

Consolidate and Conquer: A Model for Assessing the Prospects of the Islamic State

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Introduction

In the nearly two decades that have passed since the attacks of September 11, 2001, western scholars have devoted considerable attention to the phenomenon of militant Islamist movements. The intense focus on these movements has continued to grow with the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria as a so called “pseudo-state” (hereinafter referred to as the Islamic State) in 2014. The stunning, success of the Islamic State in the modern era, raises a serious question about the long-term viability of the movement and what actions will it need to take to survive in the long term. In the study that follows, I will conduct a cross-case comparison to compare two movements very similar to the Islamic State: The Wahābīs and the Almohads, in order to develop a theoretical trajectory for what is required of a militant Islamist movement to establish an enduring state-like entity.

The selection of the Wahābīs and the Almohads provides a basis for comparing the Islamic State to movements which have a large number of factors in common so as to ensure that the cross-case comparison generates a trajectory that can be reasonably applied to the Islamic State. As such, I have only included movements which have sought to impose an expressly Islamic form of government on its subjects and which have relied on the use of force as a key element in its attempt to establish a state-like political entity. Therefore, I have purposefully omitted certain groups, such as the Ottomans, which were indeed militant, but not Islamist in the sense that the form of government they established was not originally based on Islamic principles to the exclusion of other religions, at least not in the beginning. Similarly, I have excluded political movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which although Islamist, does

not advocate the application of force as a pillar of its strategy, seeking instead to work within the existing governmental structures in the countries where it operates.

After establishing a theoretical trajectory for a successful militant Islamist movement, I will then compare the trajectory of the Islamic State to that theoretical trajectory to assess the likely durability of the Islamic State in the coming years. Through this process I will demonstrate that socio-political cohesion is the factor most crucial to the success of militant Islamist movements. This socio-political cohesion is something that successful movements can only achieve through sustained, purposeful efforts to consolidate their socio-political base. Thus, the socio-political cohesion of a movement is a result of socio-political consolidation - a process by which a movement's leaders seek to create a uniform understanding among the movement's members of the movement's mission and its objectives, along with the required motivation to achieve those objectives.

An analysis of the Islamic State through this lens suggests that the movement has made several critical errors in neglecting the political consolidation of their movement in their quest to achieve military victories over external opponents. Despite these early failures, the Islamic State appears to have belatedly recognized their failures in this regard and have taken measures to rectify their lack of socio-political cohesion through a concerted program of consolidation in the form of outreach and education. In light of the recent military defeats the movement has sustained in both Iraq and Syria, the question remains open as to whether their socio-political consolidation efforts will result in a level of cohesion necessary to achieve long-term success. A nuanced understanding of the strengths and limitations found in the Islamic State's political trajectory of development may provide clues to scholars, policy-makers,

activists, and government entities seeking to defeat the Islamic State in its current manifestation, as well as for dealing with similar groups that may emerge in the coming years.

Theory

In considering the available theoretical models on which to base a study of militant Islamist movements, Paul Kennedy's theory for the development of great powers offers a useful point of departure. In his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* Kennedy proposes that economic success provides the foundation for later development and sustainment of military might, which can then be translated into material and territorial gains against disadvantaged opponents, thereby fueling even greater growth. However, Kennedy warns that excessive emphasis on the military components of empire can bring about detrimental effects, such as stagnating economic growth, strategic overreach, and the formation of opposing coalitions.¹ A somewhat simplified graphic representation of Kennedy's theory could be rendered as follows:

Figure 1: Graphic Summary of Kennedy's Theory



¹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. Vintage: New York, 1987, pp. xv-xxv.

Throughout his lengthy book, Kennedy focuses much of his discussion on the development of primarily European powers throughout the modern period, beginning in 1500 and ending immediately prior to the end of the Cold War era. While the use of this model seems appropriate for a grand study of empires, coalitions, and nation states, it does not seem to provide an adequate model for explaining the trajectory of political entities, such as nation-states or empires that begin as weak and economically inferior insurgent movements, that nevertheless succeed in forming stable forms of government. If Kennedy's theory were universally applicable to all movements that aspired to political power, we would expect that only those movements which succeeded in attaining economic superiority over their peers and adversaries would achieve political success. However, history is replete with counter examples, particularly in the realm of insurgent movements, that have obtained political power in the form of a state-like political entity despite their economic inferiority vis-à-vis their adversaries. Consequently, it bears consideration that some modification to Kennedy's theory may be necessary to develop a model with sufficient explanatory power to assess the insurgent movements that find success in building governments.

Drawing on the writings of the prominent 14th century Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun, we find that his theories on the stages of a dynasty and the factors central to building a successful political entity, such as an empire or a state are relevant to our study of militant Islamist insurgent movements that aspire to political power. Ibn Khaldun begins the third chapter of his *Muqaddimah* with the following quote:

“Royal authority and large dynastic (power) are attained only through a group and group feeling.”²

Here, the term “group feeling” could perhaps be better understood in the modern context as “group cohesion” or, more technically, “socio-political cohesion”. In contrast to Kennedy, who determined that economic power was the pathway to political power, Ibn Khaldun regards socio-political cohesion as the surer path to achieving political success.

Although it was formulated in the latter half of the 14th century, Ibn Khaldun’s theory retains its relevance into the present era. Indeed, notable guerrilla leaders of the 20th century, including Mao Tse Tung and Che Guevarra, considered that the unity and cohesion of an insurgent movement across the various levels of participation was essential to success of the movement.³ I therefore propose to eliminate the economic component of Kennedy’s model and to replace it with socio-political cohesion as a necessary precursor to sustained strategic growth. My reasons for this modification are three-fold. Firstly, both Mao and Guevara emphasize the necessity of unity among all components of a guerrilla movement as a key element in achieving victory over an incumbent government force. However, similar to Ibn Khaldun, neither Mao nor Guevarra devote a similar amount of attention in their respective works to the economic status of the insurgent force, thereby suggesting that, at least in the universe of insurgencies, the role of economic development is secondary to that of socio-political cohesion.

² Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, translated by Franz Rosenthal, Public Domain, published online at: https://asadullahali.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/ibn_khaldun-al_muqaddimah.pdf. Accessed April 7, 2018

³ Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith, Praeger: New York, 1961 pp. 88-89 and Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998, pp. 106, 110, 114-122

Since our study will be limited in scope to assess the political trajectories of militant Islamist movements, namely the Almohads, the Wahābī movement, and the Islamic State, we will focus on their ability to actively consolidate their respective socio-political bases. This consolidation, when used as a means for achieving unity in the movement, is a more likely predictor for success or failure than is its economic potential. Moreover, all of the cases addressed in our study began as small reformist movements operating on the fringes of larger political entities, be they kingdoms, empires, or nation-states. Notably, the rise of these movements did not occur as a result of their economic strength relative to their opponents, but rather, in spite of their relative weakness in this regard. Here, our modification of Kennedy's model is borne out of our need to find a more powerful explanation as to why insurgencies in general, and more specifically, those which can be characterized as militant Islamist movements, were able to achieve their respective measures of political success despite their economic weakness.

Secondly, a comprehensive study of the political trajectories of militant Islamist movements based on their economic health would be exceptionally problematic as many of these movements closely protect their financial information, maintaining in clandestine channels such records as they might be inclined to keep. Furthermore, in the case of both the Wahābīs and the Almohad, such records, to the extent that they ever existed, have been either lost to history, or do not cover sufficient periods of time to permit a thorough analysis of their economic status throughout the trajectory of the movement. Thus, on at least one level, it is a lack of data that drives our modification of Kennedy's model.

Thirdly, each of the movements covered in this study had a major socio-political component in common which, at least during initial research, appeared to offer a potential source of explanatory power for the successes and failures of these movements over time.

The model which results from our modification to Kennedy's model for the rise and fall of great powers, might be summarized as follows: A movement which begins as a militant religious reform movement must be linked to a cohesive political entity, such as a tribe, political party, or student organization, in order to develop into a viable insurgency. The long-term viability of the insurgent movement depends upon effective socio-political consolidation, a purposeful action taken by the movement to generate a sense of unity or cohesion which is the engine that drives the growth of the movement. Once established, the socio-political cohesiveness of these movements provides a base for military conquests, which can further strengthen the movement by expanding the scope of its authority and enabling it to gain access to additional human and material resources that allow the movement to either maintain or improve its position vis-à-vis its competitors. When these conquests are followed by sustained and effective socio-political consolidation, they will result in stable state-like entities. However, if the consolidation aspect of the model is neglected, it can lead to a weakening of the base which, when combined with military setbacks or overreach, can trigger the decline or outright collapse of the movement. A graphic depiction of this modified version of Kennedy's theory would appear as follows:

Figure 2: Modified Theoretical Trajectory

Militant Islamist Movement + Cohesive Political Entity → Militant Islamist Insurgency,

Militant Islamist Insurgency + Social-Political Consolidation → Cohesive Movement,

Cohesive Movement + Military Conquests → State-like Political Entity,

State-like Political Entity + Socio-Political Consolidation → Stability

Sources and Methods

Despite eventually becoming one of the largest empires in the history of Islamic civilization, the movement of the al-Muwaḥḥidūn⁴ (hereinafter rendered as “Almohad” in accordance with the westernization of the Arabic term) remains one of the least studied dynasties among western scholars. Few scholars have undertaken a serious study of the movement and its resulting empire, and where these studies have been conducted, their results have been published in a variety of languages, including Arabic, Spanish, French, German, and lastly, English. As such, the field of Almohad expertise has remained the domain of polyglot scholars, primarily those hailing from the European scholastic tradition. Furthermore, the majority of primary sources available on the movement, including first-hand accounts of the early stages of the movement before it became an established empire remain in manuscript form, unedited

⁴ Throughout this text I will generally use the American Library Association – Library of Congress (ALA-LC) system for transliteration of key Arabic terms and names. For proper names of areas that have widely used, common renderings in English, such as cities or countries, or “Almohad”, I will use standard practice English names, so as to avoid confusing the reader. However, for names of specific individuals, regions, or cities that have no standard English rendering, the ALA-LC system will be used. A guide for the ALA-LC system for Arabic may be found at the following website: <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/roman.html>

and untranslated, and therefore beyond the reach of all but the academic elites with access to the libraries housing such manuscripts.

