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A Short History of Jihadism Studies

Abstract   2018 marks the twentieth anniversary of Osama bin Laden's fatwa calling for all Muslims to wage global Jihad against the US and its allies. The manifestation of Jihadism as a global militant ideology during this period has simultaneously fostered a growing field of research occupied with this phenomenon. This article identifies and discusses some of the primary debates and currents within the study of Jihadism in English language research literature over the past twenty years. Debates between advocates of local or global views of Jihadism, as well as debates on the question of religion as a cause of Jihadism, are identified as the most prevalent. The article further argues that the fundamental disagreements in the study of Jihadism reflect a research field compartmentalized into different scholarly approaches that do not sufficiently overlap. Furthermore, a too one-sided focus on al-Qaeda as the typical presentative of Jihadism from 2001 onwards has inhibited researchers from identifying diverging expressions of the phenomenon.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the World Islamic Front's – led by Osama bin Laden – 1998 fatwa declaring global jihad against the Western "Crusader-Zionist Alliance." In practice, bin Laden and his colleagues, who established *al-Qā'idāt al-Djihad*[1] a few years later, asserted that it was an individual religious duty for every Muslim to kill Americans and their allies (civilian or military) in order to liberate the "Lands of Islam."[2]

Constituting an ascending yet relatively marginal group at the time, and with a limited portfolio of terrorist achievements, two decades later al-Qaeda – as well as the broader current of militant activism referred to here as Jihadism – would become a household name around the world. Not just limited to pro-

1. Henceforth referred to as "al-Qaeda."
2. "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders – World Islamic Front Statement." 1998. fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm (accessed on 28 Mar 2018).

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lific terrorist attacks, James D. Fearon has documented that the presence of Jihadists in all conflicts rose from 5 % in 1990 to more than 40 % in 2014 (Fearon 2017, 19), making Jihadism a truly global phenomenon.

The explosive rise of Jihadism over the past twenty years has generated an equally turbulent debate about the origins, dynamics and motivations of Jihadists. The 9/11 attack initiated a many-faceted wave of scholarly interest in the phenomenon, and the recent rise to prominence of Islamic State (IS) has increased the demand for further analyses. Yet, in spite of this vast expansion of the field of study, disagreements about fundamental aspects of Jihadism remain unresolved and highly contested to this day.

Numerous researchers have shed light on the historical development of the Jihadist phenomenon, yet the number of general reviews of the academic literature studying Jihadism has been relatively modest (e.g. Volpi 2010). This deficiency reflects the somewhat fragmented character of the scholarly debate, which tends to be compartmentalized into different scholarly fields with insufficient overlap. As a modest remedy to this scarcity, this article identifies overall trends in English language studies of Jihadism since the 1990s, with specific focus on the period from 2001 onwards. As existing research reflects deep-seated disagreements about the main drivers of Jihadism, it further discusses the reasons for the persistence of debates at the very core of the Jihadist issue.

The article puts forward several arguments. Firstly, research literature on Jihadism has over the past twenty years, by looking predominantly at the al-Qaeda-organization at the expense of other Jihadist actors, been biased in favor of adopting the "AQ-model" as the archetypical Jihadist organization. In short, Jihadism has largely been seen through the prism of al-Qaeda even though al-Qaeda represented a unique organizational model.[3] The consequence has been an imbalance in the perception of how global Jihadism works in practice and how Jihadism is expressed outside the arena of global strategic narratives and propaganda.

Secondly, and as a consequence of the first point, al-Qaeda's "global Jihad" — that is, international terrorism — came to represent Jihadist activism in both media and academia despite the fact that it represented only a minority view among the self-

3. A similar point has recently been made by Marc Lynch (2016). Lynch points to the exaggerated role of Jihadists within the "overall spectrum of Muslim politics" due to the relatively modest challenge Jihadism poses to global security (2016, 129).

identified Jihadists, most of whom were engaged in domestic insurgencies in which terrorism was but one element.

Thirdly, research in Jihadism still appears fragmented along central argumentative "tracks" that remain largely separate. One such key fault line in the research literature is between what Marc Lynch has called the "lumpers and splitters," meaning either those that lump everything together and understand Jihadism as a "broad, coherent movement rooted in religion rather than conventional politics," or those that split the larger phenomenon into separate parts according to the "competing ideological and political strands" (Lynch 2017). This has resulted in an analytical gap between micro-level studies researching Jihadism in a specific, local context, and macro-level studies conducting research into the Jihadist movement and its ideology on a global scale. An intersecting, but crucial, debate that remains fragmented relates to the main drivers of Jihadist violence. Is Jihadism as a religious ideology itself a driver of Jihadist violence on a global scale, or is it militants in the specific sociopolitical contexts that adopt and use Jihad to legitimize militant action?

In order to illustrate the intrinsic relation between the study of Jihadism and the parallel development of the Jihadist movement, these arguments are presented through a historical framework consisting of three periods separated by a major paradigmatic event that has questioned the basic premises of how researchers and policy makers approached the subject of both terrorism and Jihadism.

Until 2001 Jihadism studies was marked by the conceptualization of the emerging phenomenon of "religious" terrorism, which increased markedly during the 1990s. This discussion was framed by the question of whether or not "religious" terrorism was a fundamentally new form of terrorism distinct from older, more familiar types. Jihadism studies from 2001 onwards, defined by the 9/11 attacks, saw the principles of the "new terrorism" theory applied in the understanding of al-Qaeda and its affiliated proponents of Jihad. The debates and disagreements that emerged during this period have formed how we understand Jihadism as a global militant ideology. The 2014-takeover of Mosul marked the "ISIS-ification of Islamist politics" (al-Anani 2015). IS did not only force other Jihadist and Islamist groups to respond and react to its rise in

prominence, it also "posed a new challenge to the categories, concepts, and expectations of the academics who study them" (Lynch 2015). This article argues that this development has coincided with a greater diversification of the study of Jihadism, while also reviving older discussions usually connected to the earliest phase of terrorism research.

"New (Religious) Terrorism"

The contemporary understanding of Jihadism did not crystallize until the years following 2001. Researchers had since the 1980s tried to conceptualize the separation of Islam, the religion, and Islamism, a modern political and ideological movement that sought to secure and/or reassert the role of Islam in politics on the state level.

