

Why Salafi-Jihadist Terrorist Groups Pledge Allegiance to Al Qaeda or Isis

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ABSTRACT

No one predicted that Salafi-jihadist groups would mushroom after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York or that they would pose the biggest threat to global security. Today, no country is immune from attacks by these jihadist groups. These groups are not only active in conflict zones but also have the capacity to plot attacks in the Western world through self-radicalized individuals or homegrown extremists. In recent years, the trend has been for jihadist groups to align themselves with large terrorist organizations, usually Al Qaeda (AQ) or ISIS, because these organizations have been able to survive destructive military campaigns against them by the world's superpowers. The purpose of this paper is to analyze when and why jihadist groups declare loyalty to AQ or ISIS and to show that when jihadist groups undergo organizational fragmentation, restructuring, or dissolution following disruptive events, they tend to pledge allegiance to one of these two organizations as a survival strategy.

Keywords: Al Qaeda, ISIS, pledge of allegiance, affiliation among jihadist groups, resilience strategies of terrorist organizations

Por qué grupos terroristas Salafi-Yihadistas prometen lealtad a Al Qaeda o ISIS

RESUMEN

Nadie predijo que los grupos salafistas yihadistas se multiplicarían después de los ataques terroristas del 11 de septiembre de 2001 en Nueva York o que representarían la mayor amenaza para la seguridad global. Hoy, ningún país es inmune a los ataques de estos grupos yihadistas. Estos grupos no solo son activos en zonas de conflicto, sino que también tienen la capacidad de planear ataques en el mundo occidental a través de individuos auto radicalizados o extremistas locales. En los últimos años, la tendencia ha sido que

los grupos yihadistas se alineen con grandes organizaciones terroristas, generalmente Al Qaeda (AQ) o ISIS, porque estas organizaciones han podido sobrevivir a campañas militares destructivas contra ellos por parte de las superpotencias mundiales. El propósito de este documento es analizar cuándo y por qué los grupos yihadistas declaran lealtad a AQ o ISIS y mostrar que cuando los grupos yihadistas sufren fragmentación, reestructuración o disolución organizacional después de eventos disruptivos, tienden a jurar lealtad a una de estas dos organizaciones como una estrategia de supervivencia.

Palabras clave: Al Qaeda, ISIS, promesa de lealtad, afiliación entre grupos yihadistas, estrategias de resistencia de las organizaciones terroristas

为何萨拉菲圣战恐怖主义集团对基地组织或伊斯兰国宣誓效忠

摘要

没有人曾预测萨拉菲圣战集团将在2001年9月11日纽约遭遇恐怖袭击后迅速发展，或者他们将对全球安全造成最大威胁。今天，没有一个国家免于这些圣战集团的攻击。这些集团不仅活跃于冲突地区，还有能力通过自我激进化的个人或国内恐怖分子在西方世界设计袭击。近年来，不断出现圣战集团与大型恐怖组织联手趋势，通常是基地组织（AQ）或伊斯兰国（ISIS），因为这些组织已经能在由世界超级大国的摧毁性军事活动中存活。本文旨在分析圣战集团何时以及为何会对AQ或ISIS效忠，并表明当圣战集团在破坏性事件发生后经历组织分化、重组、或解体，他们便往往会对这两大组织中的其中一个宣誓效忠，以作为生存战略。

关键词：基地组织，伊斯兰国，效忠宣誓，圣战集团派别，恐怖组织韧性战略

Introduction

Terrorism is an insurmountable issue throughout the world. Terrorism perpetrators represent a broad spectrum of ideologies, including the tenets espoused by ethnonationalist groups, left-wing and right-wing groups, sep-

arapist groups and Salafi-jihadist groups. According to the *2018 Statistical Annex Report* from the US State Department, terrorist organizations were responsible for more than 8,000 attacks in 2018, leaving around 23,000 people dead and almost 33,000 others wounded.¹ Among these myriad organizations, the most active ones were Salafi-jihadist groups, which operate across a broader geographical area than other terrorist groups. In the report's ranking of terrorist groups by the number of terrorist attacks, jihadist organizations held the top four spots. The Global Terrorism and Trends Analysis Center (GTTAC) database for the same year recorded 1,079 attacks by the Taliban, 647 attacks by ISIS, 535 attacks by Al Shabab, and 220 attacks by Boko Haram. The attacks by jihadist groups accounted for 81% of the top-ten known perpetrator groups with the most incidents in the same year.²

This paper examines the reasons that jihadist groups pledge allegiance to either Al Qaeda (AQ) or ISIS. Using media sources, the paper analyzes active jihadist groups involved in terrorist attacks in 2018. In the last few years, Salafi-jihadist groups have shown an increasing desire to affiliate with large terrorist organizations. When military raids by states pursuing counterterrorism campaigns weaken jihadist groups by killing their leaders or eliminating a considerable part of their militants, these organizations experience vital organizational problems, ranging from restructuring to dissolution, and therefore tend to pledge allegiance to and/or affiliate with large organizations as part of strategy of resilience and survival. The well-known brand names and popularity of AQ and ISIS have enabled these two groups to expand their numbers and reach despite the long-standing efforts of the world's superpowers to eliminate both of them. That resiliency turned AQ and ISIS into highly attractive shelters for several jihadist groups that faced grave organizational problems and threats to their survival. In 2018, for example, jihadist groups in twenty-six countries preferred to declare loyalty to ISIS, while jihadist groups in fifteen counties affiliated with AQ.³

This paper is organized as follows: First, the methodology of the paper is explained, then the matter of affiliation among terrorist organizations is addressed, with a specific focus on AQ and ISIS, followed by an examination of new trends in each of AQ and ISIS. In the section on trends, the current strategies of the two terrorist organizations are analyzed without getting into much detail about the well-known historical phases these organizations. Next, the theoretical basis for the paper is laid out, including a discussion about resilience in terrorist organizations and the introduction of resilience theory, which was adapted by the authors to the resilience-seeking behaviors of terrorist organizations. This theoretical basis is then applied to organizations that have recently pledged allegiance to AQ or

1 "Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism," *United States State Department*, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/DSG-Statistical-Annex-2018.pdf>.

2 "Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism," 5.

3 "Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism," 9.

ISIS. The final section of the paper presents the conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Methodology

The study that forms the basis for this paper defines “pledging allegiance” as declaring loyalty and being affiliated to any large terrorist organization. The study examines allegiance to Salafi-jihadist organizations such as AQ and ISIS because an increasing number of jihadist groups operating in different parts of the world are declaring loyalty to these two major terrorist organizations. The analysis covers forty-three terrorist groups that perpetrated at least one terrorist attack in 2018. Some of these groups declared their loyalty to AQ or ISIS before 2018. The perpetrator terrorist organization’s declaration of loyalty to either of these major organizations as reported in the media is considered evidence of pledging allegiance.