For much of the last century the dominant works on the topic of the Almohads for American students have been Le Tourneau's *The Almohad Movement in North Africa*, translated into English from the original French, and the occasional article on Almohad architecture or examinations of numismatic artifacts in English language journals. For those with facility in Spanish, Huici Miranda's *La Historia del Imperio Almohade* and *Las Grandes Batallas de La Reconquista Durante Las Invacciones Africanas* have served as the main sources of knowledge. Recently, however, Dr. Allen Fromherz has authored a substantial English language treatment of the early stages of the Almohad movement in his book *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire*. These four books comprise the bulk of my sources on the main aspects of the Almohad movement covered here. In a few select cases I consulted relevant articles from peer-reviewed journals and Arabic language publications to supplement these sources.

In contrast to the Almohads, the Wahābī movement benefits from a wide range of scholarly coverage on a vast array of topics, including its history, politics, religious doctrine, along with biographical sketches of personalities who feature largely in the movement's history. While a full listing of sources cited and consulted can be found in the bibliography, it is worth mentioning that several works proved to be especially critical in the research for this project. In particular, Commins' *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* served as an excellent source for general history of the movement. The very best sources of information on specific periods in Wahābī history, such as its creation, early expansion, and unification are found in the

published dissertations of scholars, such as George Rentz, John Habib, Christine Moss Helms, and Bayly Winder.

Similarly useful, though differing greatly in tone and emphasis, were the recorded observations of European diplomats who ventured into Wahābī territory at various stages during the movement's development. Among these are Corancez' *The History of the Wahabis*, which offers an outstanding contemporary diplomatic account of the Wahābī conquests in the first decade of the 19th century. And the collected works of Philby which address the internal working of the movement's leadership and its military struggles during the late 19th century through the unification of the Kingdom of Sa'udi Arabia. Naturally, these sources are supplemented by a number of other scholarly and religious works, which offer occasional details and insights not found in the previously listed works.

Since the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (hereinafter the Islamic State) exploded into the consciousness of the American public with its sweeping victories over the Iraqi military forces in the summer of 2014, a number of scholars and journalists have authored historical and analytical treatments of the movement. Among these, McCants' *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of The Islamic State*, Warrick's *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*, Brisard's *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, and Weiss and Hassan's *ISIS* have been useful in developing an understanding of the overall trajectory of the movement from its beginning through its current status. For records of the Islamic State's military campaigns, an array of media articles provides coverage of the major developments. Particularly useful in this regard have been the analytical articles authored by a team of scholars at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and West Point's Countering Terrorism Center (CTC). With regard to the

Islamic State's efforts to generate a form of socio-political consolidation, I have relied on the movement's two main English language propaganda publications, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, which offered articles that directly related to the manner in which the group pursued (or failed to pursue) this course. Other contemporary documentaries such as those produced by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and Vice News, provided excellent supplementary, and occasionally unique, insights.

In the study that follows, I will test the modified version of Kennedy's theory outlined above by examining the relationship between socio-political consolidation and military conquest in the Almohad and Wahābī movements in light of that theory to demonstrate the validity of the model for militant Islamist movements. After the validity of the theoretical model has been established, I will then conduct an examination of the Islamic State to identify the viability of the movement in accordance with the model. I will conclude with a section addressing the likely future trajectory of the Islamic State on the basis of the findings from the previous section.

Case Selection

Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria and the emergence of the Islamic State much of the attention of the policy communities in Western countries has focused on defeating the radical Islamist movement and restoring security to the region. Most of the energy that has been devoted to tackling this issue has centered on efforts to understand the religious and political ideologies and doctrines from which Islamic State draws its legitimacy and which motivate its actions. These efforts have attracted the attention of scholars, activists, policy-

makers, journalists, and government officials throughout the United States and Europe. Most of the debate on the subject of the Islamic State is very much focused on the current situation and the immediate future with little effort given to framing the issue in terms of a broader historical trajectory which includes a number of similar movements. The intended purpose of this article is to contribute an analysis of two ideologically similar movements drawn from historical examples taken from Islamic societies that may generate theoretical models for better understanding and confronting violent Islamist movements such as Islamic State and similar organizations that may emerge in the future. For the purpose of this paper, the Almohad and Wahābī movements are both treated as insurgent movements which began on the fringes of a more powerful political entity: the Almoravid and Ottoman empires, respectively. For my analysis, I treat these empires, as well as the Almohad Empire, which resulted from its victory over the Almoravids as I would normally treat nation-states as these were the analogous political entities at the time of their existence.

The validity of an effective comparison is closely tied to the degree to which the cases being examined are similar, while differing on both the dependent variable – in this case the ability of the insurgent movement to create a stable country following a victory over the incumbent power and the independent variable – the extent to which each movement consolidated their respective socio-political bases and undertook campaigns of military conquest. For this reason, it is important to demonstrate the extent to which the cases of the Almohad and the Wahābī movements share common aspects, which serve to isolate the independent variable of socio-political cohesion as the causal factor in the outcome of the dependent variable, success or failure in creating a state-like political entity. In determining the commonalities between three

Islamist movements: al-Muwahhidun (Almohad), Wahābī, and the Islamic State a number of common themes come immediately to the fore. All three of these religious movements embraced fundamentalist interpretations of Islam which later developed into a military campaign aimed at establishing control over specific regions of the Islamic world. Although some distinctions can be found between the Zāhirī school of law that was embraced by the Almohads and the Wahābī interpretations of Islamic law that emerged from the Ḥanbali school, embraced by the Wahābīs and the Islamic State, there are a number of striking similarities in the literalist interpretations of the Qur’an and Hadith found in both streams. This has resulted in the adoption of very similar social policies by all three movements in the areas where they came into power. Table 1 provides a chart for comparing key features of all three movements.

	Almohad	Wahābī	Islamic State
Geography	North Africa/Spain	Arabian Peninsula	Fertile Crescent
Doctrine	Zahiri	Wahābī	Wahābī
Political Base	Tribal	Tribal	Confessional/Tribal
Transfer of Power	Hereditary	Hereditary power-sharing	Meritocracy
Militant	Yes	Yes ⁵	Yes
Expansionist	Yes	Yes	Yes
Safe Haven	Yes	Yes	Possibly
Social Policies	Reformist	Reformist	Reformist
Tolerance of Other Religions	Minimal Tolerance	Minimal Tolerance	No Tolerance
Founder	Ibn Tūmart	Muḥammad bin al-Wahāb	Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

⁵ Since the creation of the Kingdom of Sa’udi Arabia, the Wahābī movement has relied on soft power to expand its doctrine, which has created political conflicts outside of Sa’udi Arabia without directly involving the military apparatus of the Kingdom, itself.

In particular, all three movements share an especially harsh position against adherents to the Jewish faith with the Almohads insisting they convert or die and the Wahābīs and Islamic State taking a slightly more lenient position by declaring that Jews should either convert, pay the jizyah poll tax, flee the area, or face death.⁶ All movements embraced a similar treatment of Christians in areas under their control; however, it is worth noting that both the Almohad and Wahābīs adopted a more pragmatic stance towards Christians living in areas outside their domain. In the case of the Almohads they remained in a near-constant state of war against the various principalities of Christian Spain throughout their existence. In the latter years of their rule, some of the Almohad rulers sought out Christian warlords to employ them as proxies or auxiliary forces in their campaigns in Spain, which by this time were largely defensive in nature. The Wahābī tribal leaders found common cause with the British against the Ottomans during World War I, and the Kingdom of Sa'udi Arabia, which is a modern extension of the Wahābī movement, has relied heavily on Western military guarantees to protect it from its neighbors in the Persian Gulf through the latter half of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century.⁷

The social policies of the Almohads, Wahābīs, and Islamic State regarding other Muslims also strike a common chord, whereby each engages in a rigorous series of theological gymnastics to arrive at the conclusion that anyone who claims to be a Muslim but does not lend their support

⁶ Phillip, C. Naylor, *North Africa: A History from Antiquity to the Present*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009, pg. 105 and Allen J. Fromherz, *The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire*. London: IB Tauris, 2010 pg. 176 and Mohammed Ayoob and Hasan Kosebalaban, eds. *Religion and Politics in Sa'udi Arabia*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009, pp.14-16 and Roger Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 57-58

⁷ H. St. John Philby, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*. Frank Cass: London, 1977 pp-10-62; and Author's direct observations while serving in multiple locations in the Persian Gulf region between 2002-2009.

to their cause or arrive at the same juridical conclusions regarding righteous behavior, is not in fact a true Muslim.⁸

All three movements also share a similar historical track in which the movement begins as a peaceful series of attempted religious reforms. These reforms insisted on popular acceptance of their interpretations of Islamic law and were universally met with rejection by the incumbent authorities. The rejection of their doctrine spurred each of the movements to transition to a militant movement, which waged a guerrilla war against the ruling government of the era (Almoravid, Ottoman, and the governments of Iraq and Syria and the U.S. forces of occupation).

During the guerrilla warfare phase of the movements' development, each benefitted from the relative safety of a haven on the fringes of the society with which they were at war. For the Almohads, this was in the regions of the Atlas Mountains controlled by Berber tribes, who quickly allied themselves to the leaders of the movement.⁹ For the Wahābīs, the barren reaches of the Najd, deep in the Arabian Peninsula offered them safety from the Ottoman forces which were primarily based in the cities and had inadequate logistical support to mount a sustained campaign in the resource-poor desert regions.¹⁰ In the case of the Islamic State, the urban population centers in predominantly Sunni areas in northern and western Iraq and eastern Syria provided the necessary level of anonymity for the group to regroup in the aftermath of its defeat at the hands of the U.S.-led coalition in 2010.

⁸ Naylor, *North Africa: A History from Antiquity to the Present*, pg. 105; David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*. London: IB Tauris, 2006, pp. 22-24; and Ayoob & Kosebalaban, *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia*, pp.12-15

⁹ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 25-53

¹⁰ Louis Alexandre Olivier de Corancez, *The History of the Wahabis: From Their Origin Until the End of 1809*. Trans. Eric Tabet. Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, Ltd, 1995, pg. 1

In all cases, the founder of the movement died before their followers were able to achieve a military or political victory, thus it was their successors that realized the objectives of the movement in subsequent generations.¹¹ Following victory in the guerrilla warfare phase, each movement established a government and sought to expand their territory through either military or ideological conquest or a combination of the two.

The historical and ideological commonalities of these movements allow informed observers to draw conclusions into the sources of their ideological doctrine and the strengths and limitations inherent in these. An understanding of the trajectories of the Almohads and the Wahābīs will serve as a means to assess the trajectory of the Islamic State.