Various Middle East scholars tracked the initial development of militant Islamist organizations in the 1970s and 1980s in the greater Middle East noticing both the initial development, revival, and radicalization of medieval theology on Jihad, as well as the increasing militarization of this movement (expressed most prominently through the texts of Egyptian pioneers of militant Islamism Sayyid Qutb and Mohammed Abd al-Salam Faraj to name but a few), most visibly at the time through the assassination of Egypt's president Sadat in 1981 (Sivan 1985; Kepel 1984; Jansen 1986). Dependent on outlook, Jihadists came either to represent a violent fringe of the broader Islamist movement (initially, but decreasingly referred to as Islamic Fundamentalism), or – particularly in non-academic literature – used interchangeably with Islamism in spite of this phenomenon's multifaceted character (a confusion ongoing to this day) (Kramer 2002).

The general study of non-violent Islamists generally downplayed the role of religion as a key driver, whereas the dominant analytical framework through which the emerging wave of Jihadist activism was understood was that of a radically new form of political violence with particular traits born directly out of its religious nature. A series of seemingly religiously motivated terrorist attacks in the 1980s and 1990s provided the empirical basis for what became known as the "new terrorism" thesis demarcating its dissimilarity with previous forms of

political violence. These were Hizbollah's 1983 suicide attacks against US and French targets in Lebanon, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, the 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway by the multi-religious cult Aum Shinrikyo, and the 1998 al-Qaeda-orchestrated attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, to name the most prominent. The arguments behind "new terrorism" addressed two central aspects of the phenomenon's religious character: its opaque motivations and its indiscriminate nature.

American scholar of religion Mark Juergensmeyer argued that the new form of terrorism was distinctly different from "old terrorism" whose proponents carried out attacks that "could be understood as tactics aimed at achieving clear-cut political goals" (Juergensmeyer 2000). To the contrary, new terrorism appeared "pointless since it does not lead directly to any strategic goal, and it seems exotic since it is frequently couched in the visionary rhetoric of religion" (Juergensmeyer 2000, 3). Falling short of an actual strategy, the new terrorism was considered similar to "performance violence," which used spectacular attacks akin to religious rituals in order to instigate a religious, millenarian awakening, oftentimes with the US being cast as the earthly representative of pure evil.

Based on the understanding of the opaque religious driver of terrorism, US terrorism historian Walter Laqueur pointed out the indiscriminate nature of new terrorism. Due to its religious foundation, he argued, "new terrorists" were not bound by the same moral restrictions as earlier forms of terrorists, and would willingly engage in mass killings if presented the opportunity (Laqueur 1999). Laqueur found support from former RAND director Bruce Hoffman who argued – supported by qualitative data (Enders and Sandler 2000) – that "new religious" terrorism was more deadly and indiscriminate than previous kinds and that this ought to prompt a revision of "our notions of the stereotypical terrorist organization" (Hoffman 1993).

In many ways, the period from 9/11 and forward was marked by the scholarly debate of the fundamental tenets of the "new terrorism" theory, which was not limited to the question of Jihadism, but nonetheless revolved predominantly around it. Was "new terrorism" that different from "old terrorism"? And what role did religion actually play in determining the actions of so-called religious terrorists?

Early criticism of the "new terrorism" approach pointed to the predominance of Western (particularly American) scholars studying terrorism, meaning that there was a narrow focus on the threat of terrorism to Western democracies, and less so on the origins and explanations of the phenomenon (Silke 2004). Outside of the West, most terrorism occurred in relation to guerrilla warfare and civil war rather than through clandestine cells carrying out attacks, which was the predominant understanding of terrorism in Europe and the US (Corrado 1981). As a result, the latter trend came to dominate discussions of the Jihadist threat (particularly as 9/11 seemed to confirm the connection between international terrorism and Jihadism), in spite of the occurrence of Jihadist organizations based in domestic conflicts in Algeria and Egypt in the 1990s, to mention the most prominent cases.

The debate about the religious nature of "new terrorism" would not fully unfold until after 9/11, becoming a core argument in the field of "critical terrorism studies," which – for example – criticized Western scholarship of Jihadism for being embedded in a predominantly Western, secular tradition inherently adverse to any aggregation of religion and politics. The main criticism of "new terrorism" scholars' attribution of religiously-based motivations to terrorists argued that perpetrators of terrorism – like any form of political violence – while nominally religious, communist, or nationalistic, were – at core – the same. As such, religion only served as an ideational framework for activism that essentially pursued political goals (Crenshaw 1981).

Then, two rough approaches to the question of "religious terrorism" emerged: one detecting the homogenous, global occurrence of "new" religiously inspired terrorism; and another arguing in favor of the continuity of Jihadist violence with earlier forms of political violence as well as the generalizability of the phenomenon to established theories in the field of political science, terrorism, and international relations.

The Study of Jihadism (2001-2014)

The 9/11 attack proved to many the fundamental premise of the "new terrorism"-theory, particularly concerning its re-

ligious and indiscriminate nature. In the words of Alex P. Schmid, "many of these new 'experts' eagerly embraced the notion (proposed by Walter Laqueur and others) of a 'new terrorism' that was qualitatively different from non-state terrorism before 2001" (Schmid 2011, 459). As such, the study of Jihadism largely grew out of the study of terrorism either through the prism of "new terrorism" or – increasingly – as a reaction against that theory's fundamental theses in attempts to rationalize and comprehend the drivers of Jihadist violence. The latter approach tended to downplay religion as a causal factor either due to fears that it would vilify Islam, the religion, arouse fears of "orientalism," or simply due to the discomfort many disciplines felt treating something as abstract as religion as an explanatory factor.

This section identifies and discusses the broader trends in the study of Jihadism after 2001 using Volpi's categorization of broad academic approaches. These are: the field of security studies (which became the main proponent of "new terrorism" explanations); political science (which generally argued that socio-political circumstances creates political violence that is then framed by discourses and practices of Jihadist ideology); and thirdly, the "diffuse mix of area studies and studies on Islamic theology" (which – according to Volpi – highlights ideology as the "main single cause and driver" of Jihadist violence) (Volpi 2010, 151).[4]

From their different vantage points, these fields shed light on the question of the conceptual level on which Jihadists are "born"; does it start with the individual or group and his/her/ their personal experiences of grievance, exclusion and repression, framed by the identification with broader, "*ummah*-level" systems of solidarity? Is it, rather, a certain sociopolitical context of conflict that adopts Jihad as a framework of legitimizing militancy? Or is it – spurred on by globalization and modern technology – the global reach of Jihadism, the ideology?

