\) That is why this project will make no arbitrary divisions between the two and will only focus on those attacks occurring in the Middle East.

As the “Middle East” can often be a confused term, it would be best to define it as well. Insofar as this project will be concerned, the Middle East will come to mean the area stretching from Morocco, above the Sahara Desert, to Afghanistan (Figure 1). A region normally referred to as the “Greater Middle East,” will simply be Middle East throughout the paper. While it does not go so far as examining every Middle Eastern country in detail, this project will capture some of the broad trends in the Salafist terror movement that have led to its proliferation. The project will omit Turkey as a source of data. Turkey has been beset by attacks from Salafist terror groups in the last 20 years, but more often than not an attack in Turkey could actually come from a Marxist, Kurdish, or radical nationalist group. Overall attack data could not be utilized reliably in such a mixed climate, meaning Turkey will not be a part of this projects definition of the Middle East.

Only Salafist terror groups will be analyzed as a part of the project. Salafist groups are those that subscribe to highly conservative and authoritarian traditions within Sunni Islam. The term “Salafist” will be used as opposed to misnomers like “Jihadist” or specific groups like Al-Qaeda. The former is a misunderstood term that is inappropriately given to terror groups by Western media and punditry, while the latter is simply too specific to obtain reliable data. Also, some groups may choose to attack under a different

name while still carrying out the attack under the leadership of “Al-Qaeda Central” or an affiliated group such as Al-Shabbab in Yemen or Somalia; hence the reason why this is a Salafist terror analysis, not an Al-Qaeda one. Hezbollah, the Kurdish PKK, and other terror groups in the Middle East are certainly worth study, yet they will not be a part of this one. These groups do not fall under the Salafist banner, and therefore, their reasons for proliferating are different. Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Gaza, though ostensibly Salafist groups will not be a part of the study. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict would simply add too many issues to deal with reasonably in the project.

Chapter 4: Methodology

“America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day.” So declared President George W. Bush the day of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. It is a speech somewhat erroneously attributed to the beginnings of the GWOT, which actually began under the Reagan Administration in the 1980’s against drug cartels and Marxists in Latin America. Regardless, it is indicative of the nature of the threat that both the world and the US faced. In scholarship, many attempts at understanding the terrorist threat would arise in some capacity. Yet, often times it seems that the applications they provide are too broad so as to appropriately understand the nature of the particular group or groups engaged in terrorism. Authors like Pape, Jones, Walters and Choi analyze terrorism in a context that somewhat lumps all of the groups together. Instead, this project will analyze terrorism with a region and ideological centric approach that will provide more specific answers that keep context in

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mind. That is not to say that the work of the broad terrorism analysts will not be featured in the work, just that it will take a more specific approach.

The years analyzed in this project will be 1991-2010, herein referred to as the 20-year period. These dates are not chosen randomly. 1991 is roughly the end of the Cold War and is the year of the first Gulf War. At that time there was no superpower rivalry to contend with for the United States, which led then President George H.W Bush to declare that the “new world order is not a fact; it is an aspiration, and an opportunity.”9 With that “new world order” in mind, the United States would embark on a new set of policy goals and challenges, defined by a new set of geo-political interests. 2010 is the end date due to the collection of data. Terrorism data is rather difficult to obtain and often times does not arrive until a few years after the incident occurred, at least in terms of who the blame can be assigned to and the numbers who perished or were injured in a given attack.

To start the project will offer a rudimentary history of the Salafist movement in general and Al-Qaeda in particular. This historical background is by no means intended to serve as an all-encompassing project, but rather provides necessary details to understand how the dreads of Salafist terrorism ensconced the Middle East. Following that brief discussion the project will turn to the variables: blowback and interest sharing. Within each variable there may exist certain sub-categories, and they will be addressed as necessary.

As mentioned previously, terrorism data is difficult to obtain. Prescribing attacks to groups is the more mysterious task. The reasons why lie in the nature of terrorism itself.

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While there is much emphasis on “lone wolf” attacks in the US and West Europe, this is particularly frustrating when dealing with states that are saturated with hundreds or thousands of attacks annually, like Iraq. Even in the West, entire court cases and investigations that go on for years can be had over whether or not an individual was attacking at the behest of a group or by his own means. Imagine the difficulty of discerning lone wolf versus group terror in an area that lacks adequate police and intelligence services. The GTD prescribes as many attacks as it can, but many of them are categorized as “unknown.” This makes data from religiously and ethnically heterogeneous states like Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon difficult to specify. An attack could easily come from a Kurdish, nationalist, Shiite, or Salafist group and it is almost impossible to know barring on the ground live witnessing of the incident. To mitigate that uncertainty, only newspaper accounts could be used. For instance if an attack is prescribed by the GTD as being “unknown,” a search of the date and location could reveal the actual perpetrator in some news accounts. This is not a perfect way of dealing with terrorism data, but in light of the circumstances it is the best available option.

Furthermore, when attack data is listed it will count all those attacks that occurred, meaning it could include deaths, or could be just an attack on a piece of infrastructure like an oil pipeline.

When it comes to the “direct” and “indirect” intervention sections roughly the same method will be used. First both require definition. What can be called “direct” intervention mostly calls to mind the Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan Wars. They involve the mass mobilization of troops, diplomats, advisers, and private contractors in order to carry
out a war; this definition is the same as that expressed by Pearson and Baumann.\textsuperscript{10} The most recent direct interventions by the US, in Afghanistan and Iraq, included major occupations that separate them from the original Iraq War, wherein the United States militarily expelled Iraq from Kuwait and exited after a few months. The United States along with its NATO and Western European allies have been the primary state engaging in direct interventions in the Middle East, though it would not be incorrect to label the Syrian government’s current Civil War as a “direct” intervention also. This section will rely on troop deployment numbers, provided to Congress annually, and compare them to the fluctuations in terrorism numbers (percentage increases, total attacks, etc).

“Indirect” interventions will be categorized differently. These involve the application of force, absent the utilization and deployment of troops on a large scale, namely via drone or air strikes and cruise missiles. Data from US drone and airstrikes are somewhat, though not much, easier to obtain compared to terrorism data, thanks to the work done by organizations like the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and the New America Foundation. What will be very difficult is discerning the number of militants killed versus the number of civilians killed. Much the same problem from terrorist attacks comes up, but with somewhat of a legal twist. The United States, namely under the Obama Administration, utilizes “signature strikes,” whereby military aged males who adhere to a certain personality pattern are targeted and killed, often times without knowing their names.\textsuperscript{11} This is the opposite of a “personality strike,” where certain


terrorist leaders are known and nominated to be on President Obama’s “kill list.” Unlike troop numbers, the number of strikes is rarely publicized. To overcome the lack of transparency, information from non-government organization reports such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International will suffice.

**Chapter 5: The GWOT Today**

Most Americans, indeed any individual born after the Cold War, have had to deal with a majority of their life in wartime United States. Though not as apparent as World War II or as divisive as the Vietnam War, it is a fact that permeates American life and dominates headlines. Particularly infuriating is the fact that despite the trillion dollar costs, along with hundreds of thousands of lives expended, there appears no end in sight to the GWOT. Just recently both the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars have been “temporarily” continued in order to combat the scourge that is Salafist terrorism. This occurs while the United States and its allies are actively targeting Salafist terror groups in Indonesia, the Philippines, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, Libya, Syria and Pakistan. So what began in October 2001 as an effort to rid Al-Qaeda of a safe haven in Afghanistan as a response to 9/11 has become a global conflict dominated by the US. The GWOT is one of those passively accepted topics that Americans may find becoming a permanent reality if solutions are not developed. The only method by which these solutions can be developed is via rigorous analysis of the roots of Salafist terrorism.

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The current rise in terror proliferation is not up for debate and a near consensus in terrorism research supports the idea of a constant Al-Qaeda and Al-Qaeda affiliated terror growth in the Middle East. Specifically, a few Middle Eastern states that will remain the focus of the work; the main focus will be on Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Egypt as they have undergone a rapid Salafist terror expansion and feature a litany of other problems including poor governance, sectarian divisions, and constant economic troubles.

**Middle East Map Figure 1**

![Middle East Map](image)

**Chapter 6: Alternative Theories**

The project hypothesized that blowback and interest sharing are responsible for Salafist terror growth in the 20-year period. However it did not mention why certain variables were omitted or placed as a sub category within those two main variables. That

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15 Figure 1: Notice that Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Turkey, and Pakistan are not highlighted for reasons discussed in the “Preliminary Definitions” section.
is the purpose of this section, where theories such as poverty, mental illness, democratic
deficits, and the Clash of Civilizations will be briefly noted as to demonstrate why they
are not included in the discussion. It should be further noted that this is not an attempt to
disprove past work, but rather demonstrate why those theories on terrorism do not work
within the confines of this project. Then this section will end by briefly introducing the
project’s hypothesizing variables, blowback and interest sharing.

**Poverty**

At the outset of the project, poverty was considered as part of the factors giving
rise to Salafist terrorism. Some credence can be lent to this when one considers that the
states most beleaguered by terrorism in the Middle East, like Yemen and Iraq, have
entirely different socio-economic scenarios when compared to Kuwait and Qatar, who are
rarely afflicted by terrorism. Some academic evidence suggests a link between poverty
and violence, as Goodhand notes “poverty is one of a number of factors that may
contribute to violent conflict.”\(^\text{16}\) In modern criminology as well there has been a correct
tendency to associate rises in poverty with rises in crime. However, that does not seem
the case with Salafist terrorism, at least in the Middle East.

While the Salafist terror groups have been known to provide rudimentary services
for various peoples in the past so as to win their favor,\(^\text{17}\) this never came up as a growth
factor. Certain Marxist and nationalist groups can attribute some gain to this, like the
Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, but time and time again no causal link could be found between

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Salafist terror proliferation and poverty. Indeed far too many Middle Eastern states were impoverished and had very limited Salafist, or any other form, of terror attacks in their history. Examples include Iraq prior to 2002 and Syria prior to 2011.\(^{18}\) This is further compounded by the fact that the majority of Salafist terror architects, like Sayyid Qutb, Osama bin-Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and others were from privileged, middle class, or academic backgrounds. The same can be said of Salafist foot soldiers as Kepel concludes they are “the privileged children of an unlikely marriage between Wahhabism and the Silicon Valley.”\(^{19}\) The lack of impoverished Salafist terrorists fighting for monetary opportunity is why Krueger and Maleckova arrive at a similar conclusion determining there is “little direct connection between poverty… and support for terrorism.”\(^{20}\)

The very nature of terrorism speaks to the necessity of some education and money. Guns, bombs, and ally forging all require cash, usually in hard or tangible currency. So it would make little sense for a terror group to be forged by poverty, there would be hardly anything to attack without those above-mentioned items. Similarly weapons knowledge, tactics and strategy require education, at least the ability to read. It is exactly why many terrorists, according to Crenshaw, “are young, well-educated, and Middle-Class in background.”\(^{21}\) Finally, in the modern age terrorists need the ability to access technology so as to communicate quickly. This is especially true of younger members, where “there


is greater probability that recently recruited members of terrorist organizations are more competent in using the information technologies,” according to Cvrtilla and Peresin.  