Case 1: The Wahābī Movement

Introduction to the Wahābī Movement

The Wahābī movement began in the Najd region of the Arabian Peninsula, amidst the desert wastelands just beyond the southeastern boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. The Najd, devoid of any notable natural resources, arable land, or major urban centers had remained the domain of nomadic tribal herdsman, neglected by all of the various and sundry empires that rose and fell over the centuries in the territories only a few hundred kilometers to its north. It was here, in the year 1744 that a pact was formed between two men, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al Wahāb, a religious firebrand preacher who had broken away from the rigid Ḥanbali school of Islamic

¹¹ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 48-60; Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, pp. 1-39; William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*. Picador: New York, 2016, pg. 15

jurisprudence and Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ud, a wealthy leader of a tribe of moderate size, that would lead to an alliance of religious guidance and secular power that would dominate the political landscape of the Arabian Peninsula for the next three centuries, expanding and contracting the scope of its dominion several times before the eventual creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Socio-Political Consolidation in the Wahābī Movement

Following his departure from the Ḥanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al Wahāb undertook a campaign of preaching reform in a number of the towns and villages of the Najd region. The main thrust of his message was similar to that of other religious reformers, famous and otherwise, throughout history: people had abandoned the pure practice of the faith and needed to repent and embrace the true tenets of their religion, in this case Islam. As other radical Muslim reformers had done in the past, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al Wahāb took it upon himself to implement the practice of “commanding right and forbidding wrong”.¹²

¹³ This practice annoyed local leaders and as a result, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al Wahāb found

¹² This practice, (al-amr bil ma'rūf wal nahy 'an al-munkar) is a longstanding practice in Islamic society which is used to enforce conformity with Islamic principles and values in public spaces. Traditionally, the responsibility for this duty has been delegated by the caliph to an official known as the muḥtasib, who oversees an organization, called the ḥisbah, which enforces proper public behavior and market transactions. For some scholars, the presence of a muḥtasib in a society is evidence that the leader of that society is truly leading according to Islamic values. A complete treatment of the subject can be found in Michael Cook's *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

¹³ Shaykh Abdul-Aziz bin Abdullah ibn Baaz, “Biography of Imam Muḥammad bin Abdul Wahhab”, published online at: <http://www.islamlife.com:80/religion2/component/mailto/?tmpl=component&link=aHR0cDovL3d3dy5pc2xhbWxpZmUuY29tL3JlbGlnaW9uMi9jb21wb25lbnQvY29udGVudC9hcnRpY2xlLzY5LWxhdGVyLXNjaG9sYXJzLzY3Mi1iaW9ncmFwaHktb2YtaW1hbS1tdW1hZC1iaW4tYWJkdWwtd2FoaGFj>, published on November 10, 2009 archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20100914081717/http://www.islamlife.com/religion2/component/content/article/69-later-scholars/672-biography-of-imam-muhammad-bin-'Abd-al-Wahab>, Accessed March 6, 2018

himself moving from one village to another in search of a suitable audience to receive his message.¹⁴

Throughout this period, ‘Abd al Wahāb corresponded with a large number of other Islamic scholars across the Arabian Peninsula, extending even into Yemen and present-day Oman while also continuing to preach in the villages and towns where he stayed.¹⁵ In so doing, ‘Abd al Wahāb propagated his reformist message and developed a regional network of scholars who had grown sympathetic to his cause.

Although ‘Abd al Wahāb’s message attracted a substantial following among the citizens in the towns where he preached, his severe interpretation of Islamic law and its principles for governing society threatened the position of those in positions of authority. Over time, the ruling elders in these towns pressured ‘Abd al Wahāb through a variety of means to take his message elsewhere. The end result of this was that in 1744, ‘Abd al Wahāb departed the town of ‘Uyainah to take up residence in the oasis settlement of Dir‘īyah. Once there, he joined forces with Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘ud in a pact by which Ibn Sa‘ud would provide political cover for ‘Abd al Wahāb in exchange for his guidance in religious and social matters. Ibn Sa‘ud’s tribal militia also gave ‘Abd al Wahāb a nascent military capability by which to enforce his religious doctrine in the areas where Sa‘udi power held sway. Thus empowered, the Wahābī force embarked on a local Jihād of preaching and proselytizing to expand the writ of ‘Abd al Wahāb’s reformist doctrine and conquered a number of settlements in the Najd.¹⁶ Where the peaceful

¹⁴ George S. Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Sa‘udi Arabia*. King ‘Abd Al Aziz Public Library: Riyadh, 2004, pp. 19-38

¹⁵ Shaykh Abdul-Aziz bin Abdullah ibn Baaz, “Biography of Imam Muḥammad bin Abdul Wahhab”, online

¹⁶ Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Sa‘udi Arabia*, pp. 39-61

efforts to win over local populations to his views failed, 'Abd al Wahāb's Sa'udi allies would take up the military aspects of the Jihād and coerce the resisters to submit to the Wahābī way. In the areas where they had control, the Wahābīs used a variety of methods to replace the existing religious leaders with those who subscribed to their interpretation of Islam. As a result, a large number of religious scholars vacated their positions and sought refuge in areas outside the writ of the ascendant Wahābīs.¹⁷ As the movement gained strength, it gathered to itself an array of smaller tribes and clans who were incorporated into the Sau'di-Wahābī identity, which became a unifying factor in the socio-political base of the movement. Concurrently, the Wahābīs took over the system of schools for religious training, including, most significantly, the school at Ushayqir, which had previously been a prominent regional center of Ḥanbali education.¹⁸ In gaining control over the schools, the Wahābīs were able to gain a monopoly on the education of several generations of students, beginning in the Najd in 1744. By 1817 the Wahābī mission, both military and religious, had greatly expanded to include much of the Arabian Peninsula before their movement was temporarily shut down by the invasion of Ottoman forces in the second decade of the 19th century.

By the time the Ottomans destroyed the political manifestation of the Wahābī mission, which had come to be known as the First Sau'di Emirate, 'Abd al Wahāb had long since departed the scene, having died in 1792. However, a new crop of reformers, many of whom had spent their entire lives growing and learning under the guidance of the Wahābī educational system, had sprung up to replace him and his original followers. This new generation of

¹⁷ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Sa'udi Arabia*, pp. 20-26

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 26-27

Wahābī scholars had so thoroughly woven themselves into the fabric of Arabian society that they were able to continue their mission of religious teaching and indoctrination even after the Ottoman invasion laid waste to their capital city, Dir'īyah. In fact, this Wahābī base, which had come to thoroughly dominate the religious institutions in the Najd and many of the surrounding regions, continued to covertly extend its influence to all levels of society throughout the brief Ottoman occupation despite facing severe persecution at the hands of the Turks.¹⁹

This Wahābī social base served as a loyal political constituency for the re-emergence of the Second Sau'di Emirate under Turkī Ibn 'Adbullāh Ibn Muḥammad, whose first order of business was to empower the Wahābī 'Ulama' following his political ascendance.²⁰ Throughout the turbulent series of succession struggles that plagued the Wahābī-Sau'di alliance throughout the middle decades of the 19th century, the majority of Wahābī scholars remained loyal to the heirs of the original Sau'di lineage, which ultimately emerged victorious from the bitter infighting toward the end of the century.²¹

With the collapse of the Second Sau'di Emirate following its defeat at the hands of the Ottoman-backed Rashīdi tribal confederation in the Battle of Mulaydah in 1891, the Wahābīs found themselves once more without an effective political manifestation to support the military expansion of the movement. Nevertheless, they retained their control over the majority of the religious institutions as the Rashīdis were unable to consolidate their own socio-political control

¹⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Sa'udi Arabia*, pp. 42-46

²⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 45

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 61-66

of the areas they had captured from the Sau'dis and soon fell victim to their own round of infighting that left Wahābī influence in the region intact.²²

During the turbulent second half of the 19th century, the Wahābī scholars had also undergone some internal conflict during the years of Sau'di infighting and wild swings in political fortunes as they debated which factions to support. Nevertheless, the main body of Wahābī scholars remained loyal to the Sau'di lineage. Furthermore, even the feuding factions of Wahābī scholars shared more in common with one another than they did with any of the other strains of Islamic teaching that could be found outside the Najd; and as most of the internal friction they experienced arose from uncertainty over which claimant to Sau'di leadership would win out over the others, these scholars were easily reconciled when 'Abd al Aziz Ibn Sa'ud (hereinafter Ibn Sa'ud) emerged as the dominant Sau'di leader at the beginning of the 20th century.

Under Ibn Sa'ud the consolidated and relatively cohesive social base the Wahābīs had maintained provided the movement with a strong foundation for rapid mobilization into a force that would rapidly oust the Rashīdi remnants from the Najd and re-establish the third iteration of the Sau'di Emirate.²³ Having restored the political dominance of the Sau'di-Wahābī alliance once more to the Najd, Ibn Sa'ud launched a campaign of military expansion of the central Arabian Peninsula. As the Wahābī movement extended its political control over the peninsula for the second time in as many centuries, they continued with their former practice of

²² Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 61-71

²³ *Ibid*, 71-80; John S. Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910-1930*, pp. 10-13

eliminating the opposition among the scholars through a combination of pressure and coercion, once again leaving the Wahābīs solidly in control of the religious institutions and schools in those areas.²⁴

As Ibn Sa’ud’s borders extended beyond the Najd, he found himself confronted with the issue of dealing with the nomadic Bedouin tribes, who had a history of raiding, pillaging, and ever-changing loyalties that extended deep into history, even before the advent of Islam. In a politically shrewd maneuver, he confronted each of the Bedouin tribes in a piecemeal manner, and after defeating them with his superior forces, relocated them to specialized settlements, known as hijrah (pl. Hujār)²⁵ in which they would receive concentrated training in Wahābī doctrine under selected scholars.²⁶ In order to destabilize the social cohesion of these tribes, Ibn Sa’ud saw to it that different clans within these Bedouin tribes were assigned to different hujār, where they would be inculcated with a new identity – as Wahābī’s – independently of each other.²⁷ In many cases the religious training at these hujār was conducted with such efficiency and effectiveness that the zeal of the students came to eclipse that of their instructors. In at least one instance, Ibn Sa’ud was required to dispatch a very senior scholar, ‘Abd Allah al-Anqarī to the hijrah at al-Aṭṭāwīyah to temper the religious passions of the

²⁴ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission in Saudi Arabia*, 71-103

²⁵ This term stems from the Arabic root H-J-R, which means “to migrate”. The word “hijrah” is the verbal noun derived from this root, literally “migration”. Here, hijrah refers to ‘Abd al Wahāb’s doctrine which requires Muslims to migrate from the lands of the infidels to those under the dominion of Islam. As the Wahābis considered virtually all groups other than themselves to be infidels, anyone who considered themselves to be a Muslim but who was not living in a place where they could benefit from a full indoctrination into the Wahābi system would have to either migrate to a place where proper training in Wahābi principles could be carried out, lest they run the risk of being declared an infidel and face the often fatal consequences of such a designation.