Causes and Effects of Affiliation among Terrorist Groups

AQ and ISIS have given the structure of traditional terrorism a much sophisticated and versatile dimension by establishing partnerships with several local terrorist groups around the world through the *Bay’a* (pledge of allegiance) mechanism. *Bay’a* refers to an Islamic institution where one party officially acknowledges and submits to the authority of another. The concept has deep roots in Islam, starting with the Prophet Mohammed, and has been maintained since then by his successors.⁴ In the context of terrorism, “a ‘terrorist affiliate’ is a terrorist organization that accepts the leadership of another terrorist organization, but remains organizationally distinct.”⁵ ISIS, for example, has expanded its caliphate by gaining territory and accepting the pledges of alliance from several local terrorist groups around the world.⁶

Obviously, there are drawbacks to forming alliances with terrorist groups. First of all, establishing a partnership with a larger organization means compromising on organizational authority.⁷ Second, the partnership makes smaller organizations more vulnerable to government counterterrorism campaigns. Third, there is no guarantee that either of the partners will abide by the rules of the partnership.⁸ Finally, the network cannot be extended without compromising the con-

4 D. Milton and M. Al-Ubaydi, “Pledging *Bay’a*: A Benefit or Burden to the Islamic State?” *CTS Sentinel* 8, no. 3 (2015): 2.

5 D. Byman, “Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations,” *Security Studies* 23, no. 3 (2014): 434.

6 Milton and Al-Ubaydi, 2-3.

7 T. Bacon, “Strange Bedfellows or Brothers in Arms: Why Terrorist Groups Ally,” (PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 2013).

8 B.J. Phillips, “Terrorist Group Rivalries and Alliances: Testing Competing Explanations,” *Studies in*

fidentiality and, therefore, the general security of both parties.⁹ Thus, the question is why terrorist organizations form alliances in the presence of such serious drawbacks. The subject matter has been examined extensively in the literature and mostly similar conclusions have been reached.

Asal and colleagues, for example, studied the alliance-forming behaviors among 395 terrorist groups between 1998 and 2005. They find that the alliance-seeking behaviors of terrorist groups are multidimensional and involve a set of organizational, environmental, and situational factors. Asal and colleagues also found that older terrorist organizations that pursue a jihadist ideology and control a certain geographical region in countries with small military forces are more likely to establish alliances with other organizations. The researchers further contend that a common ideology and common motivation, a shared enemy, and organizational factors, such as the age and geographical origin of the respective organizations, are the most notable elements of groups that form alliances.¹⁰

Using a similar approach, Phillips examined 236 cases of alliance among terrorist groups between 1987 and 2005 from a monadic perspective, as opposed to the dyadic approach found in most of the literature on alliance formation. Phillips finds that being sovereign in a certain region and having a religious motivation are the most important factors involved in the alliance-forming behaviors of terrorist groups. He also finds that state support of terrorist-group alliances is important at the international level and that intermediate size organizations are more predisposed to forming alliances.¹¹

From an organizational standpoint, one would expect that organizational affiliations between terrorist groups would be the exception rather than the rule and that such affiliations would occur only in limited settings.¹² This reasoning would explain why only a few terrorist groups establish partnerships and why certain organizations become the focal point, or “alliance hub,” of such networks. The establishment of networks with other terrorist organizations comes with advantages for smaller groups that have suffered serious damage to their organizations. Large terrorist organizations tend to be more resilient to government counterterrorism measures, which provides smaller groups with considerable legitimacy, reliability, and status while acting under the auspices of larger terrorist organizations.¹³ In a similar organizational approach, partnerships between large and

Conflict & Terrorism 42, no. 11 (2018).

9 A. Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation among Terrorist Actors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

10 V. Asal et al., “With Friends Like These: Why Terrorist Organizations Ally,” *International Public Management Journal* 19, no.1 (2016), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254066517_With_Friends_Like_These_Why_Terrorist_Organizations_Ally/link/555f2e9e08ae6f4dcc90bc5b/download.

11 Phillips, “Terrorist Group Rivalries and Alliances.”

12 Asal et al., 16.

13 Bacon, “Strange Bedfellows or Brothers in Arms.”

small organizations allow the larger organization to reach a broader market, as the smaller organizations use the larger organization's brand name and reputation to facilitate its operations. Such alliances also enable the smaller organizations to build legitimacy in the eyes of their followers.¹⁴

Byman asserts that the primary motives for smaller terrorist organizations to seek alliance with larger organizations include (1) failure to achieve organizational goals, (2) loss of popular support and manpower, (3) the ability to obtain financial, logistical, educational, and human resources, (4) the need for a safe haven from perceived enemies, (5) the opportunity to gain experience in armed conflict, (6) the desire to ensure the general defense of the smaller group, (7) the ability to benefit from the brand value of a more prominent organization, and (8) the establishment of personal networks.¹⁵ On the other hand, the establishment of affiliations with smaller terrorist organizations may be attractive to larger terrorist organizations, such as AQ or ISIS. Smaller organizations can be used to expand a larger organization's presence geographically, enhance organizational resilience and strength when the larger organization is faced with intensive counterinsurgency campaigns, and provide logistical support and additional manpower.¹⁶ ISIS, for example, has used the many pledges of allegiance it has received from smaller terrorist organizations to build a reputation as the leading jihadist organization in the world, attract more foreign human resources, and wage attacks nearly every geographical corner of the world.¹⁷

Moghadam emphasizes mutual organizational interests with respect to affiliation between terrorist organizations. According to Moghadam, terrorist groups seek alliances to achieve "process goals," the logistical and personnel aspects of the organization, and "outcome goals," which pertain to organizational ideology and motivation.¹⁸

Bacon identifies four types of affiliation between terrorist organizations based on how resources are shared, how the partners foresee the duration of the alliance, the parties' respective degree of power, and the scope and terms of the partnership. When resources are shared and the parties do not foresee a termination date for the partnership, the organizations become almost dependent upon each other and the boundaries of authority are eliminated. The result is a "pooled" alliance.¹⁹ When the sharing of resources and the absence of a termination date are

14 Byman, "Buddies or Burdens?" 442.

15 D. Byman, "Breaking the Bonds Between Al Qaeda and its Affiliate Organizations," *Brookings Institution Analysis Paper Number 27* (2012): iv-v.

16 Byman, "Breaking the Bonds."

17 A. Moghadam, "Terrorist Affiliations in Context: A Typology of Terrorist Inter-Group Cooperation," *CTS Sentinel* 8, no. 3 (2015).

18 Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad*.

19 Bacon, 753.

ess well defined, the result is an “integrated” partnership.²⁰ When one of the parties is dependent upon the other, the result is a “subordinate” affiliation. Resources flow from the patron organization to the subordinate organization, and the patron organization incorporates the subordinate organization into its ideological sphere until a specified termination date and dissolution of the affiliation.²¹ Finally, a “reciprocal” alliance refers to a temporal and transactional partnership where both parties maintain their own resources and authority and come together for a short period to realize a common objective.²² Bacon emphasizes that trust is the cement of alliances between terrorist organizations.²³

In sum, although certain drawbacks exist, terrorist organizations still form alliances and, in the case of AQ and ISIS, alliances occur when local terrorist groups pledge allegiance to one of these larger organizations. Mutual organizational interests and strategies are the primary motivators of alliance-seeking behaviors among terrorist organizations, according to the bulk of the literature on the subject. Moghadam alone mentions enhanced resilience as a motivator for the formation of terrorist-group alliances, and he does so only from the perspective of the larger organization involved in the alliance. Nevertheless, as it is elaborated on below, this study posits that smaller organizations pledge allegiance to larger ones to ensure their resilience in the event of existential organizational traumas.