This idea of technological communication will be discussed later in the “interest sharing” section. Poverty should not be thought of as a growth factor for terrorists, but rather as something that they can exploit.

**Mental Illness**

While not a popularly expressed variable in terms of academic literature, it can sometimes be the case that media portrayals attempt to explain Salafist terrorists as stemming from insanity or mental illness. Due to its banality, the project will not cover this issue in great detail. Insanity is more of a criminal plea than a medical concept, but it has come up from time to time. However, it is worth noting that none of the Al-Qaeda or Salafist terror architects displays any traits resembling psychological or mental issues. Their decisions, while cold and barbaric, are almost always taken with the most rational and careful of thought. Terrorism in general is always done with a specific set of goals in mind and almost never done at random. If an individual perpetrated a terrorist act displaying mental disturbances this could not be the case.

The popular discussion of mental illness as a growth factor in terrorism most likely arises from a case of mistaken identity of the word suicide in “suicide terrorism.” However, even that most egregious form of terrorism is “designed to achieve specific political purposes,” according to Pape. Generally those who do engage in suicide terror do not fit a specific psychological profile, as one would expect. Finally, Borum notes,

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“mental illness and abnormality are typically not critical factors in terror behavior.” In the same study he found that instances of mental illness among incarcerated terrorists were actually lower than that of the general population. So it would make little sense to describe the rise in Salafist terror in the Middle East as a result of deep found psychological problems in the minds of Sunni Arabs that have increased in the last 20 years.

**Democratic Deficits**

The lack of democracy as a source of terror can be labeled “democratic deficits.” This line of thinking posits that the lack of the ability for people to participate in the political process encourages their anger and causes them to revolt with violence or terrorism. There is some correlation to indicate its validity. The Middle East lacks a true democracy and is responsible for a large majority of the world’s terrorism. Yet, even this does not paint the full picture and a conflicting correlation presents challenges. The three states responsible for most Salafist terrorism in the 20-year period are Iraq, Afghanistan, and Algeria. They account for 89.3% of attacks according to Graph 1. Those three states all faced massive direct interventions, two of them by a democracy and one by an authoritarian government. Indeed the growth of Salafist terror in Syria today or in Iraq after US troops exited serve as stark reminders that democratic deficits cannot claim full responsibility for terror increases.

Still Crenshaw is an advocate of the democratic deficit view by claiming, “in situations where paths to legal expression are blocked…revolutionary terrorism is doubly

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likely…" A slight correlation can be found on that basis too. One fact nearly all of Al-Qaeda’s core members have in common is that they hail from authoritarian governments; Bin Laden and Zawahiri come from Saudi Arabia and Egypt respectively. Michael Scheuer’s book, *Imperial Hubris* lends support to the idea of democracy deficits sponsoring terrorism when he opines that the US is shooting itself in the foot by sponsoring Middle East dictatorships, like Egypt’s and Saudi Arabia’s, and trying to fight terrorism.\(^2\)\(^6\) Scheuer believes that this is one of the many reasons why terrorism has grown so much in the Middle East. There is a problem with these ideas though. Since the creation of the modern nation-state system after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1683 there has never been a modern democratic Arabic state. One would expect that Salafist terrorism would have spiked generations ago, as opposed to in the last 20 years, had the lack of democracy been a significant precipitating factor. Yet, that is not the case; while it is likely that some Salafist terrorists joined Al-Qaeda because they could not vote or politically express themselves, it does not seem like the primary cause. There may be a legitimacy issue, but that will be reserved for the interest sharing section.

**The Clash of Civilizations**

There is a tendency in political and academic discourse to describe terrorism as retaliatory for “what we are” as opposed to “what we do.” To everyday Americans, and indeed many politicians, this logic has a sort of feel good aspect to it. It is akin to the oft repeated, “why do they hate us so much” phrase. President Bush largely expressed the


idea following the 9/11 attacks when he declared, “America was targeted for this attack because we are the brightest beacon of freedom… in the world.”

Even Presidents Clinton and Obama have chimed in with similar remarks at one point or another. Largely modeled after Samuel Huntington’s famous *Clash of Civilizations* argument whereby “the great divisions among humankind and the dominant source of conflict will be cultural,” this thesis is highly popular when the GWOT is discussed.

The *Clash of Civilizations* predicts that the bulk of the world’s future conflicts will take place between “Islam” and “the West” for several reasons. Chief among them are the expansion of “Western” liberal and democratic values, unrivaled US power, and the growing importance of religion. Yet none of these ideas can entirely stand up to scrutiny.

Studies like Eubank and Weinberg’s can certainly lend credence to the Clash thesis when they note that most terrorist organizations prefer to attack Western-democratic states. However they are largely keeping in line with the arbitrary distinction between “transnational” and “domestic” terror. They tend to forget that Salafist terror organizations are capable of, and often attempt, both types of operations. Both are integral to the group’s overall mission. Furthermore this only shows what the target is, not the reasons for the attacks. Raw data also demonstrates no basis to support the idea of democracy under attack. Indeed one look at Graph 1 shows that most Salafist

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terror attacks have occurred in places that are not democratic at all like Afghanistan, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, and Yemen. Overall from 1991-2010 Afghanistan would actually account for 41% of Salafist terror attacks, with nearly all of that occurring from 2003-2010. In the 1990’s the situation was largely the same, especially in the Middle East, where both Algeria and Egypt were the dominant recipients of Salafist terror attacks. Even today the situation is similar. While these attacks are only taken from the Middle East, they are indicative of broader worldwide trends, since only a scant few Salafist terror attacks occur in Europe or the US. Of the Global Peace Index’s ranking of states most afflicted by terrorism today three of them are in the Middle East; Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. The other two, Nigeria and Pakistan, are at its peripheries.³⁰ None of those five states display the democratic or “Western” values that “Islam” is supposed to loathe so viscerally.

Attitudes in the Middle East do not suggest a visceral hatred for the Western world for the reasons Huntington describes. Instead it is the policies of the Western world that are the drivers of anger. One can see this effect in simple polling data. The two most important issues for Arabs from 2008-2011 (the only years polled) were the Iraq War and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. If one were to consider Pape’s conclusion that occupations increase suicide terrorism, this should be expected. Both of those issues involve military occupations. No doubt Salafist terrorists, especially Bin Laden, prey off of the popular mood against them. The fact that both of those policies are driven by Western states should not be construed as supporting the Clash of Civilizations thesis. As of 2010, 47%

of Arabs polled held an unfavorable view of the US, but compared to the 64% of them who had similar feelings in 2008 this is actually an improvement. That improvement did not coincidentally correlate with the drawdown of US Military forces in Iraq. Though the number of attacks did increase in those years, the number of deaths from those attacks decreased from approximately 5,000 in 2008 to 3,000 in 2010.\textsuperscript{31} Certainly the two issues are related, as Salafist groups could no longer muster the major attacks they did in previous years with improved feelings toward the US. Primarily what it suggests is that Sunni Arab minds’, and those of any other culture, are not fixed realities of cultural hatred, but rather capable of altering to changing circumstances.

Graph 1\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Salafist Terror Percentage 1991-2010}
\end{center}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{chart.png}
\end{figure}

\textit{The Clash of Civilizations} thesis does posit that violence can be expected within one of Huntington’s general groups between sub-categories of those groups. This immediately draws to mind the “Sunni-Shia” divide so often talked about in the media.

\textsuperscript{31} National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2013). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd

\textsuperscript{32} “••”
However, there is no correlation to suggest that an inter-religious Sunni-Shia society is more prone to Salafist terrorism. Of those five states primarily responsible for Salafist terror in Graph 1, three are relatively homogeneous as can be seen in Table 1.20. It is quite likely that living in a homogenous state, like Egypt, makes one more prone to view Shia as non-Muslim. A poll taken by the Council on Foreign Relations shows that only 42% of Sunnis in Egypt believe Shia to be real Muslims, whereas 53% do not.\(^33\) In Iraq and Lebanon, both states that have undergone vicious civil wars in the last 30 years and are heterogeneous, large majorities of Sunnis view Shia as real Muslims. So it makes little sense to suggest that “culture,” as Huntington defines it, is the dominant source of conflict and terrorism in the world today.

### Percentage of Sunni/Shia Population as of 2010 Table 1\(^{34}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Afghanistan</th>
<th>Algeria</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>Yemen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shia</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>N/a</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The paper will now turn to the two primary variables.

**Blowback**

Instead of “what we are,” Salafist terrorism actually responds more often to “what we (or others) do.” As Eland notes “All of the examples of terrorist attacks on the United States can be explained as retaliation for US intervention abroad.”\(^{35}\) This includes both the 1993 World Trade Center and September 11\(^{th}\) attacks. Though discussing only those

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attacks that occurred on US soil or specifically against US individuals abroad (i.e. the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia) the point is still an important one. These notions are highly controversial and are not meant to demean the US, but rather to demonstrate what it is that ignites terror groups. Terrorist attacks cannot simply be explained by something as abstract and ambiguous as “culture” or “Islam.” Even the Pentagon’s Defense Science Board in a 1997 report described a “strong correlation between US involvement in international situations and an increase in terror attacks against the US.” Though it is somewhat controversial to say, Salafist terrorist groups, like all terrorist groups, do not attack values; they attack tangible targets to influence policy.

A subset of blowback sees democracies as particularly susceptible to terrorism. Pape advocates for democracies as being more susceptible when he concludes the “strategic logic of suicide terrorism is specifically designed to coerce modern democracies…”36 Though he is only referring to suicide terror attacks, which make up only 5% of overall terrorist attacks, the point is overall the same. These attacks are also the most fear inducing and powerful, responsible for nearly 70% of terrorism deaths. The idea that democracies are more susceptible to terrorism is that their populace is less likely to support aggressive action abroad if faced with the threat of terrorism and will pressure their government to withdraw or deescalate the use of force. An example is that of Spain, who following the Madrid bombings in 2005 decided to pull their troops out of Iraq. Another is the US in the 1980’s, who exited Lebanon following the Marine Barracks bombing.

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Blowback can be discussed in terms of both direct and indirect interventions. Speaking at a 2013 Senate Committee hearing Farea Al-Muslimi, a Yemeni journalist, described how “What the violent militants have failed to achieve, one drone strike accomplished in an instant.”\textsuperscript{38} That “achievement” is a long sustained anger at the US for a drone strike in the town of Wessab, Yemen that failed and killed scores of innocent civilians as opposed to the intended target. It is not just drone strikes in the eyes of blowback advocates though. Scheuer determined that “US policies and actions in the Muslim world provide Muslims eyes’ with incontrovertible proof of what Bin Laden calls an ‘ocean of oppression.’”\textsuperscript{39} In other words, US support for status quo policies, militarism, and authoritarianism are causing terrorism, not just drones. It remains to be seen which of those specifically causes terrorism the most, but this project assumes that direct and indirect intervention are the primary causal factors.