Security and Terrorism Studies

As mentioned, the field of terrorism studies initially became a central arena for the discussion of Jihadism, although the field would become increasingly diverse in time. The notion that al-Qaeda exerted control over a vast network of terrorist cells and

4. Volpi also highlights the distinct field of behavioral psychology, which points to socio-psychological context in creating violent individuals, who then rationalize behavior by refer ence to a specific ideology. This approach is not directly discussed in this article.

organizations was an appealing view to both "new terrorism" researchers, as well as US policy makers looking for expert underpinnings of the global "war on terror." The increase in terrorist attacks in the West in the subsequent years, inspired and/or directed by al-Qaeda, further directed attention towards al-Qaeda-led clandestine networks as the primary terrorist facilitator rather than the classical hierarchical terrorist organization. This scholarly focus also meant that Jihadism came to be seen primarily as a terrorist movement (with al-Qaeda at the helm) less preoccupied with the goals of classical terrorist organizations – the control of state power or at least separatist ambitions – but rather oriented towards symbolic, ideologically-driven terrorism against the West (Devji 2005, 9), or as a global struggle for Islamic primacy (Fettweis 2009, 275). With the dismantling of al-Qaeda's bases and training camps in Afghanistan in 2001, the move from a physical organization to an ideology came to play a central role in the conceptualization of Jihadism as a movement of "like-minded local representatives" that worked towards the same strategic goal laid out by al-Qaeda (Hoffman 2004, 552).

This approach had several issues. By equating Jihadism with al-Qaeda's goals and strategies, divergence from that model became obscured. The problem was that little scholarly consensus existed about what was actually meant by "al-Qaeda." That specific label was used to describe everything from the relatively tight-knit organization of Arab foreign fighters based in the borderlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan, over a global terrorist network, to a movement of "imitators and emulators," leading to a lack of scholarly consensus about how to classify al-Qaeda, and Jihadist organizations in general (Jackson 2006, 251).

Analyses of al-Qaeda's "franchising strategy" reflects this imprecision. From 2003 and forward, the group obtained pledges of allegiance (*bāi´a)* from a variety of Jihadist groups across the Muslim World, and a wide variety of groups was lumped into the al-Qaeda "cloud" seen as an indication of its ideological reach and global strategy. However, this dominant focus on al-Qaeda meant that critical debates about what – apart from loose reference to "ideology" – tied together global Jihadism and its constituent parts remained on the periphery of mainstream debates.

Some researchers fundamentally questioned the global aspect of al-Qaeda and Jihadism throughout this period. Perhaps the bluntest characterization of the confusion within the field can be attributed to Xavier Raufer, who as early as 2003 fundamentally questioned whether anyone actually knew "what" al-Qaeda was. Raufer argued that it was not an organization in the classical sense, but part of a "nebula, a protoplasm with not one mold, no unique way to organize, but rather each group (e.g. the Egyptians and Pakistanis) creating its own cells within the nebula, out of its own jihadi culture, its own local habits" (Raufer 2003). Lahoud similarly argued that there is "no binding centralized authority responsible for issuing direct orders for the actions carried out in al-Qaeda's name," and that any indications of unity is merely a result of the "rhetoric of al-Qaeda's leadership" (Lahoud 2010, 5).

Political Science

Gradually supplementing research into Jihadism after 9/11, explanations nested in sociopolitical circumstances and context (rather than the broad brush of "new terrorism" proponents) developed competing hypotheses about the drivers of Jihadism. As such, rather than being a unique phenomenon developed in isolation, Jihadism was inscribed into the overall trend of Islamic revival in the 20th century as a "marginal part of the Islamist political landscape" (Hegghammer 2006).

For these researchers, the 2001-invasion of Afghanistan and subsequent degradation of al-Qaeda served to proliferate its adherents across the Muslim World as these "Afghan Arabs" found new battlefields. Where terrorism researchers such as Hoffman saw a deliberate strategy behind the spread of Jihadists in conflicts in this period, others downplayed direct agency in this development, pointing instead to the transformation of al-Qaeda from a physical organization into an immaterial "social movement," ideology, or brand readily picked up by uncoordinated sympathizers, rather than a directly coordinated network (Braniff and Moghadam 2011).

The role of direct agency – and thus of whether Jihadism was a cohesive, strategically-oriented militant movement or a rough ideological framework fitted to local circumstances – became a key fault line between these two approaches. Norwe-

gian Jihadist expert Thomas Hegghammer saw the particular constitution of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan as a central factor in the subsequent spread of Jihadism. As that milieu was dismantled after 2001, the "organizational glue" (the strong personal relationships and the ideological unity) that was key to understanding the "internal cohesion" of the al-Qaeda network was degraded. The network became "strategically disoriented" and to a large degree reverted to the schism and fault-lines dominant in the previous period of Islamist militancy, not least that of the primary of local versus global violent activism (Hegghammer 2006, 14).

In the post-2001 context, Fawaz Gerges redirected attention to the central schism between global and local jihadists, which had already been pointed out in Faraj's seminal work on the duty of Muslims to wage Jihad – *farīḍa al-ġāʾiba* (*The Neglected Duty*) from 1981 – even as he identified the far enemy as Israel, rather than the West or the US specifically (Jansen, 20). Gerges, in turn, argued that the "far enemy" approach of al-Qaeda by the mid-2000s (targeting the West through international terrorist attacks) had come to represent a minority view among Jihadists, and that the struggle against the "near enemy" (corrupted Muslim regimes) had become the priority for the majority of Jihadists (Gerges 2005). Increasingly, this distinction became engraved into Jihadism study doxa, although the question of whether this distinction was based on strategy (and opportunity) or ideology (and theological inclination) remained an open question. Although this distinction indicated great variety and divergence from the al-Qaeda model, the "health" of that organization continued to be the barometer of the entire field of Jihadist groups.