²⁶ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 80-84; Moss-Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 128-142; Habib, *Ibn Sa’ud’s Warriors of Islam*, pp. 14-24

²⁷ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 80-84;

students.²⁸ Collectively, the Bedouin who attended these hujār came to be known as the Ikhwān, or Brotherhood.²⁹ The combination of a cultural history steeped in the violent traditions of tribal warfare and raiding and a full embrace of the radical Wahābī doctrine made for a potent concoction of aggressive zealotry. It is small wonder, then, that these Ikhwān came to form a sort of spearhead for many of Ibn Sa’ud’s military conquests, particularly those outside the Najd region.³⁰

It is important to note that the Ikhwān represent only one case of socio-political consolidation into the Wahābī identity. As Ibn Sa’ud’s forces re-conquered the Ḥijāz and al-Aḥsā, they came into contact with societies that had only briefly experienced Wahābī dominion a century before. As such, the Wahābī scholars and teachers were faced with an entrenched opposition of more moderate Ḥanbali (Ḥijāz) and Shi’a population (al-Aḥsā) that needed to be addressed but could not be rapidly eradicated as had been the case in the Najd and its immediate environs, where Wahābī doctrine predominated. Here, Ibn Sa’ud applied a method of political pragmatism, whereby the Wahābīs would have the lion’s share of control (at least officially) but where local religious pursuits, such as Sufism and Shi’a observances could continue either in designated areas or outside of public view.³¹ In taking this approach, Ibn Sa’ud applied a longstanding principle of Islamic law whereby religious codes could only be enforced in public areas, while activities in private spaces, such as inside one’s home, would

²⁸ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 86-87

²⁹ Habib, *Ibn Sa’ud’s Warriors of Islam*, pp. 16-17

³⁰ Moss Helms, *The Cohesion of Saudi Arabia*, pp. 142-146

³¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 77-80

remain under the jurisdiction of God, Himself.³² In so doing, Ibn Sa'ud created an environment in which the rule of the Sau'di-Wahābī alliance would be unquestioned, but not so oppressive as to inspire rebellions. This approach permitted the Wahābī scholars to continue their campaign of religious indoctrination with the full backing of the Sau'di political leaders, albeit on a longer timeline than some of the more aggressive scholars would have preferred.

Wahābī Military Conquests

The alliance between Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al Wahāb and Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ud was predicated on the agreement of both men to two conditions. The first of these was that 'Abd al Wahāb would remain in the settlement of Dir'iyah, an apparently simple enough matter, given the threats to his life in other quarters of the region. The second condition, however, carried with it implications of greater import, to wit, that Sa'ud would only continue to receive revenue from taxing the harvest of his subjects until the booty gained from pillaging and raids produced an equivalent income for him. Thus, the very pact that united the Wahābī mission to the Sau'di tribe carried with it the shared understanding that military conquests were to be a necessary component of the alliance.³³

Within the first two years following the establishment of the Wahābī-Sau'di alliance, the movement launched its first series of military expeditions. In the beginning, these expeditions followed the pattern of tribal warfare that had obtained in the region for centuries, that being

³² Ibn al-Ukhuwa, *The Ma'alim al-Qurba fi Ahkam al-Hisbah*, Edited by Reuben Levy. London: Cambridge University Press, 1938

³³ Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Sa'udi Arabia*, pp. 50-51

as short-lived raids carried out for the purpose of weakening rivals and capturing plunder.³⁴

However, the religious nature of the Wahābī mission appears, over the course of several decades, to have brought about a transition in the style of warfare the Sau'di tribe waged one of conquest. Evidence of this can be found in the repeated references to the expanding list of towns in the Najd region that came under Wahābī control in Rentz' chapter on the early conquests.³⁵

After establishing a base in Dir'iyah, the Wahābīs slowly expanded their control to the surrounding towns and their villages. This process took most of the second half of the 18th century as the movement encountered much resistance, primarily from the neighboring settlement of Riyadh, and the Washm areas.³⁶ Despite fighting a bitter war with its nearest neighbor, the Wahābīs were nevertheless able to gain the loyalty, through either conquest, missionary work, strategic marital alliances or a combination of the three, of a substantial number of towns further afield.³⁷ After narrowly surviving a massive invasion from Najrān and eventually capturing Riyadh in 1773, the Wahābīs were able to devote their attention to consolidating their position in the Najd. By 1786 CE, the Wahābīs were finally firmly in control of the Najd and were beginning to probe the neighboring regions of al-Aḥsā and the Ḥijāz.³⁸

³⁴ Olivier de Corancez, *The History of the Wahabis*, pp. 16-17

³⁵ Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Sa'udi Arabia*, pp. 52-137. Throughout his book, Rentz refers to the Wahābīs as "Unitarians", an English rendition of the Arabic "Muwahḥidūn", which was, in the early stages of the movement, the preferred term of address as it refers to their emphasis on God's Unity or "Tawḥīd". Note that this is also the same name used by the Almohads to name their movement.

³⁶ Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Sa'udi Arabia*, pp. 57-137

³⁷ Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Sa'udi Arabia*, pp. 110, 119

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 106-191

These military conquests over its neighbors considerably strengthened the Wahābī movement. Not only did the Wahābīs gain in terms of material plunder, but their victories also brought ever-greater numbers of adherents into their system of beliefs. This is attributable to the fact that as the movement expanded its borders, it incorporated the people of the conquered tribes into the movement. The formula for this was simple: if a tribe rejected the Wahābī overtures to submit and join the movement, all of the men of the tribe would be slaughtered, and the surviving women and children distributed as plunder, thereby growing the total population of the movement and bringing in a new generation of children who would be raised under the banner of Wahābīsm. However, if the tribe in question accepted the Wahābī overtures, it would be taxed in accordance with Islamic precedent and be required to provide one out of every ten of its men to serve in the Wahābī army.³⁹ Under such an arrangement, the loyalty of the individual was directed away from his native tribe toward an overarching identity that joined him to his newfound Wahābī brethren. In this manner, the Wahābīs were eventually able to raise a massive army, capable of overwhelming virtually any of its adversaries, individually.

As the 19th century dawned, Wahābī forces continued their raids to Zubayr, Karbalā', and Al-Ḥillah in the north, to the peripheries of Muscat in the south, and captured the cities of Ṭā'if, Jeddah, Medina, and most significantly, Mecca in the Ḥijāz to the west. In undertaking this campaign of military expansion and raiding, the Wahābī forces strengthened their position in the Arabian Peninsula and threatened the fringes of the Ottoman Empire. The capture of

³⁹ Olivier de Corancez, *The History of the Wahabis*, pp. 6-9

Mecca, was particularly alarming to the central Ottoman authorities as their role as the guardians over the holiest city in Islam and their responsibility to protect the annual caravans of pilgrims to Mecca was a key component of their legitimacy as religious leaders of the Islamic world.⁴⁰ These attacks on population centers that claimed loyalty to the Ottoman Porte attracted the attentions of the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul, who were obliged to launch a campaign of their own to reassert their authority in the region. Olivier de Corancez notes that during this stage of the Wahābī movement, its doctrine was universally accepted, willingly or otherwise, in all of the areas under Wahābī control. This Ottoman expedition was aimed at not only restoring Ottoman control over the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, the destinations of annual Ḥajj pilgrimages, but also to secure the southern flanks of Baghdad, which had grown uneasy over the demonstrations of Wahābī power in the destruction of several Shi'a shrines.⁴¹ Although it was a long time in coming, the Egyptian forces under Muḥammad Ali Pasha and his son, Ibrāhīm Pasha who had been sent by the Ottoman ruler Sultan Mustafa IV, thoroughly crushed the Wahābī forces. By late 1819, the Egyptians had razed Dir'īyah, and had either killed or sent into exile in Cairo the leading members of the Sa'udi family.⁴²

Following this disastrous defeat, the Wahābī movement did not remain dormant for long. By 1824, Turkī Ibn 'Adbullāh Ibn Muḥammad, one of Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ud's sons who had escaped the Egyptian invasion of the Najd by going into hiding, had succeeded in gathering to himself a small force of loyal Wahābīs and fellow tribesmen who had survived the Egyptian purges or who had escaped their custody and pushed the Egyptians out of the Najd. This

⁴⁰ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 32-33

⁴¹ Olivier de Corancez, *The History of the Wahabis*, pp. 33-108

⁴² R. Bayly Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century*. St. Martin's Press: New York, 1965, pp. 23-26

second iteration of the Sau'di-Wahābī state, which came to be known as the Emirate of Najd, was characterized less by military conquests than it was by a series of minor wars of succession within the Sau'di line and never made any serious effort to expand its borders beyond the Najd region. Eventually the political and military infighting so weakened the movement that it was defeated by an incursion from the neighboring Rashīdi Tribal Confederation at the battle of Mulaydah, bringing an end to the Emirate of the Najd in 1891.⁴³

However, once more the Wahābī movement would not remain defeated for very long. Within a decade of the defeat at Mulaydah, a new leader, 'Abd al Aziz bin 'Abd al Raḥmān Al Sa'ud, had emerged within the movement who would take it into the 20th century with an extended campaign of military conquests. This campaign would end with Wahābī domination of most of the Arabian Peninsula and the founding of the modern Kingdom of Sau'di Arabia.