\textbf{Interest Sharing}

Recall the definition of terrorism by the GTD. The emphasis was on the perpetrator being a “non-state actor.” Much has been written on the growth of non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) over the past 20 years. However, most of that writing only recounts the benign or positive aspects of NGO growth, citing organizations like Amnesty International or Doctors Without Borders ability to promote adherence to human rights and medicinal norms. There is a flipside though to NGO expansion; terrorist groups are a militant form of NGO who can expand their interests and norms in a similar manner. As such literature relating to the structure and growth of NGO’s can also be used to help explain terror expansion. Occasionally NGO growth can be referred to as
norm proliferation, but this paper will call it “interest sharing” instead. Interest sharing is essentially the idea that the number of grievances has expanded so drastically as to give rise to a violent backlash. These grievances can be expanded in numerous fashions that will be discussed later on. Broadly speaking, by engaging in interest sharing terrorist groups have the ability to increase bonds with likeminded groups and individuals, thereby increasing their power. It is akin to the process of “coalition building” that states engage in to confront various issues militarily. There is little that quantitative analysis can do to explain interest sharing, so this section will rely significantly more on qualitative analysis instead.

**Chapter 7: History**

Much like any political actor, coming to terms with the history of Al-Qaeda’s and Salafist terror group’s formation is imperative to understanding how and why the groups react to certain situations in the present. This project does not intend to inundate the reader with the history of Al-Qaeda and how it came about exactly, however it will explore some basics and discuss them in this section. Unfortunately, while in the post-9/11 world much has been written in the academic literature concerning the strategies of Al-Qaeda and their effectiveness, little has been written regarding the raw history of the various Salafist movements in general and of Al-Qaeda specifically. To fill this void the project will turn to a few historical narratives written on the subject.

Conservative Islam and its affiliated interpretations have existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad nearly 1400 years ago. Though its contemporary roots can be traced to Muhammad al-Wahhab, a prominent 18th century Islamic thinker who assisted in the creation of the modern Saudi state. The strictly conservative ideology professed by
Wahhab and likeminded individuals would go on to inspire later thinkers and activists. In this sense, there is nothing new with political Islam, which is crudely the idea that a society and its government should be led by the laws established in the Quran and Hadith, known as Sharia Law. While these ideals all form a rough basis for Salafist terror they do not do much justice in explaining its resurgence. Islamic militaries of course have existed too and it was only with the end of the Ottoman Empire following World War I that they formally dissolved. While periods of unrest have existed in the Middle East since that time these conflicts were almost always nationalistic in nature, and it has not been until recently that they became religious. The Yemeni Civil War, the 1967 and 1973 wars between Israel and the Arab states, and the Iraqi invasion of Iran all trace their origins to conflicts based in Arab nationalism as opposed to religion. However the seedlings of religious conflict and Salafist terror can be found during the era of Arab nationalism, specifically under the reign of its most illustrative figure, President Gammal Abdel Nasser of Egypt.

In 1950’s Cairo, Egypt, a man named Sayyid Qutb traveled to the US out of a desire to learn more about its customs, culture, and lifestyle. Coincidentally he happened to be tacitly escaping Egyptian authorities upset with his religious rhetoric and “anti-Egyptian” attitudes as evidenced by his extreme dislike of then President Nasser. Nasser’s regime ran numerous prisons that were infamous for their human rights abuses, and more often than it was conservative Islamic men like Qutb who were placed in them. The prison conditions created such a visceral desire for revenge that some have referred to them as the birthplace of 9/11.\(^{40}\) Nevertheless, Qutb received a western education,
traveled from the East Coast to the Midwest, and came back to Egypt more hard-line and religious from the experience. Disappointed by the US’s lack of religious custom, its sexual openness, and spurned by some of the bigotry he faced as man of color, Qutb traveled back to Egypt and began writing. One of Qutb’s most notable contemporary adherents is Ayman al-Zawahiri, who is the current head of Al-Qaeda and along with Osama bin Laden founded the infamous group. One of Zawahiri’s closest friends, Jamal Khalifa, would later say, “We read Qutb. He was the one who most affected our generation.”

While realizing the effects of the writings and life of Sayyid Qutb are important, there is no understanding Salafist terror, let alone its roots, without first understanding the Afghanistan Civil War in the 1980’s. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in order to assist its communist allies, the bulk of whom were located in the capital Kabul. At that time the US, along with several Arab allies, and Pakistan, funded covert Mujahedeen groups so that they could fight a guerilla war against both the Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists. These groups would form the backbone of the Salafist movement of the 1990’s. The strategic thinking that guided the US was indicative of the Cold War, as they believed anything, even religious fanatics, would be better suited to rule than the Afghan Communists, regardless of the consequences. Arab states, especially Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, established recruiting depots to send young men off to fight the “Soviet Jihad” as it was openly called at the time. In effect this meant stirring a religious pot that exists to this day. The Soviet foreigners were labeled infidels who were

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ransacking Muslim land, and massive religious galvanization was the only thing that could thwart them.

When the original Afghanistan Civil War came to an end in 1989 many of these young men traveled back to their respective countries with their newfound and battle tested skills. For the most part these young warrior types were either ignored or cast a passive form of shame by their host country societies. Yet the situation did not entirely deescalate. Beyond a tumultuous domestic scenario in Yemen and an unrelated conflict in Israel-Palestine, domestically the Middle East was not very violent as of 1990. It was not until the US invasion of Iraq in 1991 that the landscape began to change, and where this project will begin.

Chapter 8: Interest Sharing

In order for interest sharing to occur several factors must come in to play. Each of these will be discussed in depth and be followed by the primary case study scenarios in some detail. At the most basic for interest sharing to occur is the desire to unify in the first place. If there is an absence of a common general goal then one could expect no need to unify at all. These goals need not always be exactly same, and as will be shown later in the project different circumstances in different countries still caused interest sharing to occur. Also, interest sharing requires the ability for groups to communicate rapidly and efficiently. This may come through media appearances, Internet communication, or telephone usage.

Technology and Media

Technology is a major accelerant of terror group interest sharing. It is not a coincidence that Al-Qaeda’s and Salafist terror rise largely accompanies the period of
vast technological growth that has occurred in the last 20 years around the world. Unsurprisingly this rise overlaps with NGO growth as well. Bach and Stark specifically mention technology as part of “a constellation of factors that are used to explain the recent growth and prominence of NGO’s....”43 The exact same description can be said of any terror group, who in the course of the same period of time have become increasingly networked. The reason lies in the nature of terror group’s strategy. Salafist terror groups feed off of the ability to quickly communicate with one another for various reasons. Chief among them are the ability to access worldwide recruits and strategize efficiently behind closed doors. As Prieto notes, “Revolutionary changes in mobile and Internet technologies over the last decade have given terrorists new capabilities by reducing the costs and increasing the reach of their communications.”44 That reduced cost and rapid communication is certainly one factor allowing Al-Qaeda to expand its interests, especially across the borders of the Middle East and beyond.

One can witness technology’s force on interest sharing during the run up and course of the Iraq War. Prior to the war, Salafist terror groups had created their own online forums, magazines, and chat rooms to justify attacking the US and religious minorities to disparate teenagers and young adults. While crude and rudimentary, these forums are still incredibly important to Salafist groups. The Iraq War made it possible for those forums to have more of an international, as opposed to local or regional, appeal. As early as the fall of 2002 Al-Qaeda’s central leadership was utilizing the war for

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propaganda effects. This is roughly around the same period of time that the Bush Administration began making its private case for the war by dispatching media leaks according to journalist Bob Woodward in the book Bush At War. Meaning that Salafist terror groups are aware of the content of Western media, can spin it for their own purposes, and organize on the Internet without having to meet in person in response to said content.

Potentially, utilizing technology can make discussions and organizing easier as Salafist terror groups do not have to meet face to face and risk the danger of being killed or captured. If need be they can enter battle zones like Iraq, Afghanistan, or Algeria on an individual initiative instead of in lazy group clusters. One may think that in largely downtrodden combat zones like Iraq and Afghanistan that this could not occur as Salafist terrorists could not get their hands on expensive technological material. Such ideas are mistaken, as Iraq has a higher number of mobile subscriptions than Qatar, Lebanon, or Turkey.

Correlated with the importance of technology to interest sharing is media. Had technology and media appearance at least not nominally mattered to Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden, one would have expected the 1997 CNN led interview with him to never happened. Bin Laden could have easily killed the two journalists Peter Arnett and Peter Bergen interviewing him, gained some notoriety, and the rest would have been

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history. However, he chose not to and established contact via his “media advisor” in order to pre-screen the questions he would be asked. Bin Laden was using media to get his message out internationally, most likely to young minds across the world. That is a strategy roughly akin to one adopted by all murderous tyrants in the course of a war or conflict (think Bashar Assad’s interview with Charlie Rose). Salafist terrorists may also utilize media to their advantage in an effort to inflate their threat, thereby demonstrating prowess. As Thomas describes:

“Terrorists can thus introduce false information into a net via routine means, measure the response it garners from the US intelligence community, and then try to figure out where the leaks are in their systems or what type of technology the United States is using to uncover their plans” 49

The use of the Internet and media can then become a weapon for Salafist terrorists to discover holes in US intelligence. The best means by which Salafist terrorists can discover whether or not a threat was communicated successfully is too simply pay attention to American media, where terror threats, especially from Muslims, are often provided prima facie attention. That drive for “sensational content” led Cvrtila and Peresin to conclude the media “guarantees terrorist organizations maximum presence in the media…” 50 It is therefore clear that the media appearance, whether four years prior to the September 11th attacks or even currently, means a great deal to Al-Qaeda and Salafist terrorists.

Technology and the media should not be thought of as a means to the end of interest sharing. It is primarily an accelerating force that reduces the costs of


communication and increases the likelihood of a larger terror goal, centralization. Throughout the 1990’s and up until today this is the policy that would drive Bin Laden and other Salafist terror leaders.

**Centralization**

In a 2011 Middle East demographics report Credit Suisse claimed, “citizens who are not politically and economically engaged in terms of GDP, education, employment, and income distribution, quality of life and freedom, may be a source of tension and unrest.”\(^{51}\) In short, those members of society who are least engaged, whether by force or by personal decision, might end up the most “radicalized.” It is no secret that the majority of those disengaged members of society tends to be male youth, especially given that the Middle East experiences the worst youth unemployment numbers compared to any other region. These economic factors should not be construed as lending credence to the poverty explanation for terrorism, It is not simply that joining a terrorist organization gives those youth, who become the foot soldiers for Salafist terror groups, some monetary salary and a way to cover rent. Rather it gives those individuals something to do and a way to express their grievances, whatever they may be. Like many of the NGO groups founded in the 1990’s, Salafist terrorists are not interested in profit; they are interested in what Bach and Stark call “normative values.”\(^{52}\) Salafist terrorists are generally able to sell these normative values as a form of religious extremism that gives them the means to fight back. Disenchanted with the state, with employers, with other


ideologies like nationalism, and with their families, they will wind up joining the last shroud of their identity left unperturbed from the outside, their religion. At least that is the way Salafist propagandists advertise it. Thus, Salafist terrorists in the Middle East are almost exclusively young and male, angry at their society, and are preyed on by religious demagogues.