Further indicating the flexible nature of Jihadist ideology, which was being continuously shaped by the ripple effects of global politics such as the 2003-invasion of Iraq, Hegghammer himself later problematized the sharp distinction between local and global jihadist, acknowledging that a certain "hybridization" between local "revolutionary Islamism" and the transnational goals and strategies of global Jihadism had occurred since 2001. The reasons for the hybridization, he argued, were a combination of overall changes in the strategic landscape of the Middle East (increased US/Western involvement in the Middle East as well as repression by local regimes) along with the ide-

ological homogenization of Jihadist groups facilitated by new communication technologies (Hegghammer 2009b). The current example of IS seems to confirm the hybridization trend, although it appears that the prioritization of international terrorism over domestic insurgency is driven much more by contingency than strategy. IS did not "dispatch" seasoned Iraqi or Chechen veterans of Jihad to Paris or Brussels, but used French or Belgian members with existing ties and – not least – motivation to strike their home countries. It is questionable whether IS would have taken this strategic route had it not had access to a pool of foreign fighters.

Nonetheless, the distinction between global and local Jihad directed attention to the fact that the Jihadist phenomenon was "decentralized and multi-polar" in nature, as well as the fact that a multitude of "diverging political and strategic priorities" found expression in it (Hegghammer 2009a, 33). Al-Qaeda's franchising strategy (and the subsequent adoption of its name by various groups) too was scrutinized. Barack Mendelsohn contended that not only was its strategy of branching out inconsistent,[5] it actually undermined al-Qaeda's claim to lead a united Jihadist front. This was the case for two main reasons. Firstly, because branching out to affiliates that represented nationally based "jihads" undermined al-Qaeda's general message of global religious – rather than nationalistic – identity and affiliation. Secondly, because branching out the al-Qaeda-brand resulted in a loss of control over its authority and credentials. Not only did it exhibit deep-rooted strategic disagreements within al-Qaeda, such as the "near" versus "far" enemy debate. It also exposed it to criticism on behalf of the behavior of the affiliates that were to transmit its global reach in its name. For example, the brutality of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which was internally opposed by the al-Qaeda leadership, severely damaged the main organization's reputation in the broader Muslim public (Mendelsohn 2010).

Al-Qaeda, in this sense, represented a unique phenomenon in both the fields of terrorism and Jihadism because it "occupied" territory in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but organized itself as a global/transnational terrorist facilitator managing a global Jihadist milieu through training camps and ideological indoctrination. While it willingly highlighted its hegemony and embodiment of the Jihadist movement, micro-level studies of "local

5. Among the arguments Mendelsohn makes for the inconsistency of this approach is the fact that the franchising did not begin until 2003, five years after bin Laden called for global unity in fighting the West. In addition, some of the earliest groups committing terrorism in the name of al-Qaeda were actually never incorporated into the organization.

Jihads" began to challenge the view that Jihadism was a coherent, ideologically-driven "global insurgency" (Kilcullen 2005). Rather than studying Jihadist groups through the lens of al-Qaeda, region-based specialists began conducting research on these affiliated groups in this period, tracking the effects of their affiliation with global Jihadism on a local scale. In several cases, these highlight local conflict dynamics and grievances as the first and foremost explanation for violent activism, and global Jihadism as only a roughly adopted narrative framework of their struggle.

Researchers conducting studies in Indonesia and the Philippines pointed to limited ties to the al-Qaeda-core otherwise seen as a key instigator of militancy in that area, instead highlighting long-standing, local socio-political roots as the cause of Jihadism in that region. Along those lines, it was argued that South Asian Jihadism was inherently different from Middle Eastern Jihadism. This was the case because it focused more on the "political aspect of jihad rather than just the religious and tactical aspects" meaning, in practice, that the goal of creating an Islamic state generally surpassed doctrinal considerations, and even the use of violence was conditional and could be retracted (Acharya and Acharya 2007, 79).

Similarly, Jean-Luc Marret's 2008 study of the then newly constituted al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) questioned the view that the Algerian-based Jihadist group's official affiliation with al-Qaeda prompted any fundamental changes. The dual phenomenon of "local reality" (the local culture and history) and "international solidarity" (which, apart from branding, brought with it practices of tactical imitation of al-Qaeda) led Marret to the conclusion that AQIM was a "'glocal' group, a hybrid structure that weds both the local specificities and goals – to create a Maghrebian caliphate, and global operational methods" (Marret 2008, 541-552).

Gradually, then, two rough vantage points to the question of the drivers of Jihadism appeared. These adopted either – on one extreme – the macro-level perspective that Jihadism was a global insurgency actively spurred on by the ideology and strategy formulated and asserted by al-Qaeda, or – at the polar opposite – the micro-level perspective that Jihadism embodied only an (albeit) easily adoptable framework for domestically based conflict, but that this did not represent any form of cohesiveness or strategic leadership. In many cases, however, ideology was at-

tributed a central role in both explanatory models, and the study of Jihadist ideology became the centerpiece of the religious and area studies field that gradually unfolded in this period.

Religious/Middle East Studies

While "new terrorism" advocates based their assumptions of the religious motivations at the core of Jihadism on little concrete evidence apart from speculations into the motives of the assailants (expressed in particular through a fascination with suicide terrorists), the increasing access to Jihadist primary material in the form of various forms of theological treatises and strategic expositions in the decade after 9/11 prompted the sub field of "Jihadi strategic studies" (Lia and Hegghammer 2004). Close readings of prominent al-Qaeda ideologues and strategists – in addition to the resuscitation of historical figures such as Sayyid Qutb and Abu Ala al-Mawdudi who were also revered by contemporary Jihadists – seemingly provided a direct line to the understanding of the Jihadi mindset.

Gradually, the contours of the Jihadi "epistemic community" (Hegghammer 2017, 10) was uncovered by researchers studying these Jihadist theorists and theologians. As early as 2002, Reuven Paz pointed to the existence of a primarily online-based "culture of Global Jihad" that was being formulated by Islamic scholars supportive of the legitimacy of Jihad under current circumstances. A 2006-study of Jihadist-inspired websites showed that it was relatively unprolific (to Westerners, at least) Jihadist theologians – such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qatada al-Filistini, Abu Bashir al-Tartusi, etc. – rather than the Jihadist strategists – such as Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Musab al-Suri, etc. – that were quoted the most throughout resources being shared in those online communities (Heffelfinger 2006). This indicated that the "glue" of the Jihadist movement was not necessarily the strategic leadership of al-Qaeda's veterans, but the socio-religious framework provided by the aforementioned scholars; in spite of al-Qaeda's attempts to convince Muslims of the political and strategic bona fides of their specific approach, what was sought was theological viability and legitimacy from actual religious authorities.