Beginning with the recapture of Riyadh in 1902, the Wahābīs embarked on a mission to once more recapture the Najd region. These areas came back to the Wahābī fold quickly, no doubt influenced by the Wahābī scholars who had remained dominant in the region's religious institutions independent of the political fortunes of the Sau'di tribe. Between 1902 and 1920 Ibn Sa'ud devoted the majority of his efforts toward shoring up his control of the Najd, while sending Wahābī missionaries, and the occasional military raid, to the neighboring regions. By 1920, the Wahābīs were powerful enough to capture the region of 'Asīr, which was followed by their conquests of Jabal Shammar and Ḥā'il in 1921, the Jawf in 1922, and finally, the Ḥijāz in 1925.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 274-278

⁴⁴ Catherine Moss Helms, *The Cohesion of Sa'udi Arabia*. London: Croom Helm, 1981, pp. 127, 137

The case of the Ikhwān serves as an especially useful example of the close dependence of military conquests on socio-political consolidation. In most of the Wahābīs' military expeditions during the 20th century, the Ikhwān - Bedouin tribal fighters who had been settled into their hujār and indoctrinated with the Wahābī system – served as the military spearhead for the Wahābī forces. Under this system of indoctrination, the Ikhwān had come to regard anyone who opposed the Wahābī mission as an unbeliever who could be rightly confronted with a religious Jihād, based on Islamic principles.⁴⁵ Inspired by their religious convictions, the Ikhwān fought relentlessly against all their opponents, believing that death in battle would gain them immediate access to the rewards of heaven. As a result of these beliefs, the Ikhwān quickly established a reputation for vicious slaughter of their opponents and nearly reckless disregard for their own lives. Faced with this combination of viciousness and fearlessness, many tribes living in areas where the Ikhwān sought to extend Wahābī influence capitulated without a fight. These often bloodless victories were further augmented by the custom in tribal warfare by which tribes that were defeated in battle would pledge allegiance to their conquerors. In such circumstances, where the Wahābīs faced opposition from a certain portion of a tribe, they usually had overwhelming military power, which they used to crush the leaders of the resistance. Once they had secured victory, the survivors of the defeated tribe or clans would be exempted from a continued Jihād by the Wahābī forces and given amnesty, so long as they joined the Wahābī fold and pledged allegiance to its leaders.⁴⁶ In this way, the military

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 95-102

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 111

expansion of the Wahābīs during the late 1910s and 1920s brought many new adherents to the faith and its socio-political mission in the Arabian Peninsula.

Following the conquest of the Ḥijāz, with its holy cities of Mecca and Medina in 1925, the majority of the Arabian Peninsula was under Wahābī control. However, the religious fervor of the Ikhwān was not satisfied with these gains, and leaders of the Ikhwān forces sought to continue their Jihād against the populations of the Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait and, in a departure from the policy of the Wahābī leadership, certain Ikhwān elements, launched independent raids into these areas.⁴⁷ This brought the Wahābī mission into a direct confrontation with the British Empire, which had vested interests in the security of these areas. As conflict with the British Empire was not in the interests of the Wahābī mission, Ibn Sa'ud was required to contain these forces and suppress the rebellion that resulted among some factions of the Ikhwān. By 1929, Ibn Sa'ud had succeeded in crushing the Ikhwāni rebellion and had entered into a series of treaties with the British to demarcate the limits of his borders. In 1932 the areas under Wahābī control were formed into a modern nation-state with the creation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Since that time, the Wahābīs (now recognized as Sau'dis) have not engaged in any major military campaigns with the intention of expanding their political borders, although they have on occasion participated in military actions aimed at securing their interests in neighboring countries, including Kuwait in 1991 and intermittently in Yemen during the 1960s and since 2006 through the present.

⁴⁷ Habib, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam*, pp. 105-111

Analyzing the Wahābī Movement

The Wahābī case is a textbook example of a successful application of the theory of socio-political consolidation as a prerequisite for expansion through military. Beginning with the early preaching of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al Wahāb and his pact with the Sau’di tribal confederation at Dir’īyah, the movement has followed each of the stages in the theoretical development of a state-like entity. First, the movement attached itself to a cohesive political entity with the Wahābī-Sau’di pact in 1744. Secondly, the Wahābīs almost always pursued a course of socio-political consolidation before launching a military campaign with an eye toward expansion. This is evidenced in the assertion of Wahābī control over the religious institutions in the areas they controlled, as described by Commins. Their emphasis on socio-political consolidation can also be seen in their efforts to win over converts in their overtures to religious scholars and leaders in the areas outside of their political control through correspondence and missionaries described in the works of both Rentz and Habib. The result of these efforts, over time, was an unchallenged dominance of the primary religious structures in central Arabia, which served as a means of unifying the population, enforcing conformity to a system of beliefs, and mobilizing for expansion.

Had the Wahābī-Sau’di pact not taken place, it is likely that the Wahābī mission would have suffered the fate of many other reformist movements and simply faded over time into non-existence or irrelevance. However, in joining the religious movement with its call for social conformity and unity to a viable and cohesive political entity in the Sau’dis, the movement gained a base that enabled not only its enforcement in the local areas through the support of political leaders, but also held forth the promise of possible expansion. Likewise, had it not

been for the socio-political cohesion that the Wahābīs achieved through their tireless efforts to consolidate their socio-political base, it is questionable whether the movement would have ever gained a critical concentration of followers in one area to be capable of expansion. Here, the enforced conformity to the Wahābī system allowed it to achieve a concentrated mass of followers in the central Najd region, which could then be mobilized into a military force for further expansion. Similarly, had the Wahābī forces never pursued a military expansion, they might have never gained access to the necessary human and material resources needed to grow the movement into the dominant force that it eventually became in the Arabian Peninsula. Otherwise, it is possible that the Wahābī movement might have simply continued on as a local phenomenon that could be ignored and even isolated by the other political entities in the surrounding area. However, the Wahābī movement succeeded, over time, in marrying all three aspects of the theory into the creation of a fairly stable state-like political entity.

The initial formation of the Wahābī movement in 1744 required some measure of conflict with the surrounding tribes in the Arabian Peninsula. While it seems that these conflicts were rapidly resolved, there are no reliable historical sources to characterize the nature of the manner in which the Wahābīs attained their position of primacy in the Najd prior to 1800.⁴⁸ Early conquests by the Wahābīs made substantial progress in capturing territory from the Ottoman Empire but these gains were reversed several times in the 19th century, with the Egyptian army eventually invading and destroying the Wahābī capital at Dir'īyah in 1819.⁴⁹ The resurgence of the Wahābīs and ascendance of their movement in the Najd in the middle of the

⁴⁸ Olivier de Corancez, *The History of the Wahabis: From Their Origin Until the End of 1809*, pp. 1-2

⁴⁹ Lacey, *The Kingdom*, pp. 60-62

19th century reveals that their movement retained a significant degree of unity and moral strength, as evidenced by its having survived the destruction of Dir'iyah to return to power five years later, with their ousting the Egyptian garrison at Riyadh. Although the Wahābī movement experienced substantial internal turmoil during the second half of the 19th century, most of the conflict concerned which faction would lead the movement, rather than whether the Wahābī movement should retain control of the territories it had acquired. It is important to note that the division of labor instituted by the compact between Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud and Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al- Wahāb by which the Sa'udi tribe would be responsible for the political and military aspects of the Wahābī mission and the clergy would lead their coalition in religious matters, created an environment in which the Wahābī clergy were able to continue their mission without concern for the political fortunes of their Sa'udi leaders. Consequently, most of the areas and people under Wahābī domain at this time continued to be fully indoctrinated with the Wahābī principles, which contributed significantly toward developing a common identity and cultural unity. Thus, even when the internal struggles of the Second Najd Kingdom were exploited by the Rashīdi tribe in 1891, the Wahābī identity persisted throughout the peninsula in the absence of a dominant political manifestation of the movement.⁵⁰ As a result, when Ibn Sa'ud embarked on his drive toward unification in 1904, he was able to tap into the human capital of the Wahābī movement to quickly raise an army that was eventually able to conquer the majority of the peninsula. With most of the Arabian Peninsula under their dominion, the Wahābīs did attempt several small-scale efforts to capture portions of present-day Yemen and Jordan, but when these efforts failed, the movement's leadership decided to emphasize

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

consolidation of their existing nation instead of attempting further conquests. The decision to refrain from further military activity enabled the Wahābīs to devote their resources toward the creation of schools and charitable organizations that were then used to foster a sense of common identity among the peoples living under Wahābī control.⁵¹ The resulting stability has generally persisted for the past 81 years, with the Wahābī movement firmly entrenched in leading the modern nation state of the Kingdom of Sau'di Arabia.

Thus, the causal chain of events for the Wahābī Movement is as follows: The wars of unification were followed by an absence of further conquests which allowed the Wahābīs to consolidate their territory, which was accompanied by heavy investment in schools that preached the Wahābī identity to the entire population under their control. This preaching resulted in the development of a common identity as “Wahābī” among the various tribes that had been incorporated into the movement with the creation of the Kingdom of Sau'di Arabia, which in turn lead to a relative sense of unity within the state, thereby fostering the political stability of the state. See Figures 3 and 4 below.

Figure 3: Trajectory of the Wahābī Movement

Wahābī Movement + Sau'di Tribe → Militarized Wahābī Movement,

Militarized Wahābī Movement + Socio-Political Consolidation → Emirate of Dir'iyah,

Emirate of Dir'iyah + Military Conquests → Kingdom of Sa'udi Arabia,⁵²

⁵¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Sa'udi Arabia*, pp. 26-30

⁵² Recognizing that the movement underwent several iterations of conquests and defeats at this stage, I have simplified this section of the model to reflect the ultimate outcome of the movement's development during this period, which was predominantly characterized by its victories over its rivals.