That lackluster economic performance combined with the lack of something to do presents a highly exploitable situation for terrorists architects. One can see evidence of this in the formative years of Al-Qaeda and Salafist terror in the 1990’s. The Saudi decision to use American military forces as opposed to Mujahedeen forces in the Gulf War inspired Bin Laden to take action. The classic example of Salafist terror interest sharing is Bin Laden’s 1996 declaration of war on the United States. The very nature of the document stresses interest sharing as it is written to the “Muslim brothers across the world.” In the declaration Bin Laden highlighted the necessity of confronting the “far enemy,” the United States, as opposed to the “near enemy” of corrupt Arab regimes. His aim was political. He wanted to organize the various Islamist groups combating those regimes across the Middle East into one cohesive unit against the United States. This is the exact definition of NGO centralization, which is “the process by which independent but similarly minded NGO’s establish formal decision making structures at the international level.” The Al-Qaeda logic was that if the US fell then so would those same Arab regimes that Salafist terrorists had been combating for the past six years or so. There is some indication that Bin Laden was successful in this regard, as nearly 10,000 or

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so young men were thought to have entered his training camps in Afghanistan at one point or another throughout the 1990’s.\textsuperscript{54}

Overall centralization was difficult for Salafists in the 1990’s though. The process requires a consensual level of authority secession. Stroup and Wong argue, “many NGO’s are actually groups of national level organizations that choose to cede varying levels of authority to international arrangements.”\textsuperscript{55} This is quite literally what Al-Qaeda attempted throughout that decade. There were some successes, notably when Bin Laden persuaded Zawahiri and his Egyptian Islamic Jihad group to join forces with him in Afghanistan. The struggles came via many of the various Salafist groups, most relegated to one country, finding any need to unify in the first place. According to Farrall, up until the time of Bin Laden’s infamous declaration of war he had failed miserably at consolidating power by attempting to pay off like-minded groups with his vast financial resources. Of particular importance is his 1993 decision to send approximately $40,000 to the Salafist terrorists in Algeria.\textsuperscript{56} Those groups really had no interest in Bin Laden’s goal of attacking the US, but they were certainly happy to take his money. Regardless it is indicative of Al-Qaeda’s early attempts at promoting group cohesion.

The Al-Qaeda message also did not resonate much with the broader Arab public. A case can be seen in those countries that did not experience much terrorism in the 1990’s. Hardly any Salafist terror occurred in Iraq or Libya. In the case of the former what Salafist terror did occur was mostly against Kurds, as opposed to against Saddam


Hussein and his authoritarian forces. Despite that there was plenty of Salafist terror activity in Egypt and Algeria, as they accounted for the vast majority of attacks in the pre-9/11 era. Bin Laden was known publically for his hatred of Hussein, and Hussein was known publically known for feeling likewise, but still very limited attacks occurred, certainly none by Al-Qaeda. That is not to say Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda did not try, offering large sums of cash to anti-Kurdish Salafists. The major attack discrepancy occurred largely because in countries like Libya and Iraq Salafists could not broaden their appeal, whereas in Egypt and Algeria they could. The crime in Algeria was obvious; the overthrow of a democratically elected Islamist government by the military spurned an atrocious decade long civil war. In Egypt, though subtler, roughly the same crime occurred over a period of decades beginning with the establishment of that country’s republic in the 1950’s. Both of these scenarios are emblematic of governments who shed their legitimacy and transferred plenty of interests in favor of Salafist terrorists.

One can see issue with the blowback theory of increasing terrorism. Throughout the Gulf War very little terrorism occurred. The issue a two pronged one; first no Salafist group could actually shroud their reasons for a war with Hussein or US Forces in religious terms. With the reasons of the war quite well laid out by Hussein, the US, and the UN, that line of propaganda could not have existed. Hussein was quite explicit that he invaded Kuwait for its oil reserves and access to shipping lanes. Though he offered some nationalist justifications, such as the belief that Kuwait was always an Iraqi entity, these were not religious ones. Second, for many Sunni Arabs, Hussein’s regime had a certain marker of legitimacy to it. Jobs, education, and a sense of power come from the Iraqi

state, so why attack it? Omar Abdel Rahman, known as the “Blind Sheik,” could actually best sum up the line of thinking guiding Salafist terrorists at the time when he said, “both those who are against and the ones who are with Iraq should be killed.” Such logic would not exactly garner much support because it would require significant inter-religious violence and immediate chaos. Coworkers and fellow soldiers would be forced to attack one another if they followed strict Salafist thinking at the time, not exactly a great selling point for joining a terrorist group. Further, it would require fighting back against something that had at least nominal appeal amongst the Iraqi people.

**The Wars**

With the exception of the inter-state conflict that was the Gulf War, the wars in the Middle East have been insurgency conflicts. Insurgency conflict is different because it “implicates civilians more directly in the process of warfare than conventional forms of warfare,” according to Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas. Thus, one can expect significantly more civilian casualties and in turn making the situation ripe for terror exploitation. If the state does not protect you or your family from the intervening force then it is likely that an incentive for joining terrorist ranks has presented itself. This is certainly the case as Afghanistan has experienced nearly 21,000 civilian casualties and Iraq 133,000. Both numbers dwarf that of the Gulf War, and those are the more conservative estimates. Once again, Algeria is rather murky, with estimates ranging from

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150,000-200,000 civilians dead. However, in each case the Salafist terror group would find particular societal holes to adapt to their favor, steal legitimacy from the government, and swell their ranks.

**Afghanistan**

Colloquially known as the “good war,” especially after the Iraq War started going south, the War in Afghanistan was never given much thought in terms of its negative effects on Salafist terrorism until after the Iraq War ended. This is a mistake. As has been shown, with the exception of the first two years of fighting in Afghanistan, Salafist terrorism would increase significantly every year thereafter. Also, in terms of specific Salafist attacks, Afghanistan dominated Iraq with 2,266 in the 20-year period compared to Iraq’s 900. Unlike the Iraq War, the War in Afghanistan was actually going well for the US though. So how did the country go from 71 Salafist terrorist attacks in 2004 to 530 in 2010? The answer largely lies in the conduct of the war. After routine bombing operations by the US, the Taliban were largely decimated after one month of fighting in November of 2001. By December 2001 then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld actually declared that major combat operations were over. The remnants of Al-Qaeda, including Bin Laden, were largely scattered into Pakistan or killed, and the most pressing question for the Bush Administration was how the UN would govern the future “democratic” State of Afghanistan.

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Even with the introduction of US ground forces later on in 2001 and early 2002, terrorism would not encounter a major spike, another notion that runs somewhat counter to the blowback theory. It is likely that in the beginning the majority of Afghans simply did not know what was occurring. This is especially possible for those living in the countryside outside of Kabul, which is the majority of the population. In Anand Gopal’s investigative book *No Good Men Among the Living*, he reports that some of the people believed the newly introduced and generally white American soldiers were just leftover Soviet troops.\(^6\) Many had not even heard of the September 11\(^{th}\) attacks. In such an unknowing social climate it would have been near impossible for a terror group to galvanize support for their actions. As far as the majority of people knew there was nothing to take action against and those who knew the Taliban were not exactly giving rave reviews. In turn meaning that the latter half of the war (2006-present) increase in Taliban attacks cannot attribute itself to some long lost urgency for Taliban control by the majority of Pashtuns. For if that were the case one would expect instantaneous retaliation the moment the US forces entered Afghanistan on their behalf. Instead many Taliban foot soldiers and their Al-Qaeda supporters who were not dead fled, deserted, or surrendered.

Over time the situation for the US and in Afghanistan would vastly change. It is imperative to remember that by far the majority of Salafist terror attacks in Afghanistan occur at the behest of either the Taliban or Haqqani Network as opposed to Al-Qaeda, unlike in the rest of the Middle East. The difference is important, as it makes interest sharing in Afghanistan somewhat of its own case. The Taliban and Haqqani Network are largely comprised of the Pashtun ethnicity, which make up about 42% of Afghanistan’s

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overall population.\textsuperscript{65} By contrast, Al-Qaeda’s members are almost exclusively Arab and have no ties by birth or tribe to Afghanistan. This gives the Taliban a much bigger edge to recruit members and over the years has led to a very limited Al-Qaeda role. Even in January of 2011, when terror attacks in Afghanistan were increasing, the US Regional Commander based in Kandahar reported virtually no Al-Qaeda presence.\textsuperscript{66} Though this is a simplistic way to look at Afghanistan’s demographics, it does provide a rudimentary sense of the importance of identity. It is also exactly why in the early years of War in Afghanistan the Bush Administration was adamant about not having the Northern Alliance, a warlord group comprised of ethnic minorities the Tajiks and Uzbeks, take the capital, Kabul.\textsuperscript{67} The Bush Administration wisely presupposed that doing so would alienate Pashtuns and cause them to join the Taliban.

It is amazing how accurate that prediction, given in a late 2001 National Security Council meeting prior to the war, proved correct. Equally astounding is that the US did not heed its own advice. Future US over-reliance on the Northern Alliance, specifically the Panjshiri ethnicity, would contribute to a Pashtun led backlash that resurrected the Taliban by late 2004.\textsuperscript{68} Coburn notes that many in Afghanistan felt that the Panjshiri’s were responsible for the inordinate amounts of corruption that took place in then President Hamid Karzai’s government. While the blame cannot be placed squarely on one ethnicity, there is certainly evidence of the Afghan government’s intransigence. The Afghan government is notorious for squandering money, corruption, and crime. This should not come as an entire surprise. After all, Cottey described, “The record of the

Northern Alliance on human rights...was little better than that of the Taliban."\(^{69}\) Sadly that is not even the worst of it. Some cases broach on the bizarre. In one notorious incident at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Jackson, soldiers of the Afghan Military were keeping prisoner various townspeople under the noses of the Marines at that base.\(^{70}\) On its surface that does not seem like a terrible incident, but the people were largely barricaded in a room with no light about the size of a closet. The Afghan soldiers had no reasoning for keeping the people prisoner; they either did not like them or one of them had an issue with another’s tribe. In such a climate one can see how quickly support for anything but the government could develop, even support for the Taliban. Incidents like this are the reason why Gopal claims, “in the face of perpetual instability, with a weak or absent state, you allied with those you knew and trusted.”\(^{71}\) More often than not those feeling the brunt of problems were Pashtun, and they knew and trusted the Taliban.

The incident at FOB Jackson is far from an outlier. It is actually a microcosm of an endemic scenario that has plagued Afghanistan’s government and civic society. In his embedded memoir *No Worse Enemy*, journalist Ben Anderson estimated that 90% of the crime in Afghanistan was committed by someone in or representing the then Karzai government.\(^{72}\) More often than not this was the local police or newly established Afghan military, the two organizations that interact with Afghans on an almost daily basis. The Afghan troops or police will often cajole themselves into various tribal disputes for their

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own personal, or even tribal, gain. No doubt this leads to significantly higher levels of violence and trauma.