Increasingly, as the sensationalism following 9/11 had sub-

tracted, a community of scholars, mostly with backgrounds in Middle East studies began to uncover the modern history of Jihadism based to a large degree on increased access to Arabic-language primary material. Gilles Kepel (2003) tracked the foundational context of Jihadism to 1980s Afghanistan and attempts by the Afghan-Arab mujahidin to formulate a modern, theologically sustainable form of Jihad as an individual duty necessary to mobilize fighters to fight the Soviet invaders. Quintan Wiktorowicz's (2006) seminal (and much-referenced) article on the anatomy of the Salafist Movement, identified "Salafi-Jihadism" as a radical, militant minority of the broader Salafi current of orthodox, mainly Gulf-Arab, Islamic purists. Hegghammer (2010) further identified 1970s Saudi Arabia as the setting for the radicalization of the Salafi-movement prompted by the introduction of scores of politically motivated, exiled Muslim Brotherhood members from primarily Syria and Egypt. The most authoritative work in this period is perhaps the 2009-collection by Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, which posits Salafism as a global, revivalist, and strongly identity-based religious movement with Jihadism as its violent fringe.

This line of literature helped engrave the term "Salafi Jihadi" into the mainstream of Jihadism research as a term denoting the acceptance of Jihad as a theologically legitimate framework of violence, but specifically framed by the puritanical religious current of Salafism. As such, intra-Salafi theological debates about questions of *'aqīda* (religious creed) and *manhaj* (method of implementing said creed) were placed at the core of differences between violent and non-violent Salafists (Haykel 2009), and the specific Jihadi-Salafi approach to the question of *takfīr* (excommunicating other Muslims) was seen as a central driver of specific types of Jihadi activism (Lahoud 2010).

Others remained skeptical of the value of the Jihadi primary sources literature. Volpi (2010, 167-168) identified a tendency among scholars of "ideological studies" to attribute too much explanatory power to scripture (both Jihadist strategic literature and ancient and contemporary theological texts) as well as particular ideologies (Jihadism, Salafi-Jihadism, etc.). The fact that millions of Muslims have been exposed to these ideological currents and arguments, but only few have become actual terrorists – and similarly, that the large majority of Islamists

are peaceful (Gunning and Jackson 2011) – is a strong indication that ideology exclusively cannot explain Jihadism. Rather, Volpi argues that "globalization processes always require to be articulated in (and are in turn influenced by) local, social, political and cultural settings" (2010, 176).

Yet Volpi's notion of researchers that view ideology as the "main single cause and river" of Jihadism seems overly simplistic. Such one-dimensional explanations can, of course, be found. Their usual line of argument is that rather than being a reaction to current grievances (such as "modernity, globalization, U.S. foreign policy, or a clash of civilizations"), Jihadist oriented themselves in regards to a "centuries old struggle for dominance within the Islamic and particularly Arab world" (Turner 2010). However, most scholars relying on access to Jihadi primary sources rarely held such uncompromising views, which were mostly found among security and terrorism scholars and US "think-tankers" close to policy circles. To take one example, rather than seeing strategic Jihadist narratives as a direct manifestation of reality, researchers pointed to a schism within Jihadism between practitioners (i.e. those mujahidin active in Jihad) and theorists (the scholars creating the theological foundation for Jihadism). A key dynamic in the construction of Jihadism as an ideology, as Jihad-scholar David Cook pointed out, was this deepening schism. The mujahidin, while requiring the theological backing of the theorists, also needed to maintain Jihad as a flexible tool of warfare, even if it meant disregarding or manipulating the theorists (Cook 2009). This has at times led to open conflict between the two camps, as the activists believe they have the right to formulate Jihadi doctrine because they view their militancy as being of higher value than mere theoretical speculation, indicating a more complex relationship between strategy and ideology than meets the eye.

The Study of Jihadism (2014-)

A decrease in al-Qaeda-led and inspired international terrorist attacks from 2006 and forward preceded the final and current period of Jihadism research. Other events similarly contributed to the sense that the Jihadist vanguard organization had lost its ability to direct a global campaign against the West (Gerges

2011). The Arab Spring-revolts of 2011, which initially revealed competing Islamist alternatives to Jihadism, propelled the argument that al-Qaeda had now decisively failed in its strategy to mobilize the Muslim masses. The killing of bin Laden that same year robbed Jihadism of its most prominent leader. Some even began talking of "post-Jihadism," a term – born in the Egyptian and Libyan contexts – describing the process of "de-radicalization" of jihadist groups formerly affiliated with al-Qaeda (Ashour 2011). In the West, the preoccupation with al-Qaeda so dominant in the years after 9/11 was replaced by a renewed focus on processes of radicalization among homegrown terrorists and so-called "lone wolf" attackers. There were, of course, still voices – mainly American – that insisted on the continued threat from Global Jihadism and al-Qaeda (Hoffman 2013; Braniff and Moghadam 2011). These scholars insisted either on the continued relevance of al-Qaeda, or on the resilience of the ideology it championed and its narrative of global Muslim grievance and victimization.

These latter voices were emboldened by the increasingly obvious presence of Jihadist groups in the Yemen conflict and the Syrian Civil War from 2011 and onwards, culminating in IS takeover of Mosul, Iraq's second city, in 2014, which woke the world up to a new reality of a reinvigorated Jihadist movement. Given the sharp contrast with the view painted above of a fatigued Jihadist movement, this sudden and explosive development meant that the fundamental question of what was the driving factor behind Jihadist activity resurfaced with force. This, however, was not necessarily a question of right and wrong. The al-Qaeda organization *was* inarguably decimated, understandably so, after a decade of being besieged by the US global anti-terrorism campaign, even as Jihadism as a potent militant ideology was still attractive to many. Researchers arguing in favor of the continued threat of Jihadism highlighted this sustained potency, even though al-Qaeda's role in that development was somewhat marginal.