Kingdom of Sa'udi Arabia + Socio-Political Consolidation → Stable State-like Entity

Figure 4: Modified Theoretical Trajectory⁵³

Militant Islamist Movement + Cohesive Political Entity → Militant Islamist Insurgency,

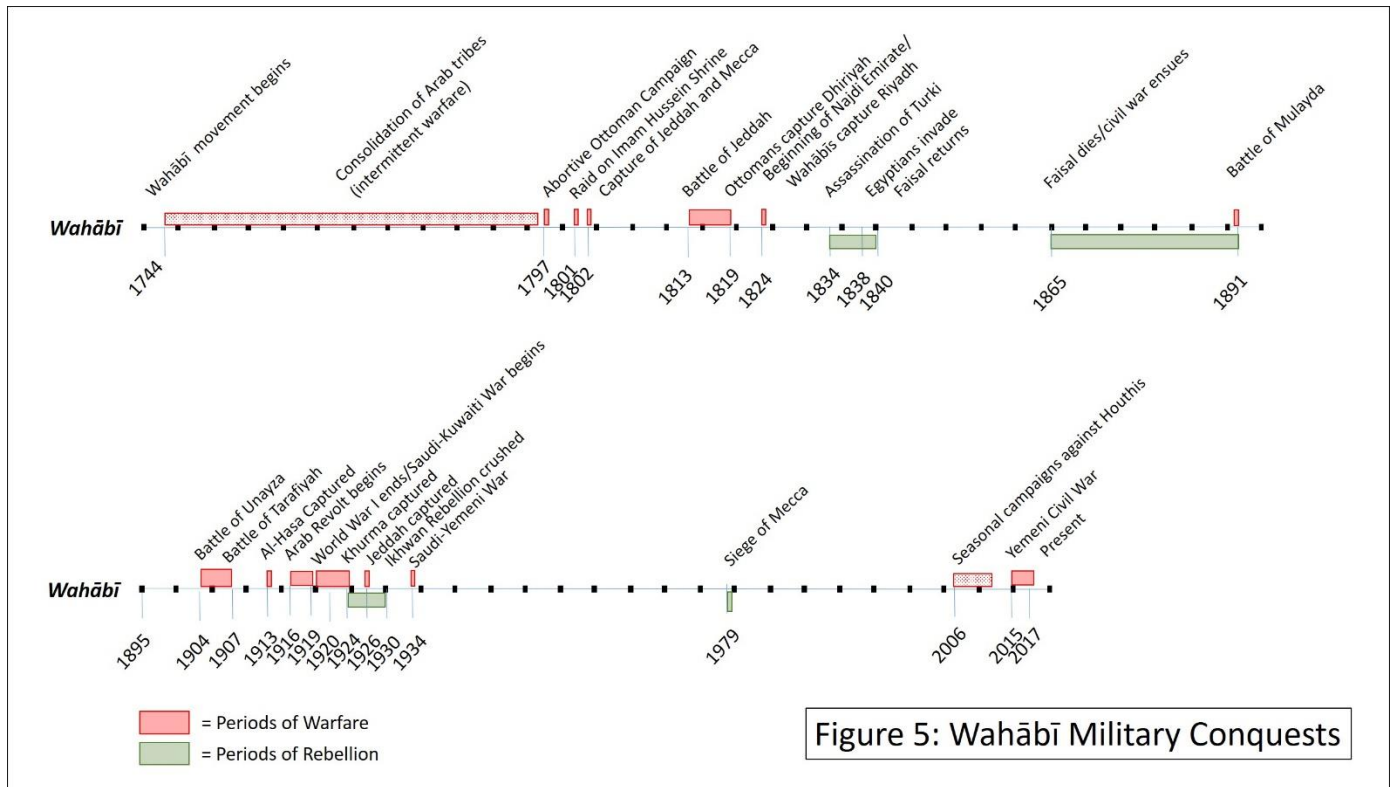
Militant Islamist Insurgency + Social-Political Consolidation → Cohesive Movement,

Cohesive Movement + Military Conquests → State-like Political Entity,

State-like Political Entity + Socio-Political Consolidation → Stability

In comparing the trajectory of the Wahābī movement to that specified by the theoretical model we find that overall, the Wahābī case represents a close match to the trajectory prescribed by the model. Although the Wahābīs sustained several major defeats on the battlefield at the hands of the Ottomans and their Egyptian agents and later the Rashidi tribal confederation, in both instances the socio-political cohesiveness of the movement, which survived the military setbacks, enabled it to rapidly reconstitute its political and military forces and re-emerge as a powerful movement. Thus, the Wahābī movement serves as perhaps the strongest example of the power of socio-political consolidation as a tool for sustaining the viability of an insurgent movement, especially in the face of an adversary that enjoys advantages in terms of both military and economic power.

⁵³ This is merely a copy of the model presented in Figure 2 above, replicated here for the sake of the reader's convenience in comparing the two, side by side.



Case 2: The Almohads

Introduction to the Almohad Movement

An overview of the Almohad empire’s trajectory below provides a generalized context for the analysis which follows and serves as a basic orientation for readers who may not be familiar with the main events associated with the rise and fall of the movement. In approximately 1109 CE Ibn Tūmart, a Berber native to the mountainous regions of the High Atlas in what is today known as Morocco, returned from a multi-year sojourn in the central Islamic lands during which he traveled among the major urban centers in pursuit of religious studies under the most prominent scholars of his day. Along his return across North Africa to his home in Morocco, Ibn Tūmart began preaching a fiery, reformist brand of Islam, which called for Muslims to return to

the “true practices of the faith”. At each stop along the way, Ibn Tūmart gathered small groups of followers but drew the ire of the established authorities whose positions would be most directly challenged by his reforms. Consequently, he and his most faithful disciples were eventually ousted from all of the major North African cities, most famously Marrakesh, before they came to settle in his native tribal areas in the mountainous regions of the High Atlas. There, Ibn Tūmart formed a society based on tribal structures, unified by a common interpretation of Islam, that would form the basis of the movement that would grow into an empire.

Socio-Political Consolidation in the Almohad Movement

The beginning of the Almohad movement can be traced to the return of Ibn Tūmart to the western Islamic territories after a lengthy sojourn of study in the central Islamic lands, which included stints in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad, among others. During each of the many stops along his route of return Ibn Tūmart established a reputation as a firebrand reformist, calling for a return to the true practice of pure Islam, devoid of the comfortable trappings that attended traditional ways of life in the various tribal groups native to this region. His calls for a renewed dedication to the highest ideals of religious puritanism often incurred the wrath of both political and religious authority figures as his preaching challenged their positions within the status quo systems of the day. Finding only minimal support in these cities, Ibn Tūmart and a small coterie of his closest followers continued their march westward, temporarily settling in the Almoravid capital of Marrakesh where he was able to generate a substantial following of

over a 1000. This following eventually attracted the negative attentions of the Almoravid Amir and his counselors, who threatened to kill Ibn Tūmart if he continued to preach his reformist visions to the population of Marrakesh.⁵⁴

Faced with a life or death decision, Ibn Tūmart and his faithful followers withdrew to the safety of the High Atlas. There, once more among his native mountainous Berber tribe and beyond the reach of the Almoravid military, Ibn Tūmart began preaching his message of puritanical Islamic reform amongst his fellow tribesmen. In contrast to the urbanized Almoravids, who were based on desert Berber tribes, and the Arab societies he had encountered during his return to the west, the mountainous Berber tribes proved to be a much more receptive audience to Ibn Tūmart's ideals.⁵⁵ According to Fromherz, the receptiveness of these tribes was likely due to their cultural values and social mores which were closely aligned with the austere version of Islam Ibn Tūmart preached.⁵⁶ Indeed, it is likely that Ibn Tūmart's upbringing in this society shaped his understanding of Islamic principles and formed the basis of much of his doctrine.

Capitalizing on the receptiveness of the mountain Berber tribes to his doctrine, Ibn Tūmart began a systematic campaign of unifying the disparate and highly independent tribes of the region into a single, cohesive super-tribal identity, based on their shared adherence to his reformist doctrine. In so doing, Ibn Tūmart co-opted tribal practices and principles to form a hierarchical movement that included existing tribal leadership structures and practices within a

⁵⁴ Fromherz, *The Almohads*, pp. 1-3, 35-52

⁵⁵ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 28-32

⁵⁶ Fromherz, *The Almohads*, pp. 87-114

social framework that superseded individual tribal identities without eliminating them altogether. In this framework adherence to Almohad principles was the dominant social currency of prestige and the main identifying feature which distinguished members of this society from the other tribal groups in the region. Nevertheless, tribal elements which had been incorporated into this society were permitted and even encouraged to retain their distinct identities. In fact, these tribal markers of distinction were occasionally used by Almohad leadership as a means to foster competitions among the various constituent groups in an effort to prove their loyalty to the Almohad cause, typically during battles with outside groups.⁵⁷

The development of this movement into a system of identity continued for several years as Ibn Tūmart expanded his dominion over a vast array of tribal groups in most of the High Atlas region. The Almohads expanded through a combination of preaching and conquest.⁵⁸ In the instances where certain tribes or clans resisted submitting to the authority of the Almohads, they were crushed in battle, with the defeated survivors then being permitted to pledge their allegiance to the movement.⁵⁹ This allowance enabled the movement to continue to grow in strength and expand its territorial control, all the while growing its ranks with new converts to the cause, willing or otherwise.

It is important to note that not all of the original tribal leaders were receptive to Ibn Tūmart's preaching. In fact, it has been reported that in a number of cases, the senior members of different tribes resisted joining the Almohad movement while their younger, and

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁸ Linda G. Jones. "The Preaching of the Almohads: Loyalty and Resistance across the Strait of Gibraltar", *Medieval Encounters*, Vol. 19 Brill: Leiden, 2013, pp. 71-101; Fromherz, *The Almohads*, pp. 60-67; Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 34-39

⁵⁹ Fromherz, *The Almohads*, pp. 60-67

presumably more impressionable, members were eager to join the movement. In these cases, Ibn Tūmart relied on the use of his infamous enforcer, al-Bashir, to eliminate the incorrigible elements within the tribe, convince the fence-sitters, and to make way for the enthusiastic followers to take their place.⁶⁰ In this manner Ibn Tūmart and his inner circle of disciples demonstrated the ability to guarantee the allegiance of his followers and to ensure that the most senior positions in the Almohad hierarchy, as well as those in the subordinate tribal components, were filled by those whose loyalty was beyond question.

The cohesiveness of the Almohad movement continued to build in the years immediately following Ibn Tūmart's death in 1130, as his successor, 'Abd al-Mu'min led the movement on a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the Almoravids. With their dominance of the Atlas Berber tribes solidified into a single socio-political unit, the Almohads were able to expand their control beyond the mountain ranges, into the coastal plains of present day Algeria and Morocco by 1145. By 1147, the Almohads had captured the Almoravid capital, Marrakesh, along with most of the other major cities in the region. Once they had established military control over North Africa, the Almohads continued their conquests into the Iberian Peninsula, where they succeeded in capturing most of the territories formerly governed by the Almoravid empire.⁶¹

However, with the expansion of Almohad governance to territories that included a diverse array of ethnicities, tribes, and religious groups that did not share the cultural values of the mountainous Berber tribes, such as the Bedouin Arabs, and coastal Berbers, the Almohads

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

⁶¹ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 51-55

rapidly slackened their efforts to incorporate conquered subjects into their doctrine.⁶²

Although there are records of the Almohads having established a training institute in Tīnmal to indoctrinate prospects into their system of beliefs, their methods of training tended to focus on elite individual members of society, rather than bringing entire clans, tribes, townships, etc. into the fold as they had done with the mountain Berbers.⁶³

The Almohad's rapid expansion far outpaced their ability to effectively incorporate newly conquered people groups into their socio-political system. Whereas the Almohad spent in excess of three decades building a cohesive movement among the mountain Berbers of the High Atlas, the explosion of Almohad control over virtually all of North Africa and much of the Iberian Peninsula occurred over the span of a little less than a single decade. Furthermore, the social conditions of the coastal plains and Spain were vastly different from those encountered in the Atlas Mountains, where the disparate tribes shared a range of common cultural values that almost certainly facilitated their ability to coalesce into a cohesive socio-political group. The peoples who occupied the Almohads' newly conquered territory, however, included a wide range of ethno-linguistic groups, which included Arabs, Berbers, sub-Saharan Africans, and Europeans. Additionally, these territories also included Christians, Jews, pagans, and an array of Muslims who subscribed to different interpretations of the Islamic faith. Consequently, the Almohads faced substantially greater challenges in fostering the same type of socio-political unity that they were able to achieve prior to embarking on their conquests outside the relatively homogenous Atlas region.

⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 55-66

⁶³ *Ibid*, pp. 62-63

The challenges of maintaining socio-political unity while rapidly expanding their span of territorial control almost immediately manifested themselves in the form of rebellions. As the Almohad cabal was consumed with a drive to continue its conquests, it neglected to incorporate the majority of its new subjects into their system of religious beliefs and government. Instead, these groups were ruled by select relatives and close allies of 'Abd al-Mu'min who had in the meantime declared that leadership of the newly-established Almohad Caliphate would henceforth be transferred on the basis of familial inheritance, rather than on the basis of religious merit as had been the case when he came into his role as the Almohad Caliph. Consequently, many of the tribes and cities in the areas conquered by the Almohads in the Eastern reaches of their empire would remain pacified for only as long as the Almohads maintained a superior force in the region, rebelling once more as soon as the military forces departed.

By the time of his death in 1163, 'Abd al-Mu'min had expanded military and political control over a vast swath of terrain, stretching from the Atlantic coast of present-day Morocco in the west to Tripolitania in present-day Libya in the east and from Jaen in Spain to the north, to the southern foothills of the Atlas on the edge of the Sahara Desert to the South. However, Almohad grasp of this territory was challenged from the time of their earliest conquests. Thus, Abu Yaqub inherited the throne of his father 'Abd al-Mu'min at a time in which a number of rebellions in the eastern portions of the empire had only recently been put down. Although a tentative quiet persisted throughout the majority of the empire in the aftermath of 'Abd al-Mu'min's counter-revolutionary expeditions, upon his ascension to the Caliphate, Abu Yaqub was immediately beset with a rebellion within his own camp led by Almohad hardliners who

sought to restore the original mode of government that was based on meritocracy. This rebellion was quickly stamped out, but it revealed the presence of political dissension within the innermost circles of the Almohad camp.

Over the course of the next century, the Almohads never undertook any serious effort to reestablish the socio-political cohesion that had provided the movement with its initial vigor. This lack of unity forced all of the Almohad rulers to rely on heavy-handed military rule, implemented by a cadre of loyalist governors, supported by garrisons comprised of troops recruited from among the tribes of the mountain Berbers. This approach to governance may have served as an effective expedient measure in the short term – indeed, there are solid records of Almohad taxation from these areas, and examples of innovative and unique architectural styles of mosques and madrasa in many cities the Almohads controlled, outside the Atlas range. However, in the long run this approach undermined the Almohads' ability to maintain the same socio-political cohesiveness that had enabled the movement to grow and expand so rapidly and eventually had the doubly negative effect of discouraging further recruitment to the cause while also provoking nearly constant rebellions in one quarter of the empire or another.⁶⁴

Almohad Military Conquests

As the Almohad movement grew, it began to come into conflict with opposing tribes, which were ultimately subdued and incorporated into the movement, thereby increasing its

⁶⁴ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 51-55

territorial and human domain. By 1128, the movement felt itself sufficiently powerful to challenge the political dominance of the Almoravid empire which then ruled the western deserts and plains of North Africa and the southern portions of the Iberian Peninsula. After suffering a major defeat at the gates of Marrakesh in 1128, the Almohads retreated back into the safety of their mountains where Ibn Tūmart had died several years later. Under the leadership of Ibn Tūmart's closest disciple, 'Abd al-Mu'min, the Almohads launched a guerrilla campaign against the Almoravid trade routes and military outposts, eventually culminating in a sweeping conquest of both the western portions of North Africa and all of Islamic Spain, replacing and even expanding the areas that had been formerly under Almoravid control.

Following the death of Ibn Tūmart, his successor, 'Abd al-Mu'min, built on the Almohad movement by extending its domain in the safety of the mountainous regions of present day Morocco. This expansion began with first securing the entirety of the High Atlas and gradually grew to include the Berber tribes of the Middle Atlas, the Rif, and finally the mountain ranges south of Tlemcen. Having benefitted from an incubation period of nearly three decades in the safety of the High Atlas Mountains, the Almohads exploded onto the coastal plains of North Africa in 1145, capturing in rapid succession the cities of Tlemcen, Oran, and Fez. By 1147, the movement had captured the Almoravid capital of Marrakesh, where it established its own movement in the seat of power. Motivated by their drive to impose their system on the whole of society, the Almohads continued their expansion to the Atlantic coast of North Africa while simultaneously crossing over into southern Spain where within several years of crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, they succeeded in capturing most of the territories that had formerly been

under Almoravid control and were pressing hard against the southern borders of the Christian-held territories.⁶⁵

By 1150 the Almohads had conquered most of Morocco and the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula, with the exceptions of the regions of Granada and Valencia, which although under Muslim control, were able to stave off Almohad expeditions and remained independent. Between 1152 and 1160, Almohad forces launched several military drives in North Africa toward the east against the Hammadid Kingdom, the Arab Bedouin tribes that resided in the areas between Bougie and Tripolitania, and Norman Christians who had initiated a campaign of their own in North Africa. By 1160, the Almohads had extended their borders in North Africa from Agadir in the west to Tripolitania in the east and had based their capital in Marrakesh.⁶⁶

While the Almohads spent most of the years between 1145 and 1160 occupied with conquering additional territories, there were also a number of struggles within the Almohad movement and among its new subjects, which required the application of military force to restore the peace. The first of these came from the Arab tribes in the eastern areas of the empire when the recently subjected Bedouin revolted against their Almohad governors once the Almohad army departed from the area. The second rebellion began when Ibn Tūmart's surviving brothers and a number of the Almohad shaykhs objected to 'Abd al-Mu'min's decision to establish his bloodline as the basis for succession to his role as the Almohad caliph.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 49-55

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 54-60.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 57-69

Although both of these insurrections were quickly put down, they established a precedent of disharmony within the empire that was to continually resurface throughout its duration.

Following the death of 'Abd al-Mu'min in 1163, the Almohad Empire made few successful advances along any of its borders of any major significance. The reign of Abū Ya`qūb Yūsuf (reigned 1163-1184), was distinguished primarily for its stability and relative quiet. Although the Almohads under his leadership were able to incorporate the former holdouts of Valencia and Granada, their ventures into the Christian-held territories in Spain met with fierce resistance and failed to expand the empire.⁶⁸

Under Abū Ya`qūb Yūsuf's successor, Abū Yūsuf Ya`qūb (r. 1184-1213), the Almohads faced a series of rebellions which lasted beyond the duration of his reign. Upon learning of the death of Abu Yaqub Yusuf in 1184, the Banu Ghaniya Berber tribe rebelled against their Almohad overlords in the North African cities of Bougie, Algiers, Milīānah, and Ashir, taking advantage of Almohad weakness to regain their independence. Although an Almohad column recaptured Bougie in 1185, the insurrection continued in the rural areas and drew the support of the ever-restive Bedouin Arabs, who had never fully accepted Almohad dominion in the first place. This rebellion coincided with a military expansion by the Banu Marīn Berbers who had never been conquered by the Almohads and retained independence in the areas of southern Tunisia through portions of present-day Algeria.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, on the Iberian Peninsula, the Christian kingdoms had learned of the unrest in North Africa and launched a series of offensives into Almohad territory. Faced with pressure on

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 70

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 71-74

two fronts, Abū Yūsuf Ya`qūb granted the Banu Marīn autonomy in the eastern provinces of North Africa and shifted its military attention to address the Spanish threat in Europe without fully resolving the other rebellions that continued to simmer in North Africa. In Spain, the Almohad army was able to win a defensive stand against the Christians at the Battle of Alarcos in 1195 but were only able to maintain their borders and made no further territorial gains.⁷⁰

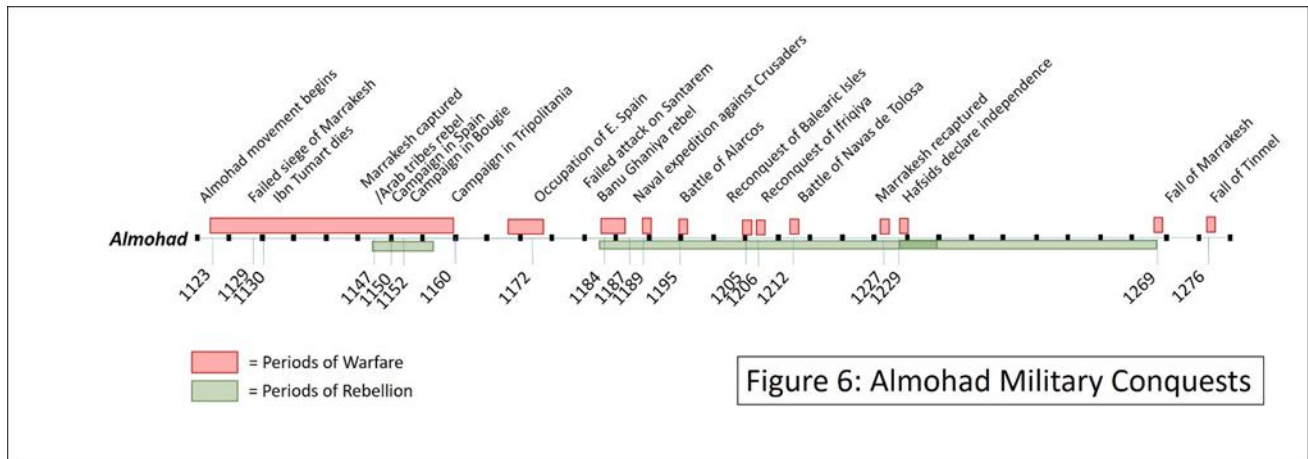
After the death of Abū Yūsuf Ya`qūb in 1199, his son, Muḥammad al-Nasir inherited the ongoing Banu Ghaniya and Arab rebellions in the east, while other rebellions cropped up in the regions of Sus and Ghunara in the south. By 1202 the Banu Ghaniya had recaptured most of present-day Tunisia, Libya, and portions of Algeria from the Almohads. Al-Nasir responded with a lengthy counterinsurgency that restored Almohad primacy in these regions by early 1206. He was only able to secure this region by deputizing the Ḥafṣ tribe, which required the support of a large Almohad garrison. By this time, the Christians of Spain were once more pressuring the northern borders of the Almohad empire, requiring another expedition of the army from Marrakesh into the Iberian Peninsula. This campaign lasted from 1211 and culminated in the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in July of 1212 in which the combined armies of the Spanish Christians crushed the Almohad forces, marking the first time in which a Christian army had defeated a Muslim army while it was being led by the caliph on the Iberian Peninsula.⁷¹