One may draw the conclusion that had the Afghan government been more open; less corrupt, and more pluralistic it may have worked. That goes back to the democratic deficit argument addressed in the “Alternative Theories Section.” It is a mistaken conclusion however. The problem with the Afghan government established by the US is not that it was not democratic enough; rather it is that the government lacks any legitimacy amongst the people, especially Pashtuns. The importance of legitimacy in regards to terrorism cannot be understated. A 2008 Rand Corporation study noted, “The decline of a regime’s legitimacy… can threaten long term stability.” By 2004, when the US mission there altered, this was certainly the case in Afghanistan. The Afghan government, and somewhat the US, lost their legitimacy by over relying on ethnic minorities, carrying out the trite yet violent bidding of various warlords, and by centering all political importance in one urban center. The Afghan government could be highly authoritarian, even violent, but if it had legitimacy it would most likely not face much in the way of a terror threat. Indeed that is the position Afghanistan had in the 1990’s. Prior to the war’s launching in October of 2001 Afghanistan encountered a total of 25 Salafist terror attacks in the 20-year period; this despite the fact that the genocidal Taliban were in power for half of that time.

With Afghanistan as an example, it is safe to say that the lack of legitimacy for a government can definitely be a benefactor for interest sharing. This is especially when one considers the funding of various warlords, where Coburn concludes that,

“international military forces and NGO’s will continue to inequitably distribute funds, empower warlords, and delegitimize the Karzai government.” After all if a large subset group of society, such as the Pashtuns, feel their government is atrocious, that they cannot alter it, and the heart of violence is a constant, it may inspire them to take up arms. In general this lack of legitimacy effect on interest sharing has the ability to produce more societal grievances, which in turn could lead to increasingly marginalized sectors of society clustering in anger. It is no wonder then that LaFree and Ackerman claim, “participation in terrorism is often linked to a search for meaning and belonging,” essentially a sense of meaning and belonging to their government and society.⁷⁴

Iraq

No event assisted Salafist terror group centralization more so than the Iraq War. According to Hegghammer, “Iraq is now considered by far the most important battle arena in the fight against the ‘Jewish-Crusader alliance’;”⁷⁵ the “Jewish-Crusader alliance” being the crudely crafted term by Bin Laden to describe his fight against the West. The numbers of course are striking. Iraq would go from two Salafist terror attacks in 2002 to 10 in 2003 (the year of the invasion), eventually to 91 in 2004. Representing a near 4500% increase in just two years. Some of this comes from the nature of military interventions. As American troops entered Iraq they became targets for the already active Salafist terror cells before the invasion. These groups no doubt took advantage of the fact that the “far enemy” had become ever more close. However, this does not explain why the attacks grew so precipitously in such a short period of time. It would also not explain

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why Salafist attack reverberated outside of Iraq where according to Bergen “the rate of fatal terror attacks around the world… increased dramatically after the invasion of Iraq.”

Part of the problem of the Iraq War was the political climate surrounding it. Salafist terror groups were undoubtedly able to exploit the negative worldwide perceptions of the US following its decision to invade. In France alone, a natural ally of the US, US favorability encountered a 20% decline in just one year. In Jordan, the only Arab country polled, US favorability declined from 25% to 1% in the period 2002-2003. Yet this does not explain Salafist group membership and attack capability. Millions across the world, even in the Middle East, opposed the Iraq War yet did not turn their resistance into violence. The difference is that the Iraq War, according to Byman, vindicated Bin Laden’s argument that the US was the primary enemy of the Muslim world. Prior to the war Bin Laden’s argument found little resonance in the Middle East, this is why attacks in large numbers were relegated to Egypt and Algeria against local dictatorships.

Policies the US adopted whilst in Iraq, namely “de-Baathification,” did not exactly assist either. Adopted by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and its head L. Paul Bremer after the April 2003 overthrow of Hussein, “de-Baathification” is largely the process by which all members of Saddam Hussein’s former political party were barred from taking part in future Iraqi politics. Unsurprisingly the vast majority of

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Baathist party members were Sunni Muslims. This means that the vast majority of recently terminated employees were Sunni Muslims, and that they were barred from finding future employment or means of subsistence. Ruining the very “engagement” that Credit Suisse discussed in their report. In terms of the Iraqi military this decision had especially poisonous consequences. Thousands of men, young and old, whose only training was in the handling of weapons, were instantly prevented from seeking employment or opportunity in the future Iraqi state. This disastrous policy occurred despite the fact that the US Military was opposed to disbanding the Iraqi Military. Thus LaFree and Ackerman’s conclusion that “for Jihadist-style terrorism there is a widespread fear that military training increases, rather than diminishes participation in terrorism,” is quite salient. Many of the individuals who would become Salafist terrorists in Iraq were in fact ex-Baathist soldiers. So as opposed to Afghanistan’s ethnically inspired interest sharing, religious inspired interest sharing would come to dominate in Iraq. The root causes are essentially the same, albeit for slightly different circumstances.

**Algeria/Yemen/Egypt**

The reasons for the Algerian Salafist increase are quite bizarre and dispel the notion that it is solely the West that increases Salafist terrorism. In 1992 an Algerian Islamist party was expected to win in the nations first democratic elections. Determined not to have this be the case, the Algerian military overthrew the Islamist party, banned them, and undertook a major violent crackdown. The Algerian military strategy was similar to that of Saddam Hussein in Kuwait; they tortured, assassinated, and broke down their enemies through a systematic campaign of violence and fear. Yet their war lasted

ten years from 1992-2002, as opposed to Iraq’s that lasted seven months. The extended period of time allowed more opportunity for terrorist groups to coalesce and organize, especially in light of the election that was stolen from them. This largely fits Crenshaw’s pattern whereby “Government use of unexpected and unusual force in response to protest or reform attempts often compels terrorist retaliation.”

The Salafists in Algeria did not arise overnight from some long dormant underground political bloc. Instead as Lowi determines, the nearly 5 or so opposition groups in Algeria all stemmed from the forced disintegration of the victorious political party of the 1992 election, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). While lacking a coherent political vision these groups were able to nominally congregate around the banner of the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA). According to Wohl the groups did so in order to “unify the diverse interests against the incumbent (military) government,” a clear indicator of interest sharing that NGO’s adopt as well.

Egypt is somewhat of an interesting case. Unlike all of the countries in Graph 1, Egypt never experienced a direct or indirect intervention. Neither the “target rich” environment nor the Choi-Powers troop level medium could be seen as exploitable by Egypt’s Salafist terrorists (both are items discussed later). Neither can responses to the hazardous use of indirect force by a western power explain the 1990’s spike in Salafist terrorism. Though the Mubarak regime at the time may have utilized a heavy-handed police force, this is not entirely comparable to the use of military troops, such as in

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Algeria. Instead it is likely that Egypt’s Salafists, unlike those in other states of the Middle East, had been forged by years of waning legitimacy of the Egyptian Republic’s leaders. This process most likely began in the 1950’s, with the Nasser regimes led crackdown of Islamic political parties discussed briefly in the “History” section. The 1979 Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt certainly dealt a further blow to Egypt’s legitimacy. Even today nearly 61% of Egyptian oppose that treaty, creating an exploitable situation for terrorists. The final blow may have come with the suppression tactics in the 1980’s, whereby all members of opposition, but mainly Islamic parties, were arrested, tortured, or killed. It is likely that these policy decisions by Egypt culminated in the major Salafist terror attacks of the 1990’s.

Curiously, Yemen mirrors some of the same problems of Afghanistan. It is well known that former President Ali Abdullah Saleh utilized Al-Qaeda militants in order to assist his fight in that country’s Civil War against Marxists and secessionists of the 1990’s. Despite this, the US provided lucrative aid money and military assistance to Saleh’s regime well into his eventual departure in 2011. How much of that aid money ended in Al-Qaeda hands is impossible to determine; but it can be said unequivocally that at least some of it did. According to a former Yemeni Salafist quoted in Foreign Policy, “the members of Al-Qaeda who refused to be paid, they are the people Saleh told the Americans to kill.” It is a common tactic for an authoritarian to use to his advantage a hair trigger American policy for his own domestic gains, and certainly not one limited to Afghanistan.

**Backfiring**

Interest sharing is not a one-way street that only results in gains for terror groups. Even for terror groups like Al-Qaeda interest sharing is a double-edged sword. In 1997 Salafist terrorists from the al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya (GAI) committed the “Luxor Massacre,” killing around 59 civilians and a few Egyptian policemen. To this day the attack is one of Egypt’s deadliest. Yet it backfired on the group by turning normal Egyptians and Arabs against its wanton brutality. Shocked and horrified by the image of massacred civilians, GAI would encounter a passive resistance that stifled its operations. The results in Egypt are quite striking. In less than two years Egypt was able to achieve what 6 years of counter terror measures could not; be attacked by Salafist’s zero times in one calendar year. It would take nearly 6 years for Egypt to experience another Salafist attack, which can probably be attributed to the Iraq War instead. In 2005 Amman, Jordan would experience a similar atrocity when militants associated with Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, the head of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, attacked hotels killing nearly 60 civilians. The results were numerous public demonstrations against Zarqawi and Al-Qaeda and a decline in the popularity of Bin Laden by 40%. The attack happened so early in the Iraq War that Salafist attacks in Jordan, Iraq’s neighbor, would be quite low throughout the entirety of the conflict.

Though it remains somewhat of a theory, there is scant evidence that Algeria’s Intelligence Service, the Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité (DRS), utilized backfiring interest sharing against its Salafist enemies in their civil war. The goal was to provide the GIA with some support so they would break away from the other Salafist

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groups, provoke massive hostility, and eventually discredit the opposition. The results, though horrific, were somewhat successful. Even Bin Laden would purportedly “recoil” from the violence of the Algerian Civil War, causing him to break ties with Salafist Islamist group in 1997, a year after his declaration of war against the US. The support for backfiring interest sharing need not be entirely direct. According to one survivor of the infamous Bentalha Massacre, which killed around 200 individuals, the Algerian military was notably absent from the area the day of the attack despite a normally massive presence. Amnesty International lends credence to Algerian Military culpability in a 1997 report citing “military troops with armored vehicles were stationed a few hundred meters away as the massacre was taking place.” For the Algerian Military the massacre was a means by which the opposition could discredit itself with the slaughter of hundreds of innocent civilians.

According to Graph 2 1997 was the second highest year for Salafist terror attacks in Algeria. Though the violence would slightly increase and plateau at certain points the attacks would never be as violent as in that particular year, where some of the most infamous massacres occurred. Not coincidentally the GIA would lose its foreign and domestic “coalition,” break into smaller less powerful groups, and become largely ineffective at combating the state. While terrorism continued in Algeria after the civil war ended in 2002, most of those attacks were quite small scale. For example, 2004 experienced 41 incidents with 119 deaths, or 2.9 deaths per attack. On the other hand in the same year Iraq experienced 91 incidents with 625 deaths, or 6.9 deaths per attack.