New Trends in Al Qaeda

AQ was established by Usama bin Laden in 1988 to move jihad against the Western world to a global dimension after the end of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.²⁴ “Al-Qaida’s tenure as an alliance hub can be roughly divided into four periods based on its environment and alliance behavior: (1) a jihadist facilitator during the anti-Soviet jihad, which predated al-Qaida’s formation as an organization; (2) a jihadist lender in Sudan from 1991 to 1996; (3) a terrorist provider in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001; and (4) a terrorist brand name from 2002 to present.”²⁵

AQ has had a different organizational mindset from ISIS from the outset in terms of being directly established in the conflict area, fighting at that time against the Soviet Union, which was then one of the two hegemonic powers of the world, together with the US, and recruiting warriors from various nations across the world.²⁶ Having defeated a superpower in Afghanistan, bin Laden declared

20 Bacon, 754.

21 Bacon, 754.

22 Bacon, 755.

23 Bacon, 759.

24 T. McCormick, “Al Qaeda Core: A Short History,” *Foreign Policy*, March 17, 2014.

25 Bacon, 322.

26 M. Mohamedou, “Al Qaeda’s Matrix,” in *A Theory of ISIS: Political Violence and the Transformation*

global jihad against the other super power, the United States, in the 1990s.²⁷ The 9/11 attacks in the United States were the benchmark occasion through which the organization demonstrated its destructive capacity to the entire world; however, these attacks also woke up the sleeping giant and triggered the onset of the global response that brought AQ to the brink of its own destruction.²⁸ As a response to the massive military and political campaign against itself, the organization was restructured as loose networks.²⁹ The elimination of bin Laden by the United States had a negative impact on the organization, especially by ending the myth that bin Laden had been bestowed with divine protection against US attacks.³⁰ Nevertheless, after the decapitation of bin Laden, AQ improved its organizational capacity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and in South Asia and altered its organizational structure from hierarchical to decentralized in order to ensure the security of its leaders under the increasing volume and severity of the military campaigns against it. The decentralized organizational structure of AQ is characterized by the existence of several local affiliates that are directly (i.e., the jihadist groups in Iraq and Yemen) or indirectly (i.e., Tehrik-i Talibani in Pakistan and Boko Haram) connected to the core organization.³¹ The central core of AQ settled in the rough area along the Pakistan and Afghanistan border (AfPak region) and has remained there for several years. The organization has not moved its center to Iraq or Syria, despite the favorable conditions in those two countries as a result of the Syrian civil war. AQ continued to use the AfPak region as its base because the location was deemed crucial for the survival of the organization due to its naturally protected geographical location and the convenience of getting support from the local populations.³² A base in the relatively safe haven of the AfPak region enables AQ to provide strategic and ideological support to its affiliates overseas while gaining power and consolidating its popular support through online communication, which trivializes the need for geographical proximity.³³ Another indication that AQ became a more localized organization and kept a low profile after the military campaigns led by the United States is that almost all of the attacks by AQ between 2007 and 2013 were against local targets in the MENA region (the Near Enemy) rather than western countries (the Far Enemy).³⁴

of the Global Order (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 31–64.

- 27 J. Skovgaard-Petersen, "Heirs of Abu Bakr: On the Ideology and Conception of History in al-Qaeda and Islamic State," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 16, no. 1 (2017): 25–36.
- 28 D. Byman, "The History of Al Qaeda," *Brookings Institute Op-Ed*, September 1, 2011.
- 29 Skovgaard-Petersen, "Heirs of Abu Bakr," 27.
- 30 M. Halimi, "Is Al Qaeda Central Relocating?" *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 8, no. 7 (2016).
- 31 S. Jones, "Think Again: Al Qaeda," *Foreign Policy* 193 (2012).
- 32 Halimi, "Is Al Qaeda Central Relocating?" 34.
- 33 M. Rudner, "Electronic Jihad: The Internet as Al Qaeda's Catalyst for Global Terror," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no.1 (2017).
- 34 S. Jones, "A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of al Qaeda and Other Salafi Jihadists," *Rand Corporation* (2014): 36.

The future of AQ cannot be predicted easily. AQ is not a terrorist organization that can be categorized and totally understood through classical analyses, as the organization was able to develop new ways to retaliate after each destructive move taken by its enemies.³⁵ The organization has a strong core and continues to influence many other groups and individuals across the world via the Internet; therefore, no one can claim victory against this sinister organization. As Hoffman warns, although ISIS has put the cat among the pigeons by trying to act like a state, AQ has been subtly rebuilding its strength by adopting AQ leader Zawahiri's decentralized franchising approach, refraining from bloody attacks (especially those targeting Muslims) and by letting ISIS take the curse for all global counterterrorism campaigns.³⁶

New Trends in ISIS

Unlike AQ, which has a relatively stable organizational structure, ISIS has experienced several ups and downs since its debut in 2004. Abu Musab al Zarqawi established ISIS under the name of Islamic State of Iraq and Levant in Iraq, an organization that dates back to 1999 when Zarqawi established Jamaat al Tawhid wal-Jihad in Iraq.³⁷ ISIS was a branch of AQ in Iraq, but it was not until 2004, after the US invasion of Iraq, that Zarqawi pledged allegiance to bin Laden. Between 2004 and 2010, ISIS often used aggressive and ruthless violence, which prompted several relatively orthodox Sunni groups to part ways with ISIS. In 2006, Zarqawi was killed during a U.S. airstrike. Egyptian Abu Hamza Al Muhajir (also known as Abu Ayyub al-Masri) replaced Zarqawi and, in 2009, and changed the name of the group to ISI (Islamic State of Iraq). Zarqawi lacked the necessary leadership skills to make significant progress toward achieving the organization's goals.³⁸ US strategies against ISI, such as humiliating the Sunnis and letting them freely organize in prisons, paved the way for the group to restructure and emerge as a stronger organization.³⁹ The civil war in Syria presented a golden opportunity for ISI, which used the region as a safe haven after 2011. In 2015, ISI renamed itself ISIS.⁴⁰ The relationship between ISIS and AQ ended when Baghdad declared his caliphate in Mosul in 2014. Although the martial view of AQ was predominantly defensive, based on the liberation of the land of Islam from

35 C. Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda: From Global Network to Local Franchise* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

36 B. Hoffman, "Al Qaeda's Resurrection," *Council on Foreign Relations Expert Brief*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/al-qaedas-resurrection>.

37 K. Jasko et al., "ISIS: Its History, Ideology, and Psychology," in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, ed. M. Woodward and R. Lukens-Bull (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018).

38 K. Jasko et al., "ISIS."

39 K. Jasko et al.

40 N. Sandal, "Apocalypse Soon: Revolutionary Revanchism of ISIS," in F. Al-Istrabadi and S. Ganguly (Eds.), *The Future of ISIS: Regional and International Implications* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 17–38.