The argument forwarded here is that the dominant focus on al-Qaeda in the preceding decade (and the subsequent "cooling" of interest with this group's marginalization) "desensitized" research on Jihadism to the possibility of something as significant as IS anno 2013-14. IS's rise to fame thus fundamentally challenged central presuppositions about the drivers

and actions of Jihadists. Its takeover of northwestern Iraq and (north) eastern Syria fundamentally challenged the notion that al-Qaeda-like terrorist cells and networks – rather than hierarchical organizations vying for political power – were the main purveyors of Jihadism. Its replication of al-Qaeda's franchising strategy fundamentally questioned perceptions of al-Qaeda's role as hegemon of a coherent Jihadist movement. Its brutality and doctrinal approaches to warfare and governance revived forgotten debates of a "new kind" of religious terrorism. Moreover, the terror campaign against the West it instigated and inspired, fulfilled Hegghammer's hybridization theory and turned concepts of "near" and "far" enemies on their head.

Such revision of accepted "truths" within a relatively limited field of study is arguably indicative of the fragmented and insufficiently cross-disciplinary disposition of the main approaches (roughly sketched in the preceding section), as well as the overreliance on – paraphrasing Volpi's criticism of the uncritical adoption of "common sense" explanations (2010, 155) – generally accepted "truths" drawn from secondary literature not sufficiently challenged.

A recent positive development, however, has been the deepening of access on multiple levels – and a subsequent increase in the availability of primary material – to the study of broader aspects of Jihadism. This has found expression in a variation of edited volumes focusing on different aspects of Jihadism, such as the development of a specific Jihadist culture to override local cultural practices hindering global Jihadist solidarity (Hegghammer 2017), studies of Jihadist practices on social media platforms, as well as a number of significant studies of foreign fighters returning from Iraq and Syria primarily.

The growth of modern communication technology has proven a mixed blessing. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (and more recently Telegram and WhatsApp) enabled Jihadi propagandists hitherto unseen access to potential recruits, as well as encrypted modes of communication (Klausen 2015). Yet from a scholarly perspective, this access has also given Jihadists a voice away from the ideological treatises otherwise taken to represent the entire militant movement through the increasing scholarly reliance on interviews with Jihadi internet activists and spokespeople (e.g. Revkin 2016; Hamming 2016). Particularly studies of foreign fighters

who went and returned from Syria and Iraq has provided valuable insights into the inner workings of Jihadi organizations. Similarly, the "paper trail" – the leftovers of administrative documents used by IS, most prominently – enabled research into Jihadist governance and administration. Of course, this phenomenon preceded IS's Caliphal project in 2014, not least by IS's own former incarnation, Islamic State in Iraq, which voiced its "state" ambition as early as 2006. Other examples of Jihadist governance had at the time been seen in Yemen and Mali.

In general then, as Jihadism became a more intimately familiar and almost every day-like (yet seemingly increasingly abhorrent and brutal) new aspects of Jihadism were gradually uncovered contributing to more diverse interpretations coinciding – not without reason – with the visible fragmentation of the Jihadist movement between IS and al-Qaeda.

Main Debates

Not only new approaches were being debated, however. The long running discussion of the primacy of religion in explaining IS reflected the comeback of ideological explanations of terrorism and Jihadism. While the very visible schism between al-Qaeda and IS made it difficult to argue that Jihadism was a single unified movement, it prompted a wave of research into the ideological differences between Jihadist "strategists" (represented by al-Qaeda) and "doctrinaires" (represented by IS).

Especially the foreign fighter flow to Iraq and Syria – arguably the largest of its kind modern history – and IS's replication of al-Qaeda's franchising strategy, which saw it accept pledges of allegiance from a variety of Jihadist groups from Afghanistan to Nigeria, provided new ammunition to researchers who advocated for the cohesive nature of Jihadism. The fact that IS spread so visibly was seen as a clear indication of a (if not unified, then) highly interconnected and concerted movement motivated not – like al-Qaeda and its followers – by waging global insurgency against the West, but by establishing a living, breathing Caliphate.

The revived focus on foreign fighters was one aspect of the renewed focus on ideology and its global reach. The sub-field

of social movement studies – at this point an established approach to the study of Jihadism (e.g. Wiktorowicz 2004; Della Porta 2013) – became a significant framework for analyses of the Jihadist "comeback." Assaf Moghadam's twin definition of Jihadism as "a social movement (that represents) a conscious, concerted, and sustained effort by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means," and "a transnational movement composed of individuals, cells, networks, and organizations tied by a common adherence to Jihadist ideology" (2017, 123) reflected the contemporary scholarly consensus that Jihadism consisted of both a range of organizations and networks, as well as a more abstract ideology and identity-based "movement."

Jihadism and Religion Revisited

The discussion of the role of religion found multiple expressions in the post-IS media landscape, particularly because of IS's visible doctrinarian approach to religious ideology and eschatological framing of its struggle, which differed to a large degree from al-Qaeda's somewhat tempered and calculated strategic message. Among some scholars, religious ideology experienced a comeback as an explanatory tool, or contemporary events confirmed their long-held assumptions about its prominence.

A seminal debate on this topic was triggered by journalist Graeme Wood's article in *the Atlantic* titled "What ISIS Really Wants," which, according to the author, was written in reaction to the prevalent view in the US – held by then president Barack Obama among others – that IS had nothing to do with Islam and was in fact "un-Islamic." Based on interviews with prominent Western-based ideologues supportive of IS, Wood polemically concluded that "the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very* Islamic." This is because "virtually every major decision and law promulgated by the Islamic State" adheres to the ideological framework of the "Prophetic methodology" (*manhaj*), the practical expression of its understanding of the Sharia law. In other words, religious considerations lie at the heart of almost all of IS's actions (Woods 2015). Mirroring "new terrorism" advocates two decades earlier, researchers found backing in quantitative studies that seemed to confirm this picture, argu-

ing for example that not only is there a correlation between religion and terrorism, but the more prominent the role of religiosity is within an organization and to its ideology, the more violent and deadly it is (e.g. Burstein 2016).

This debate was constantly rekindled by news of Islamically illiterate IS recruits, the "secular habits" of some of the European terrorists acting on behalf of the Jihadists, and IS's general brutality, casting doubt on the organization's Islamic credentials. Rather than a violent reading of the Quran leading to political violence, it was argued that (an atmosphere ripe with) political violence leads to a violent reading of the Quran (Cottee 2017).

More nuanced takes on the question – following Omar Ashour's definition[6] of Jihadism – underlined the role of religion in legitimizing violence (as opposed to directly causing it). Criminologist Simon Cottee argued that if IS was "animated by exclusively secular political purposes" and exploited, rather than adhered to, theological principles, "this would not show that religious scripture does not shape the group's behavior, since what the group is able to do is limited not only by what it can legitimize within the bounds of Islamic scripture, but also by what courses of action it can plausibly range within this" (2017, 445).