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Herein lays an inherent paradox for terror groups; utilize too little force and your group could be cast off as irrelevant or weak, but use too much force against the population that makes your base, and you will have difficulty recruiting. That rings true especially in situations outside of direct interventions, as was the case in Egypt in the 1990’s. For a better picture of what that means consider a reverse example. If the US Military were to bombard a Dallas suburb in order to root out a grouping of Salafist terrorists, you could expect both future enlistees and military support to dwindle significantly.

**Global**

Though it does not exactly fall within the bounds of this project, one can see interest sharing outside of the Middle East too. By launching the GWOT, the US granted a sort of de facto recognition to the international community that “terrorism,” however they defined it, must be stopped at all costs. In regards to Russia and China, both with large Muslim populations, it has created many problems. Certainly US approval of their
actions made combating Salafist terrorism more difficult as tacit support is granted to many human rights abusers. Scheuer even goes as far to label China’s actions in the restive Xinjiang Province, where most of its Muslim population resides, “genocidal.”

No doubt this has had the double effect of creating more terrorists and lending credence to Bin Laden’s theories of global struggle.

Chapter 8: Blowback

Military interventions as a source of terror have been studied quite rigorously. Choi demonstrates that direct military interventions can fuel terror attacks and group popularity in some capacity. Kydd and Walter show that certain strategies of terrorists, such as outbidding and provocation, are quite salient for terror groups when it comes to combating direct interventions also.

In Pape’s study, he supports the notion that occupations of countries by military forces, regardless of where they occur, almost inevitably lead to the employment of suicide terrorism. With the exception of Choi, these studies ignore a key element; not all direct interventions are created equal. Americans of baby boomer age would be quick to remember that the Gulf War and Iraq War were entirely different not only in outcome but in operation as well. The same can also be said of the differences between the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. Also of importance is that not all direct interventions need to be taken at the behest of the US or a Western power, something none of the studies examined in this project looked at. Algeria’s brutal civil


war in the 1990’s qualifies as for a direct intervention, and therefore will be analyzed with the Gulf War, War in Afghanistan, and Iraq War.

Certainly a positive correlation exists to support the idea that direct military intervention increases terrorism. After all a look at Graph 3 demonstrates that terrorism of all sorts, not just Salafist, grew precipitously in the Middle East in the 20-year period at certain key intervals. The first prominent example is 1992, which is the start of the Algerian Civil War. The second comes after October 8th, 2001, the day the GWOT was officially declared and the US began attacking Afghanistan. Yet the most dramatic rise in terrorism seems more in line with the beginning of the Iraq War in March of 2003. Much of this is largely vindicating already known information about terrorism. The DOD’s Defense Science Board in a 2004 report doubled down and specified their 1997 conclusion by claiming, “Muslims do not ‘hate our freedom,’ but rather they hate our policies.” Our policies being “direct intervention,” mentioned specifically in the report.89 Eland concurs, describing Bin Laden as almost exclusively using US policies as his rallying call.90 However, this does not get into explaining what it is about direct interventions that are responsible for terror increases. To start the paper will analyze the American led instances of direct intervention, then proceeds to the Algerian case. Following that a brief analysis of indirect intervention tactics will be discussed.


US Led Direct Interventions

Gulf War

Undertaken under the auspices of removing Saddam Hussein’s aggressive Iraqi military from Kuwait, the Gulf War did not last very long. As far as the United States is concerned the direct intervention portion of the war only lasted from January 17, 1991 until February 27, 1991, with Hussein’s invasion and eventual occupation of Kuwait taking place in August of 1990. The conflict ended rather quickly and inauspiciously, and because of the mandate secured by the US via United Nations Security Council Resolution 678 the US was not viewed by the bulk of the international community as the

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aggressor. That element is key, many Sunni Arabs in the Middle East may have opposed the war, as Saddam Hussein was relatively well liked by them, but with international support it would be difficult for terrorists to propagandize the US as an international bad guy.

During the course of the war there were hardly any noteworthy incidents of terrorism in the Middle East. The lack of immediate Salafist or other terrorism in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Kuwait where the fighting took place, may lead one to conclude that the US led a “clean” campaign, with limited civilian casualties and damage. Such an idea is erroneous. The US and its coalition forces not only drove the Iraqi military out of Kuwait, but they also bombed parts of military installations in and around Baghdad so as to further deter Hussein. This decision by the US incurred heavy Iraqi civilian casualties, approximately 3,500 according to Daponte, with another 100,000 dying from indirect effects of the war in her estimate. Concurrently the State Department also noted an increase in the number of terror attacks in the Middle East from 65 to 79 and attributed them to the tensions from the war. That report fails to encapsulate the full scenario. The PLO in Israel committed the majority of those attacks, which falls out of the bounds of this project. It is highly likely that those attacks would have occurred regardless of whether or not the Gulf War ever took place. Still neither its coalition partners nor US forces faced any Salafist terror threat where actual combat took place in Iraq or Kuwait, despite the above-mentioned civilian casualties.

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What of the record of Saddam Hussein’s forces? They were certainly the aggressive force in the Gulf War and were not a religious military. Yet, they faced little retaliation in the way of terror too. In fact only two terrorist attacks occurred during the entirety of the conflict in Kuwait. The damage inflicted by the two attacks was one fatality and one injury respectively, neither of which were directed at Iraqi troops but against Kuwait.\(^{95}\) Again the culprit could be assumed to be the PLO, hardly a Salafist group. The PLO would have had more incentive to carry out the attacks anyway as they openly sided with Saddam Hussein against Kuwait during the Gulf War, a decision that later led to their forced exodus from that nation. However even if the two attacks were to belong to Salafist groups the damage was so miniscule as to almost devalue them to the level of violent street crime as opposed to terrorism. Similarly in Iraq there were no terror attacks, not even by Kurdish or Shiite groups. So despite the fact that a direct intervention was carried out, at the behest of Western forces, and an act of aggression was carried out by the nationalist Iraqi military, there were hardly any terror attacks in response from late 1990 to early 1991; only three in total that caused three injuries and one fatality.

Following the end of US combat operations in Iraq, 1991 became a relatively calm year. Of the 116 terror attacks following combat operations in late February, only 26 were Salafist inspired, with a majority of them occurring in Algeria, which will be discussed later. The US experienced little in the way of immediate blowback for its interests in the region, and the nature of the war meant little time for terror groups to organize. That point is key. Primarily the PLO and Hezbollah were responsible for the

terrorism that did occur in the Middle East at the time. Both groups were also entrenched and organized at the time, meaning they could respond quickly to rapidly changing events.

A few rudimentary conclusions can be drawn from the Gulf War case. First the war was done with one widely accepted goal in mind; get Hussein’s Iraqi military out of Kuwait. No time costing endeavors such as democracy promotion or regime change took place, which brings up the second point: the short duration of the conflict meant little time for terror groups to organize, strategize, and plot. All of which are integral to any terror group. The PLO were the only group responsible for terror attacks during the conflict for a reason, they were already in place, had battle tested skills from their skirmishes in Israel and Palestine, and had the tacit backing of Saddam Hussein. No Salafist terrorism occurred because frankly no truly Salafist organizations existed. There was not enough time for one to build up in the 40 days of direct intervention by the US and 6 months by Iraq. Though Bin Laden declared Al-Qaeda active as early as 1989 the group only had around 80 members, was relegated to Afghanistan and far from popular.

**Afghanistan/Iraq Wars**

The US would keep military forces out of direct conflict in the region for another 10 years, changing policy after the September 11th atrocities. This fit one of Bin Laden’s immediate goals. It is well known that Bin Laden’s primordial motive in attacking the US on September 11th was to draw the US into a massive over response in Afghanistan, thereby galvanizing the world’s Muslims for a counter attack and eventual revolution.96 In other words, almost exactly the course of events that happened in Afghanistan in the 1980’s against the Soviets. It is akin to the Crenshaw strategy where terrorism is

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“intended to provoke a counter-reaction from the government, to increase publicity for the terrorists’ cause.” Fortunately that not only did not occur, it almost happened in reverse order in the early years of the GWOT.

Interestingly at first the War in Afghanistan did not experience many major issues in the way of Salafist terror. There were Salafist terror attacks, but they were quite limited, especially given the massive Al-Qaeda and Taliban resistance the US was expecting. The limited Salafist terror response can partially attribute itself to the lack of targets for those groups to exploit, known as a “target-rich environment.” The target rich environment introduces forces for terrorists to attack in a foreign country, meaning they do not have to plan for time expensive overseas ventures. This decreases the risk for terror groups inherent in trying to plan an operation that spans the globe. In intervention terms the wider the target rich the environment, the greater the propensity they will be attacked to a degree. US troop deployments in the initial stages of the War in Afghanistan were quite limited, keeping that environment low with only 5,200 troops in 2002, 10,400 in 2003, and 15,200 in 2004. For a country with a population of nearly 22 million at the time, those troop numbers are quite small. Predictably the War in Afghanistan could be regarded as an initial, albeit tacit, success as many of the Al-Qaeda and Taliban elements were thrown out of the country. Speaking in an interview with Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly in 2014 former Lt. General Daniel Bolger confirmed this by calling the war largely a victory as quickly as early 2002.

Juxtaposed to the 67,700 troops deployed to Iraq in 2003\(^{100}\), the numbers in Afghanistan are almost insignificant. Naturally the discrepancy in attack numbers is apparent. Whereas Afghanistan would go from 16 Salafist terror attacks to 74 to 71 in three years of war, Iraq would go from 10 to 91 to 122 in the same amount of time. By 2006, the situation in Iraq was so abysmal that the Director of National Intelligence concluded that the “Iraq War has become the cause célèbre for Jihadists…” The discrepancy in attack numbers may seem slightly arbitrary, but it is important for several reasons. As mentioned previously, organization and time are two related goals fundamental to all terror groups. In Afghanistan, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda were entrenched, with the latter even desiring a US response. Given the groups preparedness, it is surprising that more terrorism did not occur. In Iraq, there was virtually no Al-Qaeda or Salafist terrorism prior to the war. Incidences of suicide terrorism in Iraq were also non-existent prior to the war according to Pape.\(^{101}\) In short one can see that the Iraq War had the quick effect of galvanizing disparate sectors of society into fighting back the US.

The Salafist terror response differences are in keeping in line with Powers and Choi’s conclusion that “those interventions using either very small or very large troop levels…have no influence on terrorisms pervasiveness.”\(^{102}\) This can be referred to as the Powers-Choi medium, whereby the medium allotment of troops is enough to inspire blowback for a few reasons. Afghanistan certainly fit the mold of small troop levels at first at least. While on the other hand, Iraq did not.

\(^{100}\) Iraq’s population at the time was a comparable 25 million.
There is reason to indicate preliminary support for the Powers-Choi conclusion by the military brass. A US Central Command (CENTCOM) report concerning a hypothetical Iraq War, “Operation Desert Crossing;” a war game commissioned by then CENTCOM head General Anthony Zinni in the late 1990’s, opined that for the war to be successful it would require around 350,000 troops. That was far from an isolated opinion. In late 2002 General Eric Shinseki, then the Army Chief of Staff, went even further, arguing that the war would require around 500,000 troops to be carried out effectively. To juxtapose the Gulf War would utilize around 650,000 troops and has been shown did not experience any immediate Salafist terrorism. Though the original 67,700 troops in Iraq may sound relatively large, it was deliberately kept low by the Bush Administration, who largely ignored Desert Crossing and Shinseki’s opinions. With only a maximum of 157,800 troops in Iraq ever in one year, the war would predictably fit the Powers-Choi medium of troop numbers highly exploitable by terrorists.