Western dominance, and focused on non-Muslim (i.e., geographically distant) enemies, ISIS had been organized specifically to acquire territory and establish a state-like organization in its territories.⁴¹ After its declaration of caliphate in 2014, ISIS became a prominent terrorist organization. The transformation was possible not only because of the numerous territories it won through military activities, but also because of the large-scale attacks it directly plotted in major European cities or inspired in the United States and other parts of the world. Thus, ISIS gained pledges of allegiance from several terrorist groups around the world, which it referred to as its “provinces.”⁴²

Although ISIS lost almost all of its territories in Iraq and Syria, the provinces of ISIS, which included groups and organizations in locations such as the Philippines, Egypt, Libya, Afghanistan, and Nigeria, remained loyal to ISIS headquarters. The loyalty of these provinces is of critical importance for ISIS to maintain its credibility as a leader organization.⁴³

Baumberger asserts that ISIS should be considered to be a New Religious Group (NRG) because ISIS used Islamic rhetoric to open a path for itself and then changed that rhetoric in line with its organizational goals to attract Muslims across the world. NRGs are attractive to those who use religion to find answers to the vicious questions stemming from today’s complex and chaotic world. ISIS was able to legitimize itself by identifying its organizational goals with the sacred goals of the religion of Islam, predicating itself on that religion and introducing its doctrine as the true interpretation of Islam.⁴⁴

Similar to AQ, one of the most distinguishing aspects of ISIS is its use of the Internet, especially social media, for its organizational goals. Given the abundance of websites, social media accounts, and propaganda videos in circulation on the Internet, it is obvious that ISIS uses the Internet to reach youths and recruit fighters around the world.⁴⁵ As Sandal asserts, “ISIS might be territorially defeated, yet its members are now escaping to different continents to take part in other organizations. It is obvious that there will be groups in the future who will carry the caliphate banner and take lessons from the ISIS experience.”⁴⁶

Despite several major setbacks ISIS has endured over the years—including the death/decapitation of some of its leaders, the its demonization by other Sunni

41 J. Skovgaard-Petersen, “Heirs of Abu Bakr.”

42 J. Zenn, “The Islamic State’s Provinces on the Peripheries: Juxtaposing the Pledges from Boko Haram in Nigeria and Abu Sayyaf and Maute Group in the Philippines,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 1 (2019).

43 Zenn, “The Islamic State’s Provinces,” 87.

44 G. Baumberger, “ISIS Online: Analyzing ISIS’s Use of the Internet as a Method of Legitimation,” *Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Theological Studies* 2, no. 1 (2019), <https://digital-commons.lmu.edu/saysomethingtheological/vol2/iss1/2>.

45 Baumberger, “ISIS Online.”

46 Sandal, “Apocalypse Soon,” 32.

groups, and the loss of almost all of the territory it had seized—its organizational structure has turned out to be extremely resilient. This resilience stems, in part, from a mindset that enables the organization to readily replace leaders who have been killed. Another factor, which reflects the history of AQ, is the ability of ISIS to restructure itself after major defeats into cell-type small entities that are located mostly in regions of the Middle East. More importantly, ISIS was able to use the security vacuum in Iraq and Syria (and elsewhere) to its advantage, relying on years of accumulated experience to reorganize and regroup.⁴⁷ It would seem likely, therefore, that other areas with a security vacuum, such as Libya and Yemen, would become safe havens for ISIS in the future. Gerges suggests that the Arab states should strengthen their fragile organizational structures, gain power, and become stable states if they want to totally destroy ISIS.⁴⁸ The most recent attacks claimed by ISIS show that the organization is fully capable of carrying out attacks in the most developed countries of the world, with almost no cost to the organization, through its network of affiliates spread all over the world.

How Terrorist Organizations React and Respond: Resilience Theory

The ability of AQ and ISIS to survive several major disruptions that likely would have destroyed other similar organizations stems from these groups' rather flexible and resilient organizational structures. A study by Young and Dugan provides insight into why some terrorist groups are able to survive (and even thrive) while others are defeated and eliminated. For their study, Young and Dugan examined the survival patterns of 2,223 terrorist organizations between 1970 and 2010. They found that the mean duration of survival for terrorist organizations is 3.33 years; however, 68 percent of all terrorist organizations collapse within the first year following their debut. Furthermore, only 20 percent of terrorist organizations can survive long enough to celebrate their fifth anniversary, and 93 percent of all terrorist attacks are perpetrated by organizations that are older than one year.⁴⁹ The root causes of organizational resilience among terrorist organizations are the subject of debate among scholars. Some scholars point to the durability of terrorist organizations after the death/decapitation of their leaders. The most formidable disruption for any terrorist organization is, of course, the death/decapitation of the leader, an event that is still considered to be the most effective governmental counterterrorism strategy; therefore, the survival of a terrorist organization following the death/decapitation of its leader can be considered the main determinant of the group's resilience. The literature on the resiliency of

47 T. Tønnessen, "The Islamic State after the Caliphate," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 1 (2019).

48 F.A. Gerges, *A History of ISIS* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

49 J. Young and L. Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest: Why Terrorist Groups Endure," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 2 (2014).

terrorist organizations, while citing different results with respect to the degree of havoc caused by the elimination of the leader (depending on the structure of the organization) unanimously suggests that killing or capturing the leaders of terrorist organizations is not a “silver bullet” in the fight against terrorism. Johnston, for example, examined 119 leader decapitation attempts and found that states have a greater chance of ending a war with a terrorist organization by killing or capturing its leader. Moreover, if a terrorist organization’s leader curbs the amount of violence exerted, and the number and interval of attacks perpetrated by the organization.⁵⁰ More recent studies, on the other hand, show considerably different outcomes. Jordan empirically analyzed 298 decapitation cases involving ninety-two organizations and found that 53 percent of the terrorist organizations that suffered the decapitation of their leaders collapsed, while the rate of collapse was 70 percent for terrorist organizations that did not lose their leaders.⁵¹ By the same token, Yaoren asserts that the elimination of the leader of a terrorist organization yields mixed outcomes. Elimination of the leader can enervate the organization, have little impact on the organization, or increase the number and level of violence of subsequent attacks.⁵²

When it comes to other explanations for the resilience of terrorist organizations, Lindberg posits that the level of resilience of a terrorist organization is determined by popular support, ideology, scale-free network structures (i.e., characteristics of the network are independent of the size of the network) that enable the organization to avoid cascading failures when one of the nodes (i.e., members of the organization) is eliminated, the robustness of the structural basis to realize organizational goals (allowing the organization to adapt to changing circumstances), and the commission of crimes (especially theft and extortion) to finance the organization’s activities.⁵³ Petrich suggests that restructuring as a criminal organization is a resilience strategy that some terrorist organizations employ to avoid traditional government-sponsored counterterrorism campaigns.⁵⁴ Jordan posits that the two major determinants of the resilience of terrorist organizations are the bureaucratic structure of the organization and popular support. He contends that organizations that are highly bureaucratized and capable of garnering extensive popular support will be more resilient than organizations without these character-

50 P. Johnston, “Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns,” *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012).

51 J. Jordan, “Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark: Why Terrorist Groups Survive Decapitation Strikes,” *International Security* 38 (2014); 7–38.

52 K. Yaoren, “Leadership Decapitation and the Impact on Terrorist Groups,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 11, no. 3 (2019).

53 M. Lindberg, “Factors Contributing to the Strength and Resilience of Terrorist Groups,” *Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos (GEES) Publication* (2010), <http://gees.org/articulos/factors-contributing-to-the-strength-and-resilience-of-terrorist-groups>.