Shedding light on the complex relationship between religion, ideology and strategy, one example often presented is that of the Syrian town of Dabiq. A small town in the countryside north of Aleppo, this town gave name to IS's English language news magazine evoking the Dabiq-area's connection to eschatological *hadīth* texts indicating the occurrence of a great battle that would initiate the end days. The fact that ISIS captured this place of "little strategic importance" (McCants 2014) was seen as definite proof that IS was a machine prepped for doomsday and that decision-making was subservient to this belief.

Yet for the many researchers evoking this example, little (if any) rationalization of why Dabiq is "strategically insignificant" has yet to be given. In fact, it can just as well be argued that Dabiq was of significant strategic value to IS when they captured it in 2014, while only later becoming dispensable as outside intervention made holding it militarily untenable in the face of overwhelming opposition. The hill north of the town provided a vantage point over an otherwise flat agricul-

6. Ashour (2011) defines Jihadism as the belief that "armed confrontation with political rivals is a theologically legitimate and instrumentally efficient method for socio-political change."

tural landscape. Directly west of Dabiq ran the so-called "Mara Line,"[7] designating the supply corridor for the Syrian rebels – from whom IS had captured Dabiq – into the rebel stronghold Aleppo. East of the town lay IS main supply route of foreign fighters across the Turkish border; a crucial passage for IS at the time and the defense of which was a key priority. In October 2016, IS was pushed out of Dabiq as the Turkish military intervened in Northern Syria offering "minimal resistance"[8] to the advancing forces rather than staging a mass mobilization of fighters that ought to reflect the ideological importance attributed to the town. Furthermore, IS shortly thereafter renamed the Dabiq-magazine *Rumiya,* or Rome – a general moniker of the West – as to avoid further association with the place.

The point here is not necessarily that one approach has more explanatory value than others do (although that could well have been the case). While taking Dabiq might have provided a welcome opportunity to arouse eschatological excitement among its rank and file, studies into the importance of borders in domestic conflicts could have usefully supplemented the sudden attention being paid to *hadīth* literature in explaining IS's strategy (e.g. Salehyan 2009). Rather, the – obvious – point is that a multitude of motivations on different organizational levels influences decision-making, including both basic strategic calculus and ideological fervor. Sometimes they overlap (as in the case of Dabiq), and at other times, they clash.[9]

The persistence of the global/local gap

The advent of IS also came to frame the discussion of global or local factors in explaining the persistence and growth of Jihadism in Muslim communities around the world.

Hoffman saw in IS the realization of al-Qaeda's operational chief Sayf al-Adl's grand strategy formulated in 2005, which predicted the establishment of a Caliphate in the period from 2013-2016. Given their mutual ideology, shared strategy, and hatred of the West, Hoffman (2016) predicted that IS and al-Qaeda would plausibly join forces in the near future.

The question of fragmentation, which had previously been a central part of the argument against al-Qaeda's purported command of global Jihadism, returned to the fore. Crenshaw (2015) argued that the level of fragmentation and doctrinal

7. Running from Azaz on the Turkish border to Mara close to the outskirts of Aleppo; see twitter.com/centcom/status/730059989977567232?lang=da (accessed 28 March 2018).
8. "Syria Conflict: IS 'ousted from symbolic town of Dabiq,'" BBC, accessed July 19, 2018, bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37670998.
9. Such as in the case of former number two in the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) – IS's predecessor group – the Egyptian Abu Ḥamza al-Muhajir, who, according to a critical inside account, was "obsessed with the apocalypse" to the point that it was "leading him to make irrational strategic decisions" (Fishman 2015).

disagreements fundamentally questioned the widespread notion that there was a Jihadist movement seeing as "rivalry among like-minded militant groups is as common as cooperation. Identities and allegiances shift. Groups align and re-align according to changing expectations about the future." Jihadist groups' position and allegiance within the global Jihadist movement was fundamentally decided by its immediate socio-political context.

Norwegian Jihadism researcher Brynjar Lia (2016) maintained, in contrast, that in spite of internal conflict, al-Qaeda upheld significant branches in the Arabian Peninsula and the Sahel demonstrating the continued appeal of its ideology. Furthermore, the presence of a widespread "popular support base" as well as the notion that Jihadism is still completely unrivalled as a global, revolutionary ideology, made Lia identify contemporary Jihadism as a "global rebel movement."

The persistence of such fundamental disagreements almost twenty years after bin Laden first introduced the world to global jihad indicates both that studies into the impact of al-Qaeda (and others) and its ideology on local conflicts is "at an early stage" (Deol and Kazmi 2011, 1), and that there is a shortage of theoretical frameworks to bridge the gap between the global and local levels of analysis. While acknowledging that "Jihadist ideas exist in specific contexts" (Ibid., 3), as exemplified above, macro level changes can significantly affect the trajectory of Jihadist ideology and the prominence (or decline) of individual Jihadist groups (Drevon 2017).

Several recent studies have explored this complex relationship by using theories of "glocalization" that seemingly act as a filter that sustain local inclinations in the face of global solidarities and influences, while processes of "localization" has pointed to the complexities of convergence between the global and the local.

In her 2014 study of foreign fighter influence on Chechen Jihadism, Kristin M. Bakke pointed to the process of "localization" as a key variable in determining the effect of outside influences on a domestic conflict.[10] The processes that determined whether the outcome of domestic-level interaction with the Jihadist movement was positive or negative was that of "localization." The success of a given tactic or organizational form, for example, depended on how it resonated with local

10. The phenomenon of "localization" with regards to Jihadism and terrorism was noted by Sedgwick already in 2007 where he argues that global Islamist terrorism can be considered the localized "Jihadist" variant of modern terrorism.

norms and practices. If it was not accepted, the "host"-group might become unpopular among locals and risk aggression or, at least, a reduced mobilization pool (Bakke 2014).