Invading Iraq with the Powers-Choi middle ground, the US would encounter a significant quagmire that led to a literal implosion of that country. Within that medium scenario in the words of Powers and Choi, once a terror group “attains the requisite amount of resources for collective action they are… thus more likely to engage in political violence.” Saddam Hussein’s vast weapons depots would supplant the resources necessary for collective action in Iraq. The failure by the US to secure them was a costly mistake that led to the Government Accountability Office finding many of those depots were looted, with the stolen munitions largely being converted into the dreaded improvised explosive devices, or IED’s. That particular weapon would be responsible for

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approximately 60% of American casualties in the Iraq War and an untold number of Iraqi
deaths.\textsuperscript{104} That does not even paint the full picture. During the course of the looting the
Federation of American Scientists estimates that perhaps thousands of shoulder fired
surface to air missiles went missing from the weapons depots too. Spread all over the
world now, these weapons are lethally undetectable and highly dangerous for not only
terrorism in the Middle East, but for other conflict dominated regions as well.

With those reports in mind it is no wonder that terrorism increased significantly
closer in Iraq compared to Afghanistan in the beginning. The Iraq War would also
provide the inspiration Bin Laden lacked in Afghanistan, thereby spurning the original
drive to collective action. According to Scheuer, “there is nothing Bin Laden could have
hoped for more than the American invasion and occupation of Iraq.” It provided the
exploitable environment he was looking for, a “Christmas gift” of terrorism, to borrow a
crude yet telling Scheuer quote.\textsuperscript{105} Once the war began, Salafist terrorism would increase
throughout the Middle East. That is unlike Afghanistan, which did not inspire Bin
Laden’s call to arms regionally or globally. These results are due to the lethal
combination of a conflict situation where enough troops are around to around to bring up
the requisite target rich environment, yet not enough to enforce some nominal level of
order such as deterring street crime or looting.

A bell curve of sorts develops in Iraq once the US begins drawing troops down. In
first full year of war, 2004, there were 130,600 US troops in Iraq, which coincided with

\textsuperscript{104} Schroeder, Matt. "Countering the MANPADS threat: Strategies for success." \textit{Arms Control Today} 37.7

\textsuperscript{105} Scheuer, Michael. \textit{Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror}. Washington, D.C.:
91 Salafist attacks. While reaching a high of 160 terror attacks with 135, 600 troops in 2009, the next year would see Salafist terror dwindle to 95 attacks with only 88,300 troops in country. This is certainly within the Powers-Choi medium, but it does represent a more than nominal decrease in the available target rich environment.

A look at Graph 4 shows that Salafist terror attacks in the Afghan War would eventually surpass those in Iraq in 2005, and be responsible for around 40.4% in the 20-year period, compared to Iraq’s 16.4%. The discrepancy is partially misleading. In terms of overall terrorist attacks Iraq has encountered more than Afghanistan every year since 2003 and is placed higher on the Global Terrorism Index’s threat ranking. The problem is many of the attacks in Iraq cannot be delineated to a specific group or ideology, whereas in Afghanistan they can. Regardless both nations sit in the Vision of Humanity’s top 5 worst states for terrorism, with Afghanistan generally averaging 3rd or 4th place, and Iraq always at the unfortunate top.

Graph 4

Afghanstain/ Iraq Salafist Attacks

There is good reason to believe that in the end both US led direct interventions created more terrorism than they thwarted, especially in the respective countries. Though most of the blame must be squared on the decision to invade Iraq, as the situation in Afghanistan was nominally improving in the beginning. This is combined with the fact the as Eland describes the Iraq War had the effect of increasing collateral damage and widening the GWOT to unnecessary aims. Salafists and other terrorists certainly responded. One can see as much in general terror data. Prior to 2003 there were only 343 suicide terror attacks in the world, with around 10% of them directed at the US. Following that year up until today there have been nearly 9,000 suicide terror attacks, with 91% of them directed at US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.107 Once again the suicide attacks present particular salience because though they only account for nearly 5% of attacks, they make up nearly 50% of the fatalities.

**Indirect Intervention**

As the project ends in 2010, indirect intervention analysis is more difficult to obtain. In the entire period of the study there were very limited instances of indirect intervention tactics, as these became a staple of the Obama Administration primarily after 2010. Nevertheless, 11 total incidents of indirect intervention occurred in the Middle East in the 20-year period; two in Iraq, in 1993 and 1996 respectively, one in Afghanistan in 1998, and 8 in Yemen at intervening years, the first being in 2002. The cruise missile strike in Afghanistan was followed by a year of no terror attacks. The two in Iraq were both followed by years of one terror attack each. The incidents in Yemen, utilizing the

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cheaper and quicker Predator and Reaper Drones, are more telling. Each year drones were used in Yemen was followed by an increase in Salafist terror.

The data from Iraq do not necessarily produce any definitive conclusions. The two terror attacks cannot be said to have definitively arisen from the cruise missile strikes. After all, limited Salafist terror was present in Iraq prior to those years anyway, primarily against the Kurds. The Afghanistan case is different. It is somewhat misleading to conclude that the 1998 Clinton Administration decision to use cruise missile strikes in Afghanistan had no negative effects because of the lack Salafist terrorist attacks. First, the Taliban were largely in power of the country at the time, so it would make no sense for them to attack themselves or their own infrastructure. Second, Al-Qaeda was newly introduced to the country, but their new hosts had no reasons to attack them either, otherwise they would not have invited them in the first place. Appreciative of their new home, Al-Qaeda did not really have any incentive to attack the Taliban too. Evidence blowback exists, just in a more discrete form. This type of blowback cannot be quantified but is certainly worth mentioning. According to declassified NSA cables, the cruise missile strike had the pernicious effect of drawing the two Salafist organizations together.108 The Taliban now saw Al-Qaeda’s fight as their fight, and vice-versa.

The Taliban spokesmen at the time even went as far as claiming, “If Kandahar could have retaliated with similar strikes against Washington, it would have.” Prior to that attack the two organizations were only nominal allies, forged more so by convenience then by desire. Al-Qaeda needed a safe haven after being kicked out of

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Sudan in 1996, and ever eager for more guns, the Taliban were not going to deny someone willing to fight alongside them. Taliban head Mullah Omar is famous for saying Bin Laden was akin to a knife in his neck, something he could neither pull out nor leave in. It is likely the Clinton Administrations decision to use a cruise missile strike cauterized the wound and healed their bizarre relationship.

Yemen presents the most interesting case for indirect intervention. This author has shown before that a strong correlation exists after 2010 between the number of drone strikes in a given year and the number of terrorist attacks. However, that study did not delineate Salafist attacks in particular. Remember Yemen has a sizable Shia minority and an active Shia terror group, the Houthis. Parallels can be drawn between the Yemeni and Pakistani drone programs on the basis that both are undertaken with essentially the same strike policies, both the “signature” and “personality” versions mentioned above. In Pakistan, former Pakistani Ambassador to the US Sherry Rehman told CNN reporters that the drone program there “radicalizes foot soldiers, tribes, and entire villages in our region.”

There is certain plausibility to these arguments. After all the “signature strike” method can have the particularly damaging effect of convincing Sunni Arabs that the US is at war with their way of life, since the criterion are based partially off religious customs. This is particularly troubling when the US broadens its strike capability. As the NYU/Stanford Law School report notes that many of those targeted by the drone program were either exceptionally young or proven to be low level fighters. Approximately 90% of the “militant” deaths can at least fall into that category. However, many of the Al-

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Qaeda fighters in Yemen were transfers from either Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan. Some of these men may have had ties to Yemen, but it seems that the bulk of them were more interested in expanding Al-Qaeda’s reach rather than reacting to situations in Yemen. This is at least the case within the 20-year period.

**Statistical Analysis Results**

To conceptualize the effect that blowback may have on terrorism numerically this project ran a negative binomial regression analysis of the data involving terrorists attacks, “direct interventions,” and “indirect interventions.” The data were categorized as follows: direct interventions were placed in a year and country as the number of troops located in said place and time. So for instance, Algeria had approximately 140,000 troops fighting the GIA from 1992-2002, so each of those year’s variables was marked with 140,000. Indirect interventions were categorized with much lower numbers. The 1998 Afghanistan strike would simply count as one for 1998 for example. The results from the negative binomial regression can be seen in Table 2.

**Negative Binomial Regression Results Table 2**\(^\text{110}\)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Coefficient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>.354011 (.0830658)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>.5449437 (.2298848)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Essentially these coefficient numbers mean for direct interventions is that if you increase the number of soldiers in a country by one there is a .354011 increase in the incidents of Salafist terrorism. Considering the above-mentioned cases this should not be

\(^{110}\) The numbers in parenthesis are the reported standard errors.
entirely shocking. For indirect interventions though it means that if one were to increase the number of strikes (drone or cruise missile) in a given country by one there is a .5449437 increase in the incidents of Salafist terrorism. This evidence is certainly striking, but as mentioned previously it does not paint the entire picture. In his book *The Last Refuge* Johnsen describes how after the regime of Ali Salih exploited their services, “a number of jihadis wondered why they were being ignored instead of being asked to share in governing the country…”\textsuperscript{111} This proves that 1. Prior to drone program coming into existence Yemen had a vast Salafist terror network and 2. Their primary grievance was not drones but rather the loss of legitimacy and participation from the Salih government. The drones in later years may have exasperated those problems, especially after the 20-year period ended. However, because it does not fall within the bounds of this project it would make little sense to add those extra years in.

**Chapter 10: Conclusion**

The evidence provided above can now allow for some conclusions: There is evidence to support the claim that direct intervention causes blowback and therefore increases Salafist terrorism. At that same point, there is evidence that interest sharing has the same effect. So this does not exactly tell one a great deal about what increases Salafist terrorism in the Middle East. Instead the two variables should be seen as related to one another. Direct intervention can serve as a benefactor for interest sharing, thereby increasing the number of terror attacks. The introduction of combat troops in a nation can stir up resentment, fear, anger, alienation and other ill feelings. Terrorist leaders will then seek to propagandize off of those emotions to best suit the interest of their group. The

intervening nation can also exacerbate these feelings if it adopts certain policies that alienate the intervened upon population. Speaking in a recent interview, CIA whistleblower John Kirikaou said:

“People make a big deal about ISIS’ social media presence. Yeah, that’s great, they’re very sophisticated. But what really helps them recruit is actions by us: where we show disrespect for human rights, disrespect for civil liberties, and a propensity to torture people.”

The direct intervention hypothesis does not paint the full picture though. Why, in Iraq for example, did people not simply join nationalist terror organizations or flock to the Iraqi Army en masse to defend their sovereignty? The answer lies in the effect direct interventions have on interest sharing.