54 K. Petrich, “Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine: Al-Shabaab’s Criminal Activities in the Horn of Africa,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. doi:10.1080/1057610X.2019.1678873.

istics. Similarly, Weber contends that well-bureaucratized terrorist organizations will be more versatile than poorly bureaucratized terrorist organizations, have clearly identified roles and responsibilities, and have organizational strategies that are followed closely and fulfilled in accordance with the hierarchical structure. Therefore, even the sudden elimination of the leader will have little or no impact on the organization's operations. Because bureaucratization is associated with time and experience, smaller, younger, and more ideological terrorist organizations will be more dependent on their leaders and thus more likely to disperse after the leader of the organization has been decapitated. Popular support helps terrorist organizations gain access to human, logistical, and financial resources more easily and legitimizes the group's violent activities. Extremely violent government-sponsored counterterrorism campaigns, however, are more likely to push local people toward terrorist organizations and, consequently, enhance the organizations' resilience.⁵⁵

Lindelauf and colleagues argue that terrorist organizations are more likely to be resilient when they operate as loosely connected and scale-free networks across the globe, which are needed to establish a balance between secrecy and functionality. These networks are, in contrast to small-world networks, locally clustered networks that are more vulnerable to targeted attacks.⁵⁶

Another significant determinant of organizational resilience is the geographical location of the group's headquarters. AQ, for example, maintains its headquarters in the area between the porous Afghanistan and Pakistan border (i.e., the AfPak region), an area that is quite difficult for regular armies to access to fight a decisive war.⁵⁷ McNally and Weinbaum argue that after the 9/11 attacks in 2001, AQ restructured into a decentralized organization that consisted of an elite core of three hundred individuals located in the AfPak region and several loosely connected branches spread across the world. AQ's elite core is relatively small, which enables it to quickly relocate to the other side of the border when faced with problems on the side it had been occupying. Not content with the status quo, AQ's elite core has been consolidating its power in the AfPak region by cooperating with the Taliban against official governments in the region and uniting defragmented jihadist groups.⁵⁸

The literature on terrorist organization resilience generally underscores organizational variables (such as organizational structure, ideology, and network type) as the main factors that enable terrorist organizations to withstand disruption.

55 Jordan, "Attacking the Leader Missing the Mark."

56 R. Lindelauf, P.E.M. Borm, and H.J.M. Hamers, "Understanding Terrorist Network Topologies and Their Resilience Against Disruption," Center Discussion Paper; Vol. 2009-85. Tilburg: Operations Research.

57 B. Sude, "Assessing Al-Qaeda Central's Resilience," *CTS Sentinel* 8, no. 11 (2015).

58 L. McNally and M.G. Weinbaum, "A Resilient Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Middle East Institute Publication* (2016), https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF18_Weinbaum_AQinAFPAK_web_1.pdf.

tive events (such as the decapitation of a leader) that may be counterproductive under certain circumstances. It is argued in this paper that resilience theory might provide the insights needed to understand why some terrorist organizations are able to withstand attempts to eradicate them while others are not. In the field of psychology, resilience theory is used to explain why some people are better able than others to tolerate traumatic events. Adaptation of resilience theory to criminal activity stems from Jones's analysis of a Mexican drug cartel. Jones argues against using resilience as a binary variable to show whether or not an organization is able to survive after a major traumatic event. He believes that a broader approach is more appropriate because a person's response to a major traumatic event can be experienced on different levels, based on certain subjective conditions.⁵⁹

Jones posits that levels of resilience extend along a continuum, starting with *survive intact* and continues with *restructure*, *fragmentation*, *internecine conflict*, and *dissolution*, where *survive intact* is the strongest form of resilience and *dissolution* is the least. *Survive intact* refers to the most flexible and adaptive type of organization. It can absorb almost any kind of disruptive shock without undergoing a major endeavor. *Restructure* is another strong level of resistance. It refers to the capability of a criminal organization to determine when to undergo a major restructuring after a shocking event, such as the elimination of the leader of the organization. Fragmentation refers to the level of resiliency common among organizations that split into new, smaller-scale organizations. The new entities maintain mostly cordial relations, but occasionally get into conflicts with one another based on the duties performed within the organization. *Internecine conflict* occurs when the departed groups engage in violence against one another in an attempt to dominate the turf of the now-fragmented organization and leads to a lower level of resilience. Finally, *dissolution* refers to the total destruction of a criminal organization's network, usually after sophisticated state response.⁶⁰

On the basis of Jones's taxonomy, it is argued in this paper that when terrorist organizations encounter a disruptive event and fragment, restructure, engage in internecine conflict, or dissolve as a consequence of that disruptive event, they pledge allegiance to major terrorist organizations. The only exception to the applicability of Jones's resilience typology to terrorist organizations is the *survive intact* level of resiliency. Terrorist organizations that survive intact after a disruptive event do not to pledge allegiance to another terrorist organization. For example, ISIS leader Baghdadi was killed in 2019 but soon had a new leader. The decapitation of the group's leader did not impact the organization. Similarly, when bin Laden was killed in 2011, the AQ core appointed Zawahiri as bin Laden's successor, and the group carried out its activities as usual. The Taliban is another ex-

59 N. Jones, *Mexico's Illicit Drug Networks and the State Response* (Georgetown University Press, 2014), 32.

60 N. Jones, *Mexico's Illicit Drug Networks*, 33.

ample of how a terrorist organization can survive intact even after engaging with well-armed military forces or after their leaders are killed. For example, US drones killed the Taliban leader in 2016,⁶¹ but the organization survived intact and did not pledge allegiance to another organization.

Pledging Allegiance to Al Qaeda and ISIS

In 2018, thirty-nine jihadist terrorist organizations declared loyalty to AQ or ISIS; nineteen of the organizations took the side of AQ, while the other twenty organizations favored the ISIS ideology and swore loyalty to it. Table 1 shows the jihadist groups that declared loyalty to AQ and what prompted them to do so. Table 2 shows the jihadist groups that declared loyalty to ISIS and what prompted them to do so.

Table 1: Active Jihadist Groups That Declared Loyalty to AQ in 2018, by Country

Jihadist Group	Country	Reason for Pledging Allegiance
Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)	Algeria	Fragmentation, Restructure
Al Badr Mujahideen⁶²	India-Kashmir	Fragmentation, Restructure
Al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent	India-Kashmir	Restructure
Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind⁶³	India-Kashmir	Fragmentation
Hizbul Mujahideen⁶⁴	India-Kashmir	Dissolution and Merging ⁶⁵
Jaish-e-Mohammed⁶⁶	India-Kashmir	Restructure
Lashkar-e Tayyiba	India-Kashmir	Restructure
Tehrik ul-Mujahedeen⁶⁷	India-Kashmir	Restructure

61 “U.S. Targets Taliban Leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour in an Airstrike,” *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/05/21/479004343/taliban-leader-mullah-akhtar-mansour-likely-killed-in-u-s-airstrike>.

62 The Al Badr Mujahideen is a breakaway group from Hizbul Mujahideen and was involved in several attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. “Al-Badr/Al-Badr Mijahideen,” *Global Security*, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/Al-Badr.htm>.

63 The Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind was created by Zakir Musa, who was former Hizbul Mujahideen militant. “Al-Qaida-linked cell Ansar Ghazwat-Ul-Hind announces Zakir Musa as its chief in Kashmir,” *The Times of India*, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/59792567.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

64 Hizb-ul Mujahedeen is an umbrella group, formed by a dozen smaller groups. “Al-Badr/Al-Badr Mijahideen,” <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/Al-Badr.htm>.

65 “Dissolution and Merging” represents terrorist groups that dissolved, but then merged to form an umbrella organization, such as HTS and JNIM.