Recent research has also shed light on the complex relationship between al-Qaeda and its Syrian affiliate in its various guises. Jabhat al-Nuṣra, which in 2016 became Hayat Taḥrir al-Sham (HTS), sought affiliation with al-Qaeda in 2013 in the context of its conflict with what was then known as ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). It became increasingly clear, however, that there was an unsustainable balancing act between tending local interests, staying relevant to the Syrian Revolution, and trying to build and control a broad, "inclusive" Islamist coalition on one hand, and, on the other, staying a part, and receiving the benefits, of the Jihadist Movement led by al-Qaeda. Eventually, in the course of 2016 and 2017, HTS broke ties with its mother organization in an attempt to evade the negative consequences of the al-Qaeda brand in the eyes of the foreign powers increasingly active in Syria (Lister 2018).

Along similar lines, new research on IS's ties to Jihadist milieus in Indonesia and Malaysia points to a more complex interchange between the local and the global. Similar to previous micro-level studies referenced above, these authors point to a process of "glocalization" whereby the ideology and narratives of IS were "adapted to – and by – local conditions." Rather than being lured by the universalist nature of the IS ideology, for these Jihadists "local political and religious dynamics played a key role in creating a conducive and facilitative environment." In short, local grievances were the incubator for global Jihadism (Schulze and Liow 2018).

Even IS – with its global aspirations, numerous affiliated organizations across the Muslim world, and very visible foreign fighter contingencies – have, through its various organizational manifestations, always had a leadership populated mainly by local Iraqis (Zeidel 2017; Whiteside 2017), and its strategy has arguably always been solidly tied to Iraqi conflict dynamics born out of the post-2003 period.

Bridging the conceptual gap between macro and micro level studies, with the former identifying global ideological narratives and processes of inspiration, imitation, and outreach (often dependent on the role ascribed to a Jihadi "hegemon" such as IS or al-Qaeda), and the latter detecting complex patterns

of interaction between local dynamics and global solidarities, is a central piece of the puzzle in the understanding of Jihadism. The studies quoted above show the value of incorporating theoretical frameworks (such as "glocalization" and "localization," to mention a few) from other disciplines into the study of Jihadism in general, and the integration of macro and micro level approaches, in particular.

Conclusion

What these debates tells us about the study of global Jihadism today, is that two decades after Bin Laden introduced his version of global Jihad against the "Crusaders and the Jews," the research field, having otherwise produced countless excellent studies, still appears unable to fully agree on fundamental issues. With the latest paradigmatic change in research on Jihadism in the form of IS's frontal assault on Jihadi doxa, these analytical gaps seem only to have widened.

As indicated above, there is reason to critically assess the literature that sees Jihadism as a strategically and ideologically coherent movement. It attributes too much weight to ideology and readings of Jihadi strategic literature and Jihadi religious treatises, which also tends to attribute too much explanatory force to religion. It operates largely on a macro level with little appreciation of micro-level dynamics that, by closer inspection, complicates transnational interaction; and it tends to carry a bias towards the most visible and spectacular expressions of the phenomenon, be it al-Qaeda or IS, without considering broader and on-ground dynamics. This has arguably been a feature of Jihadism research (and terrorism research) at least since the days of the "new terrorism" theory, where the over-reliance on a few but highly visible cases of religious terrorism created the basis for a much broader ideological and decontextualized reading of the Jihadist movement and its goals and ambitions.

However, reverse points of criticism also apply to "micro-level" advocates. Firstly, the "classical terrorism" discourse, which seems to have experienced a comeback in recent years, by focusing primarily on "rational" motives of terrorism runs the risk of excluding religious and ideological considerations

that might have some explanatory value. The role of religion (framed by Jihadist theologians) in sanctioning Jihadist violence (or prohibiting it), to name one example, should act as a reminder not to fully exclude such approaches. Furthermore, this literature often ignores the multitude of examples of direct interaction and facilitation, as well as the fact that hub-organizations, such as al-Qaeda and IS, are not just passive purveyors of ideology, but are actively influencing and – to some degree – controlling its affiliated groups. These arguments are usually rejected by default by reference to the decrease in al-Qaeda-directed attacks from the 2000s to the 2010s, accusations of "fear mongering," as well as being mired in the broader political debate that propels the question of al-Qaeda's primacy to the fore of the US foreign policy agenda. Some recent cases of inter-connectivity (al-Qaeda "sending" operatives to Syria to try and rein in its Syrian affiliate, and IS-contingents of foreign fighters setting up a branch in Libya), stand as a reminder that Jihadi hegemons can create top-down transnational ripple effects that significantly alter local dynamics. This also fails to recognize Hegghammer's identification of a process of "hybridization" whereby anti-American sentiment, and even a mix of local and transnational terrorism, seems to be spreading among geographically separated Jihadist organizations. Finally, it fails to adequately take into account the role of modern communication technology in creating transnational virtual spaces where local and global Jihad interact and, to some degree, merge. This is highlighted by the ability of Jihadist ideologues to attract a large transnational following on web platforms, as well as for activists to use encrypted communication applications to host debates about issues relating to the Jihadist movement in general.

The general compartmentalization of scholarly approaches into area and religious studies, political science, terrorism and security studies, psychological (criminological) studies etc., who all study Jihadism from different perspectives and does not significantly overlap, inhibits the field from reaching wholesale conclusions and formulate general theories. As highlighted above, however, with great disasters come great opportunities, and with the comeback of Jihadism in the current decade new methods and sources (including a wider access to the field) to better understand the phenomenon has also presented itself.

Abstract på dansk

2018 markerer 20-året for Osama bin Ladens fatwa, der påbød alle muslimer at føre global jihad mod USA og dets allierede. Cementeringen af jihadisme som en global militant ideologi i denne periode har samtidig fostret et voksende forskningsfelt, der har forsøgt at forklare dette fænomen. Denne artikel identificerer og diskuterer de primære debatter og strømninger inden for den engelsksprogede jihadismeforskningen i løbet af de seneste 20 år. Debatten mellem fortalere for enten lokale eller globale forklaringer af jihadisme, sammen med debatten om religionens rolle som drivkraft i jihadismen, identificeres som de mest gennemgående. Artiklen argumenterer samtidig for, at en del af årsagen til, at der stadig er fundamental uenighed omkring svaret på disse spørgsmål, findes i opdelingen af feltet i forskellige forskningsmæssige tilgange, der ikke i tilstrækkelig grad overlapper. Derudover har et for ensidigt fokus på al-Qaeda som den typiske repræsentant for jihadisme siden 2001 forhindret forskere i at identificere divergerende udtryksformer af fænomenet.

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