Direct interventions present the primary factor to increase interest sharing. They underscore the most necessary piece of interest sharing to begin with, creating a desire to unify. The Iraq War, and to a lesser extent the War in Afghanistan, had just that effect. The presentation of American troops to the region largely made many of Bin Laden’s strange theories about the US plausible in many Muslims minds. Combined with the loss of legitimacy of Arab regimes, Al-Qaeda and Salafist terrorists were able to retaliate against the US with extreme prejudice by broadening their appeal. Another policy that can assist direct intervention and thereby increase interest sharing amongst Salafist terror groups is adopting the Powers-Choi troop level medium can create a highly chaotic state of affairs inside a country.

As far as indirect interventions go there seem to be no support one way or another.

On one hand is the key discrete form of blowback the 1998 cruise missile strike against

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Afghanistan had on Taliban-Al-Qaeda relations. But on the other hand is the noticeable swell in Al-Qaeda numbers in Yemen prior to the drone programs full implementation. It is likely this effect took place in later years too, but the loss of legitimacy combined with a deteriorating socio-economic Yemen had more of the effect on Salafist interest sharing in that country. The drone program may have just been icing on the cake for the Salafists in the Arabian Peninsula and not increased their rise one way or another in the 20-year period.

So it would be a mistake to say that direct and indirect interventions are entirely a source of terrorism. Both the Gulf War and early stages of the War in Afghanistan serve as indications of that. Though the Gulf War did serve as a later inspiration for Salafist terror groups it was not a message that spread too rapidly as the US could never present the immediate “target rich environment” and Salafist terrorists could never exploit resentment of the US in their favor absent indications that the US was evil in their eyes. Instead direct interventions should be thought of as a major force contributing to Salafist interest sharing. As was shown in the project, this process waxed and waned by country, but overall remained steady.

**Future Research**

Two critical regions this project did not examine were Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The latter is often considered the GWOT’s “other” focus zone, while the former is a late bloomer in regards to terrorism. Future research should definitely analyze Salafist terror in those regions and other forms of political conflict. Furthermore, future research should investigate the links between terror group interest sharing and civilian deaths, asking how specifically do terrorists exploit them and to what effect. Also of
interest to future researchers should be the potential other ways in which blowback can arise in conflict situations. In the future this author would prefer to examine Yemen and indirect intervention again, and re-visit some of the past conclusions.

**Chapter 11: Policy Recommendations**

While somewhat different in operation, what can be labeled the Bush and Obama Doctrines rely on the belief that terrorists need to be fought there in the Middle East, so they do not come here to the US homeland. Both the 2006 and 2011 Strategy to Prevent Terror that idea comes up. However as the above information demonstrates our presence in the Middle East has actually led to a precipitous increase in the both the size and scale of terror attacks by increasing interest sharing. Terrorism will obviously remain a threat, so what options should the US and its partners adopt to mitigate it? At the most basic, the US should do everything to take away from the interests of terror organizations. The 2006 National Intelligence Estimate largely concurs, opining, “Countering the spread of the Jihadist movement will require coordinated, multilateral efforts that go well beyond operations to kill or capture terrorists leaders.”  

Here is how the US can do so:

To start, a scaling back of forces is going to have to occur at some point in the Middle East. While lawmakers in Washington are quick to point out this or that security failure and its lack of troops to preempt it, they rarely if ever seem to acknowledge both direct and indirect interventions effects when it comes to increasing terrorism. This author has suggested before that closing the 2001 Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF), which grants the US legal authority to strike anywhere against terrorists tied to the September 11th attacks, would be a wise idea. Indeed it still is. That particular

AUMF has led the US to consider those who may not like the US terrorists. Curiously it has led the US to consider too much voicing of criticism of the US to be considered anti-Americanism and therefore terrorism. No doubt that has contributed to threat conflation, where the US attacks those who might not present any real threat. One can see this in Afghanistan specifically, where if a local warlord brandishes another a terrorist it is almost impossible for the latter to drop that label. The US can even go further than adopting a new strike and military policy though.

It may be somewhat cliché but the US should focus instead on exhausting all options on defending the US, without the use of preemption as an immediate strategy. Had US policies to appropriately focus on terrorism in the first place the September 11th attacks may not have even happened. Both the NSA and CIA had information on the 9/11 Al-Qaeda Hamburg Cell but refused to share crucial information with the FBI that could have led to many members of that cell’s capture. That is only one of several lethal mistakes. According to Zegart both organizations (the FBI and CIA) missed exactly 23 opportunities to prevent 9/11 in a time that spans the Clinton and Bush Administrations. Meaning that the US could have ensured the attack did not occur without the use of Patriot Act, Iraq War, or drone warfare in Yemen. The tools were already in place, office politics simply got in the way. It is a paradoxical world where office bureaucracy is just as dangerous as groups of angry men with Ak-47’s.

Geo-politically there may come a time when the US will have to accept the fact that a government in the Middle East may not exactly be on friendly terms with it. The Obama Administration has taken some strides in this regard via its newfound relations with Iran, but in the rest of the Middle East much of the same policies continue. This is
important because it could allow a rudimentary civic society to independently develop. The RAND Corporation noted that, “Political opening can co-opt and moderate opposition forces and marginalize hardliners…” No doubt there are no guarantees here, but it certainly could beneficial for the region in the long run by allowing an organic civil society to develop.

Speaking at the Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs, investigative journalist Lawrence Wright commented that in the Middle East “there is nothing between the government and the mosque.” Perhaps if something were to fill that void many Arab Muslims would not feel so compelled to join Salafist groups. While of course many may find solace in political Islam, radical liberalism, radical environmentalism, etc. this should not be a cause for fear. Those political organizations with an unfamiliar ideological background as their backbone should be perceived as threats only if they actually do something threatening. At the end of the day a democratic form of government must be developed organically and independently in order to thrive; it cannot be created by a whimsically named “Freedom Agenda,” whereby the US plays God attempting to immaculately conceive a democracy in a region without one. Every modern democracy is the perfect example; they all struggled largely on their own to become the way they are today, the US is no exception. Auto-correction is key to the formulation of a legitimate government, and the US needs to allow that to happen.

None of this should be construed as saying that the US should take irrational measures like not engaging terrorists militarily or eliminating the option to utilize military force. There will come a time when the US will have to engage another terrorist group militarily, perhaps another Salafist one. In that case the US should re-think its
global strategy in the Middle East. As Choi describes, the only form of intervention that does not incur blowback against terror groups are those that specifically target terrorists and do not broaden their goals to regime change or attacking the political structure of another state.\textsuperscript{115} A foreign power will struggle mightily attempting to establish a legitimate government in another state, as the Iraq and Afghan wars demonstrate it is an almost fruitless endeavor. As such the US would be wise to drop it as a policy goal and only engage those terrorists that have demonstrated a threat capability. Doing so will require the policy of “offshore balancing,” where heavy emphasis is placed on the use and stationing of Naval force. Forces are generally concentrated on naval ship in those flash point areas susceptible to conflict that threatens the US. Certainly much more could be written on this issue, especially related to terrorism. So it would be best to analyze that in future research.

Coupled with that new level of engagement should be a goal to avoid the Powers-Choi medium at all costs. It goes without saying that the resort to force should ultimately be a last resort, but if the time comes where maybe a massive direct military intervention is required, then by all means operate under the pretense of more is better. Do not sacrifice carrying out long-term goals and strategies in favor of troop speed, as the Bush Administration did. Use the massive intervention force to carry out the specific goals, enforce order, locate loose weapons storages, and when the mission is done, leave. Do not give terrorists the option to have time run in their favor so that they may organize and plot.

The US should also learn that admitting when a policy has failed is neither weak nor foolish. It is something every sincerely moral person or government should do so as to avoid that mistake in the future. At this both the Bush and Obama Administrations have failed miserably. Speaking to CBS’s Face The Nation former President Bush stated that he had “no regrets” about invading Iraq. No doubt many of his most ardent supporters feel the same but in light of the above-mentioned evidence it is difficult to see how one could believe that. The Iraq War did correlate with a dramatic increase in all forms of terrorism, especially Salafist. It largely vindicated Al-Qaeda’s beliefs about the US to many Muslims and caused a severe backlash. President Obama has repeated many of his predecessor’s follies too. Primarily by claiming the success of various provinces in Afghanistan, despite the fact that most of those provinces, like Kandahar, have gone through an increased Salafist presence. In Yemen, President Obama claimed that the drone program has been a “successful model,” for future counterterrorism policies, disregarding the current revolution and increased Salafist presence in that country too. While this project did not specifically say the drone program contributes to terrorism, it did not also say the drone program hinders Salafist terrorism either. Regardless, admitting failure might be difficult, but as the cliché saying goes it is the integral first step to self-awareness.

Another problem the US should address is on the domestic side, for various Western states, is that of non-Muslim and Muslim relations. For its part the US, including the Bush Administration, has done a decent job at this. The Bush Administrations 2006 National Security Strategy even went as far to claim that Islam itself is not responsible for terrorism and is a religion of peace. The European states, most of which have strong
minority political currents of white nationalism and fascism, struggle significantly more. Regardless, it is integral to the GWOT effort that Western states not alienate their Muslim societies. For the sake of the fight against Salafist terrorists depends on demonstrating to Muslim societies that the US is not a belligerent force against Islam, rather that we are, and always have been, an open society that respects all citizens. Such is the will of our founding fathers anyway.

Finally, this project obviously took out all mentioning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but that does not mean it is not related. Eventually the US, Israel, and the Palestinians will have to craft some fair and even handed agreement. This paper will not pretend to know what that will look like, but it will highlight its importance. The reasons are ideological. Former CENTCOM head, General James Mattis once remarked “I paid a military security price every day as a commander of CENTCOM because the Americans were seen as biased in favor of Israel…” Indeed if the US wants credibility in the Middle East in combating terror, promoting democracy, and regaining stability it must start there first, or risk losing those who may want to align with the US. These ideas mirror those of another former CENTCOM head, General David Petraeus when he said, “the enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the AOR (area of responsibility),” referring to the Middle East and North Africa. Crafting a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will allow the US to do what most successful counter terrorism strategies require to thrive off of, the ability to use local troops, sway the interests away from the terrorists, and allow the society to eventually develop on its own with some outside help.

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Currently it would be difficult to attempt to persuade a group of Arabs or Sunni Muslims to join a cause against Salafists or other terrorists when doing so could be seen as openly siding with Israel. Crafting a fair political solution to that conflict could end once and for all that excuse and could also dwindle some of the interest in joining a Salafist group in the first place. Of course it is not a complete solution, but it would certainly help the policy aims of the GWOT.

These policies are not cure alls. Terrorism, like crime or disease, cannot be eliminated, only mitigated. The best way to mitigate it is to first adopt policies that do not exacerbate it and second keep the fight against the terrorists only if they present an active threat. What the future holds in store for both the Middle East and Salafist terrorism is almost impossible to tell. One thing that can be said unquestionably is that the history and trajectory of Salafist terrorism is at this point intrinsically linked with that of the US.
Bibliography