66 The Jaish-e-Mohammad was banned as a result of a military crackdown in Pakistan in 2002. However, according to many critics, the ban was only a formality, and the group resurfaced after the crackdown. See B.O. Riedel, *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of the Global Jihad* (Brookings Institution Press, 2012) 70.

67 Tehrik ul-Mujahedeen is one of the Salafi-jihadist groups that emerged in early 1990s. “Not

Ansar al-Furqan ⁶⁸	Iran	Restructure
Jaish al-Adl ⁶⁹	Iran	Fragmentation
Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin	Mali	Dissolution and Merging
Lashkar-e-Jhangvi ⁷⁰	Pakistan	Fragmentation
Al-Shabaab	Somalia	Restructure
Ahrar al-Sham ⁷¹	Syria	Dissolution and Merging
Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (formerly, al-Nusrah Front)	Syria	Dissolution and Merging
Jaysh al-Islam ⁷²	Syria	Dissolution and Merging
Jaish al-Izza ⁷³	Syria	Dissolution and Merging
Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade ⁷⁴	Tunisia	Fragmentation, Restructure
Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula ⁷⁵	Yemen	Restructure

ISIS, but Tehrik-Ul-Mujahideen is the Headache in Kashmir," *One India*, <https://www.oneindia.com/india/not-isis-but-tehrik-ul-mujahideen-is-the-headache-in-kashmir-2587048.html>.

- 68 The Ansar a-Furqan was established in 2013 by the merger of two other jihadist groups. "Iran Sunni Baloch Insurgents: Union with Hizbul-Furqan Strengthens Our Front Against Safavids," *Worldview*, <https://eaworldview.com/2013/12/iran-sunni-baloch-insurgents-union-hezb-ul-forqan-strengthens-front-safavids/>
- 69 Jaish al-Adl was founded by former members of Jundallah, whose leader was killed in 2012. "Violence Returns to Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan Province," *Radio Farda*, <https://www.rferl.org/a/violence-sistan-baluchistan/25161200.html>.
- 70 Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is an offshoot of anti-Shia party, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and was founded by former SSP members. "Profile: Lashkar-e-Jhangvi," *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-20982987>
- 71 Ahrar al-Sham is an umbrella organization established by the merger of jihadist groups that left the Free Syrian Army. See E. O'Bagy (2012). "Jihad in Syria," *Middle East Security Report: Jihad in Syria*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140327163800/http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Jihad-In-Syria-17SEPT.pdf>
- 72 Jaysh al-Islam is another umbrella organization founded by merging different rebel groups, most of which had been linked to the Free Syrian Army. See A. J. Al-Tamimi, "The Dawn of Freedom Brigades," *Syria Comment*, <https://www.joshualandis.com/blog/profile-tajammu-alwiya-fajr-al-hurriya/>
- 73 Jaish al-Izza is a group affiliated with the Free Syrian Army and was established by former members of FSA. The group was an ally of al Nusrah Front. The group has strong linkages with AQ. "Naked Terrorism in Syria! Jaish al Izza," *Middle East*, <https://english.iswnews.com/5896/terrorism-in-syria-jaish-al-izza/>.
- 74 The Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade was established by several AQIM members under the command of the AQIM leader subsequent to the revolution in Tunisia in 2011. See D. Lounnas, "The Tunisian Jihad between al Qaeda and ISIS," *Middle East Policy*. doi:10.1111/mepo.12403
- 75 AQ in the Arabian Peninsula was formed in 2009 by the merger of AQ's Saudi and Yemeni branches. Saudi suppression was the main reason that AQAP restructured and began to operate in Yemen. See J. Novak, "Arabian Peninsula al Qaeda Groups Merge," *Long War Journal*, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/01/arabian_peninsula_al.php.

Table 2: Active Jihadist Groups That Declared Loyalty to ISIS in 2018, by Country

Jihadist Group	Country	Reason for Pledging Allegiance
Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh ⁷⁶	Bangladesh	Restructure
ISIS Sinai Province ⁷⁷	Egypt	Restructure
ISIS – Jammu and Kashmir ⁷⁸	India-Kashmir	Fragmentation
Jamaah Ansharut Daulah ⁷⁹	Indonesia	Restructure
Mujahidin Indonesia Timur ⁸⁰	Indonesia	Restructure
ISIS Libya ⁸¹	Libya	Fragmentation, Restructure
ISIS – Greater Sahara ⁸²	Mali	Fragmentation
Ansar al-Sunna ⁸³	Mozambique	Restructure
Boko Haram	Nigeria	Fragmentation, Restructure

76 Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh formed in late 1990s and was responsible for plotting five hundred attacks in three hundred locations in 2005. The crackdown by the government weakened the group, after which it became affiliated with ISIS. See S. Choudhury, "Story of ISIS Affiliated Bangladeshi Jihadist Sisters," *Blitz*, <https://www.weeklyblitz.net/news/story-of-isis-affiliated-bangladeshi-jihadist-sisters/>.

77 Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis restructured and changed its name to ISIS Sinai province as a result of a military crackdown by the Egyptian military. "Sinai Province: Egypt's Most Dangerous Group," *BBC Monitoring*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25882504>.

78 ISIS Jammu and Kashmir were founded by militants who left Hizb-ul Mujahedein. One of these militants was killed in 2017. See S. Mir, "What the Unveiling of IS's Wilayat al Hindi," *The Wire*, <https://thewire.in/security/isis-jammu-kashmir-ishfaq-ahmad-sofi>.

79 Jihadists formed Jamaah Ansharut Daula. The group had strong linkages with ISIS in Syria. See B. Wilkinson, "Terror Group JAD Linked to Indonesia," *CNN*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/14/asia/jad-indonesia-terror-intl/index.html>.

80 Mujahidin Indonesia Timur pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2014. Sidney Wockner, "Indonesian Police Are Confident Killed the Country's Most Wanted Terrorist Santoso Who Pledged Allegiance to Islamic State," <https://www.news.com.au/world/asia/indonesian-police-are-confident-killed-the-countrys-most-wanted-terrorist-santoso-who-pledged-allegiance-to-islamic-state/news-story/529b4f85d445c8b827f0100c91a28f73>.

81 The ISIS in Libya group was formed by Libyan rebel fighters. They fought on the side of jihadist groups in Libya and then returned to Libya to establish the country franchise of ISIS in Libya. See F. Wehrey, "Rising Out of Chaos: The Islamic State in Libya," *Carnegie Endowment*, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/59268?lang=en>.

82 ISIS-Greater Sahara was formed by Walid al-Sahrawi in 2015 and pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2016. The group was split off from Al Motabitoun, where it was split off from AQIM. "Intelbrief: ISIS in the Greater Sahara," *Soufan Center*, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-isis-in-the-greater-sahara/>. Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi proclaimed his group's allegiance to the Islamic State in October 2016. The Islamic State accepted that pledge. As is the case in the chaotic world of Sahel terrorist affiliations, al-Sahrawi's group split off from Al-Mourabitoun, which itself had split off from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

83 Ansar al-Sunna was established as a religious organization and militarized in 2015. Suguta West, "Al al-Sunna: A New Militant Islamist Group Emerges in Mozambique," <https://jamestown.org/program/ansar-al-sunna-a-new-militant-islamist-group-emerges-in-mozambique/>. Ansar al-Sunna has gained recognition thanks to ISIS. "ISIS in Mozambique Creates Terror Threat," *Strategic Intelligence*, <https://intelligencebriefs.com/isis-in-mozambique-greatest-terror-threat-to-east-and-south-africa-yet/>.

ISIS – West Africa	Nigeria and Sahel	Restructure
Jamaat-ul-Ahrar ⁸⁴	Pakistan	Fragmentation
Abu Sayyaf Group ⁸⁵	Philippines	Restructure
Ansar Al-Khilafa ⁸⁶	Philippines	Fragmentation
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement ⁸⁷	Philippines	Fragmentation
ISIS – Philippines ⁸⁸	Philippines	Fragmentation, Restructure
Maute Group ⁸⁹	Philippines	Restructure
Islamic State in Somalia	Somalia	Fragmentation, ⁹⁰ Restructure
Jaysh Khaled Bin al-Walid ⁹¹	Syria	Dissolution and Merging
ISIS in Tunisia	Tunisia	Restructure
Jund al-Khilafah ⁹²	Tunisia	Restructuring

84 Jamaat-ul-Ahrar was established by militants who parted from Tehrik-i-Taliban in 2014. “Pakistani Taliban Faction Split,” *NDTV*, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/pakistan-taliban-faction-an-nounce-split-new-leader-659199>.

85 Isnilon Hapilon, the leader of Abu Sayyaf, pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2017. See M. Ness, “Beyond the Caliphate: Islamic State Activity Outside the Group’s Defined Wilayat: Southeast Asia,” United States Military Academy, <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CTC-Southeast-Asia.pdf>.

86 Ansar al-Khalifa is based in the Philippines and was established by former members of the Abu Sayyaf Group. Ansar al-Khalifa pledged allegiance to ISIS. Rohan Gunaratna, “Islamic State to Create Southeast Asian Satellite,” *Benar News*, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/commentaries/asia-pacific-threat-update/southeast-satellite-01122016135306.html>.

87 BIFM is the breakaway group from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) founded by Ameril Umbra Kato. “Is BIFF the MLF’s BFF?” *Today’s Paper*, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/669597/is-biff-the-milfs-bff>. When Kato passed away, the MILF split into three factions, and one of those factions was BIFM. See C. Weiss, “Islamic State-loyal Groups Claim Attacks on Filipino Military,” *Long War Journal*, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/05/islamic-state-loyal-groups-claim-attacks-on-filipino-military.php>

88 The jihadist groups in the Philippines, such as the Maute group, the Abu Sayyaf group, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and the Ansar Khalifa, pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2014. The groups were not dissolved but restructured and declared loyalty to ISIS.

89 The former members of Moro Islamic Liberation Front established the Maute Group. The group pledged allegiance to ISIS, as did other jihadist groups in the Philippines.

90 Abdul Qadir Mumin was assigned by al Shabab to the Puntland region, but Mumin formed his own organization and pledged allegiance to ISIS, using the group’s name. Then Mumin restructured the group with new recruits in the region. See J. Warner, “Sub-Saharan Africa’s Three ‘New’ Islamic State Affiliates,” *CTCSENTINEL* 10, no. 1 (January 2017): 28–32, https://web.archive.org/web/20170430031255/https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CTC-Sentinel_Vol9Iss1119.pdf.

91 Jaysh Khaled Bin al-Walid was an umbrella organization formed by the merger of the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, the Islamic Muthanna Movement, and the Army of Jihad. All of these groups were affiliated with ISIS.

92 Jund al-Khilafah was formed by the former members of AQIM. These members broke their allegiance with AQ and declared loyalty to ISIS. See L. Chikhi, “Splinter Group Breaks from al Qaeda in North Africa,” *Reuters*, September 14, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-algeria-security/>

As shown in Table 1, many jihadist groups in conflict zones such as Syria and Yemen sided with AQ and became affiliated with the organization. Their declaration of loyalty is the result of dissolution and merging, fragmentation, fragmentation and restructuring, and restructuring. Groups that failed to fight against international forces or that lost their power came together and convened under umbrella organizations in conflict zones.

Three of the groups listed in Table 1 (i.e., Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Al Badr Mujahedeen, and the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade) are examples of fragmentation and restructuring, a process in which some members of a larger group leave the organization and establish a new group. Former jihadist groups that operated mostly in Algeria created AQIM in northern Africa. Militants who left Hizb-ul Mujahedeen in Kashmir formed Al Badr Mujahedeen in Kashmir. Former members of AQIM established the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade. The groups' pledges of allegiance can be explained by the attractiveness of AQ's ideological and logistical support. The groups were well aware that use of the AQ name would enhance their popularity and enable them to attract new recruits.

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), also listed in Table 1, is an example of what results when dissolved groups merge, form a larger organization, and then pledge allegiance to AQ. JNIM, an active jihadist groups in Mali, resulted from the merger of four dissolved groups: Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, Al-Mourabitoun, and the Saharan branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.⁹³

Another example of dissolved groups' declaring loyalty to AQ is Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a jihadist group formerly known as the al-Nusra Front. HTS was formed after the dissolution of five terrorist organizations: Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the Ansar al-Din Front, Jaysh al-Sunna, the Nur-al Din al-Zinki Movement, and Liwa al-Haqq.⁹⁴ The dissolved groups were responsible for a few terrorist incidents before they merged with HTS. Led by Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani (the former leader of the al-Nusra Front) in its early years, HTS evolved into a large organization in Syria. After ISIS began to lose its territory and power, HTS gravitated toward AQ, the group responsible for killing the Russian ambassador to Turkey in 2016.⁹⁵ Similarly, the jihadist groups Jaish al-Izza and Jaysh al-Islam split from the Free Syrian Army to form new terrorist organizations.

splinter-group-breaks-from-al-qaeda-in-north-africa-idUSKBN0H90G820140914

93 "Al-Qaeda Now Has a United Front in Africa's Troubled Sahel Region," *Newsweek*, <https://www.newsweek.com/al-qaeda-groups-unite-sahel-563351>.

94 T. Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda and Allies Announce 'New Entity' in Syria," *Long War Journal*. Foundation for Defense of Democracies, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/01/al-qaeda-and-allies-announce-new-entity-in-syria.php>.

95 N. Bertrand, "Russian Ambassador to Turkey as Assassinated in Ankara," *Business Insider*, <https://www.businessinsider.com/russias-ambassador-to-turkey-has-reportedly-been-shot-in-ankara-2016-12>.

Al Shabab, as shown in Table 1, is an example of group restructuring. When the group began to lose its power because of internal divisions and self-inflicted wounds, the group's leader, Ahmad Godane, declared loyalty to AQ. Godane announced a formal merger with AQ⁹⁶ and replaced Al Shabab commanders with AQ commanders. The shake-up caused a schism and strife within the group.⁹⁷ Godane, who feared an outbreak of internecine conflict, began to issue death warrants for his rivals. Godane's strategic move helped him to get support from AQ and prevent a possible internal conflict.

As shown in Table 2, the seven jihadist groups in East Asia lean toward and have pledged allegiance to ISIS. Five of those groups are located in the Philippines, while the other two groups are located in Indonesia. ISIS's popularity in Syria and Iraq in 2014 and 2015 was one of the reasons that jihadist groups formed country franchises of the larger organization (i.e., ISIS). One organization each in Egypt, India-Kashmir, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Sahel, and Somalia pledged allegiance to ISIS, as did two organizations in Tunisia.

Boko Haram in Nigeria is an example of fragmentation and restructuring. In 2009, the Nigerian military raided Boko Haram hideouts and killed more than 700 group members, including the group leader, Mohammad Yusuf. Abubakar Shekau became the new leader in 2010, restructured the group, and swore loyalty to AQ.⁹⁸ In subsequent years, Shekau engaged in brutal attacks and kidnappings. He targeted law enforcement units and political leaders in 2011, increased the level of violence, and targeted markets, churches, and fellow Muslims in 2012. Incensed with Shekau's targeting of Muslims, some Boko Haram commanders parted ways with the organization and formed Ansaru in 2012.⁹⁹ Shekau's strategy continued unabated through 2014, giving Boko Haram the dubious distinction of being one of the most violent organizations in the world. According to an October 2014 report in the publication *Global Security*, at least 11,000 people lost their lives as a result of Boko Haram attacks.¹⁰⁰ Boko Haram found itself under pressure from the Nigerian military in 2015, making it difficult for the organization to survive intact. It was time, Shekau apparently reasoned, to declare the group's loyalty to ISIS and did so in 2015.¹⁰¹ Weakened by the Nigerian military raids, Boko Haram expected to get support from ISIS. That support, however, was not forthcoming. In 2016, Boko Haram fractured, and a number of senior leaders left the organization and con-

96 K. Menkhaus, "Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate By," *CNT Sentinel* 7, no. 2 (Special Issue, February 2014): 4–8, <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2014/02/CTCSentinel-Vol7Iss2.pdf>.

97 J. White, *Terrorism and Homeland Security* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2018), 170.

98 White, 166.

99 White, 166–167.

100 "Islamic State West Africa Province," *Global Security*, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/boko-haram.htm>.

101 "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province," *Crisis Group*, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province>.

vened under the umbrella of a group called the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), which operates mainly in the Lake Chad region. Boko Haram's brutal attack policies led to the loss of the group's legitimacy and its popular support. Former senior leaders dissatisfied with the group's diminished status split off from the organization and formed ISWAP, a group that was better able to establish links with the local population by abandoning the wanton practices of Boko Haram.¹⁰²

The one group listed in Table 2 as dissolving and merging before pledging allegiance to ISIS differs from the six groups listed in Table 1, which took the same steps before pledging allegiance to AQ. The difference lies not only in the number of groups, but also in the role that dissolution and merging played in the decision to pledge allegiance to a larger group. The ISIS model in Iraq and Syria fell victim to a sequence of events that led to its demise. First, the organization lost its territory and financial resources. The next blow came when jihadist groups began to head off umbrella organizations and convene under the leadership of large jihadist groups that had declared loyalty to AQ. Table 2 (i.e., declaration of loyalty to ISIS) shows more restructured groups compared with Table 1 (i.e., declaration of loyalty to AQ). ISIS, at one time quite popular and the reason that jihadist groups established ISIS-linked groups in their home countries, has seen its popularity plummet. While some groups, such as ISIS Sinai Province in Egypt, began to use the ISIS label as part of their organizations' names, jihadist groups in other countries restructured their organizations as franchises of ISIS (i.e., without including the ISIS label as part of their organizations' names).

Recently, an increasing number of jihadist groups have referred to their organizations as a branch of AQ or ISIS in a given country to attract more recruits to their organizations. There are many reasons that terrorist groups pledge allegiance to AQ or ISIS. Groups in conflict zones lack resources and need support from internationally accepted and well-known groups. AQ and ISIS are the main players among terrorist organizations, making the two larger organizations quite attractive to smaller terrorist groups that believe in the shared goals of AQ and ISIS. Those goals are to spearhead the spread of global jihadism. These smaller groups also find appealing the two larger organizations' history of resilience in the face of counterinsurgency campaigns conducted by the world's superpowers. Some of the smaller groups, however, simply want to upgrade their organizational status from local to regional or even global. AQ and ISIS are seen as a means to that end.

Conclusion

The world is still experiencing the impact of the fourth wave of terrorism,¹⁰³ or religious terrorism. This wave began with the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (in which the monarchy was overthrown and replaced with an Islamic re-

102 "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province."

103 D.C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand*

public). Subsequently, Iran began to export terrorism to protect the regime. When the Soviet-Afghan war began, the mujahedeen in Afghanistan fought against the Soviet Union, which had entered its neighbor Afghanistan to support that country's pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. Curiously enough, the jihadists in Afghanistan moved to different conflict zones and created the culture of jihadism in different regions of the world during the war—a time when the world was mostly ignorant about jihadists. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, the world witnessed a ruthless fight against jihadists; however, this period also paved the way for the creation of scores of new jihadist groups that found safe havens in the Middle East when a security vacuum emerged in the region after the Arab Spring of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed conflicts against repressive regimes in the early 2010s. During the period between the breakout of the Arab Spring and the present, the war between the modern world and the region's jihadist groups has gone through phases in which one side or the other dominated.

The situation is somewhat different for AQ and ISIS. Over time, AQ became the brand name for jihadist groups. Its presence was widespread, with operations in different regions through its franchises. For many years, AQ had little competition from other terrorist groups. All of that changed when ISIS emerged as a rival of AQ. ISIS was popular in Syria and Iraq in 2014 and 2015, particularly among smaller local jihadist organizations, which were largely responsible for raising the popularity of ISIS to its pinnacle. It was not long before local jihadist groups began to pledge allegiance to either AQ or ISIS. In the course of the global war against jihadism, several local jihadist groups in different parts of the world experienced organizational disruptions and had to pledge allegiance to either AQ or ISIS, both of which had proven their resilience, in order to maintain their existence. In other words, jihadist groups hit by disruptive events (such as the decapitation/death of their leaders or the loss of a considerable number of their fighters after heavy military campaigns), fragmented, restructured, or dissolved and gravitated toward either AQ and ISIS as a strategy for resilience. When these groups pledged allegiance to AQ or ISIS, they benefited from the larger group's brand name and popularity, attracted more recruits, received ideological and logistical support, and gained the attention of world politics, as suggested by the extant literature. While these benefits helped to raise the status of the smaller terrorist groups, their overarching goal was to enable the organization to survive as a viable entity after facing an existential threat. This viability, however, comes at a cost. Smaller terrorist groups that form alliances with larger ones are forced to compromise on organizational authority,¹⁰⁴ which brings with it the risk of being targeted by counterterrorism units from the states that pursue counterterrorism campaigns.¹⁰⁵

Strategy, ed. A. Cronin and J. Ludes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 46–73.

104 Bacon.

105 Asal et al.

Given the root causes of terrorism in conflict zones and the ongoing political and economic grievances in Islamic countries, it would not be outlandish to predict that jihadist groups will sustain their presence and popularity in many regions of the world and that they will continue to lean toward AQ or ISIS when they feel any threat to their existence. This paper presents some evidence that having survived several military campaigns waged by the most powerful countries in the world since the early 2000s, both AQ and ISIS have proved their resilience and therefore remain attractive and powerful shelters for smaller jihadist organizations that face organizational problems at the existential level. In the last couple of years, several local terrorist organizations have pledged allegiance to AQ or ISIS to overcome the detrimental effects of disruptive events and ensure their survival. This finding is a working hypothesis that needs to be supported with empirical data from future research.