After the defeat of the Almohads at Las Navas de Tolosa, the caliph, Muḥammad al-Nasīr retreated back to Marrakesh where he died the following year, in 1213. He was succeeded by a series of weak and ineffective rulers who oversaw the demise of the movement over the course

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 79

⁷¹ *Ibid*, pp. 77-89

of the following three decades. After Las Navas de Tolosa, the myth of Almohad invincibility, which although plagued by numerous rebellions had never been beaten decisively since it began its march of expansion in 1145, was shattered and the Almohads never again returned in any force to Europe. Between 1213 and 1248, Almohad control of its North African holdings continued to be eroded by the expansion of the Banu Marīn, the independence of the Banu Ghaniya and the Arab tribes and intermittent insurrections elsewhere. By 1248 the Almohads controlled little outside of Marrakesh and in 1269 even this was lost to the Banu Marīn as they established the Marīnid dynasty. The few Almohad survivors who remained after the fall of Marrakesh retreated to the original home of their movement in Tīnmal, where the Marīnids eventually pursued them and eradicated the movement once and for all in 1276.⁷² See Figure 6 below.



Analyzing the Almohad Movement

A historical review of the Almohad political trajectory makes clear that the movement encountered little in the way of opposition among the Masmuda Berber tribesmen of the

⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 83-92

Maghrib during its formative years. This enabled the first generation of the Almohad movement to devote most of its energies toward developing religious unity on the basis of shared values without having to expend much in the way of resources on military campaigns. Once the Almohads began expanding their territory beyond the borders of their co-ethnic tribesmen, with whom they also shared a common language, they began to encounter resistance. This was most prominently so in the case of the Arab tribes which the Almohads repeatedly conquered but failed to incorporate into their structures of administrative and military power. In time, the political and military dominance of the Almohads over the Arab and non-Masmuda Berber tribes, while denying them the benefits of belonging to the empire, resulted in the sense of disenfranchisement of the Arabs manifesting itself in a series of rebellions. The spirit of rebellion then spread to other tribes and ethnic groups, most notably, the Banu Marīn and Banu Ghaniyah, who also lashed out at Almohad dominance, forcing the central Almohad leadership to dispatch a series of military expeditions to suppress the insurrectionists. As shown in the timeline in Figure 6 above, these rebellions became a near-constant component of Almohad rule.

For almost a quarter of a century, from 1160 to 1184, the Almohad military was able to remain in control of the restive areas in Northern Africa beyond its central base in Marrakesh and the Atlas Mountains. However, following the disastrous defeat of the Almohad army at Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 at the hands of the combined Christian armies of Spain, which resulted in the destruction of the majority of the core Almohad military cadres, Almohad control in the rebellious regions of North Africa became tenuous as the central Almohad authorities lacked the coercive power to bring the population, most of which had never accepted Almohad rule,

under their control.⁷³ Following their defeat in 1212, the Almohads slipped into a steep decline that saw their capital in Marrakesh captured (and recaptured) several times as their allies abandoned them and rebel movements gained power, capturing huge swaths of territory in modern-day Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. By the middle of the 13th century, the Almohads were no longer the major power in North Africa with their domain once more limited to Marrakesh and the Atlas.⁷⁴ In 1269 the once rebel Marīnids captured Marrakesh, effectively ending the empire.⁷⁵ Seven years later, Tīnmal was sacked and razed, thereby virtually erasing the last remnants of the once powerful empire.⁷⁶

The causal chain of events laid out above is as follows: The initial union of the Almohad cause to the Masmuda tribal confederation gave the movement a political base from which to begin its expansion. Through an extensive crusade of preaching the Almohad doctrine, supported where necessary by military force, the Almohad movement gained a huge following in the mountainous regions of Morocco. This unified polity was able to expand its domain through a series of military conquests, which gave the movement control over valuable resources, thereby strengthening the movement. However, the pursuit of military conquests brought the Almohads into a position of dominion over a wide range of territory that included very diverse subjects. Their failure to actively incorporate this population into the Almohad identity as they had done with the Masmuda Berber tribes prior to the movement's expansion resulted in a lack of socio-political cohesion within the empire which eventually manifested itself in a series of

⁷³ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 84-88

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 92

⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

rebellions among the disenfranchised peoples they had conquered. These rebellions did not bring about the downfall of the empire, in and of themselves, but when combined with the major defeat of the Almohad army at Las Navas de Tolosa, the central government no longer had the means by which to enforce its rule over the rebellious territories, which ultimately led to the collapse of the empire. See Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: The Almohad Trajectory

Ibn Tumart + Masmuda → Almohad Movement,
Almohad Movement + Socio-Political Consolidation → Cohesive Movement,
Cohesive Movement + Military Conquests → Almohad Empire,
Almohad Empire + Lack of Socio-Political Consolidation → Strong State/Weak Society,
Strong State/Weak Society + Rebellions → Unstable Empire,
Unstable Empire + Military Defeat → Collapse of Empire

Figure 8: Modified Theoretical Trajectory⁷⁷

Militant Islamist Movement + Cohesive Political Entity → Militant Islamist Insurgency,
Militant Islamist Insurgency + Social-Political Consolidation → Cohesive Movement,
Cohesive Movement + Military Conquests → State-like Political Entity,

⁷⁷ This is merely a copy of the model presented in Figure 2 above, replicated here for the sake of the reader's convenience in comparing the two, side by side.

State-like Political Entity + Socio-Political Consolidation → Stability

In this light, the Almohad case serves as evidence supporting the proposed theory in that it followed the trajectory predicted by the theory until it failed to sustain the required socio-political consolidation. Although the Almohad movement did not collapse immediately as a result of this failure, it was plagued throughout the entirety of its existence with an ongoing series of rebellions in one quarter or another of the empire. Had the Almohads sought to incorporate the bulk of the populations it conquered into the overarching Almohad identity, it is possible that the movement would have avoided many of these rebellions. Given the speed with which the Almohads expanded once they began their military conquest of North Africa, which it captured in a little more than a single decade, it would have been nearly impossible for the movement's leaders to achieve anything approaching the same level of unity among the conquered population that had been accomplished during the previous three decades among the relatively homogenous mountain Berber tribes. This could only have been achieved if the Almohads had dramatically slowed the pace of their military campaigns, halting once a given area had been captured and resuming once more only after the majority of the area's population had been absorbed into the movement under a unifying identity. However, as the Almohads expanded beyond the limits of the movement's unity, their military capabilities outstripped their abilities to create a cohesive political entity, ultimately leading to the crumbling of the movement's social and political bases. Once the military capability of the movement, which had held the empire together by force, was severely reduced through

confrontation with a stronger military, the movement lost its ability to guarantee its dominance over its reluctant constituents and over time collapsed.

The comparison of the trajectory of the Almohad movement with that prescribed by the modified theory reveals that the Almohads enjoyed success in the early stages of their movement – those stages in which their trajectory followed the steps in the model. However, as their movement expanded, their lack of socio-political cohesion severely undermined their position, leading to the predictable collapse of their empire once their primary enforcement mechanism, in this case their army, was effectively destroyed and rendered incapable of underwriting the political primacy of the movement’s leaders. As such, the case of the Almohads serves as evidence of the model’s applicability in analyzing militant Islamist movements in that as long as the Almohad movement’s trajectory was aligned with that of the theoretical model, they were successful, but when it deviated from the prescribed course, it was met with failure.

Examining the Islamic State

Although the Wahābī movement experienced its share of military conflict on its path to achieve statehood, it demonstrated a remarkable ability to recover from repeated setbacks and defeats to become one of the most stable nations within the Middle East. Since achieving full statehood in 1932 the Wahābīs have not engaged in extensive campaigns of conquest, limiting their military engagements to low-level support of the neighboring Yemeni government in its ongoing counterinsurgency efforts against the Houthi rebels. Notably, these campaigns did not

materialize in the early stages of state development, but rather took place after nearly a century of relative stability in the country. It appears that the absence of military conquests allowed the Wahābīs to devote their resources toward promoting stability within the country. Consequently, the Wahābīs are presently able to pursue these military conflicts from a position of strength based on a foundation of political stability, in which the country's leadership has invested since the state's inception.

One other aspect of the Wahābī movement that contributed to its enduring stability is the division of labor between the religious and political leaders within the movement. Although the two components of the movement generally work as a cohesive entity, the institutionalization of Sa'udi dominance in matters of politics and governance, explicitly stated in the compact between Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud and Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahāb, insulated them, to a certain extent, from attacks on their legitimacy. The result of this arrangement is that while political leadership of the movement was inherited by one generation of Sa'udis from the previous one, their claim to legitimacy was secure, so long as they were approved by the Wahābī clergy. By contrast, the Almohads vested the authority over both the religious and political aspects of their movement in a single person. Consequently, when 'Abd al-Mu'min designated the position of caliph as a hereditary one, he single-handedly determined that the sole qualification for leadership of the movement would be based on lineage, rather than merit, and he severely compromised the legitimacy of the caliph in the eyes of the Almohad religious leaders, who felt that the caliph should be selected on the basis of religious criteria. The division caused by 'Abd al-Mu'min's decision greatly undermined the socio-political cohesion of the movement and essentially undid several decades' worth of work toward consolidation.

It is interesting to note that the Almohads ceased to exist as the dominant political power within their own territory as early as the 1230s and that their movement ceased to exist entirely with the loss of their base in Tīnmal in 1276.⁷⁸ By contrast the Wahābīs twice survived the loss of their capital, first when the Egyptian army razed Dir'īyah on behalf of the Ottomans in 1819 and secondly, when the Najd Emirate fell to the al-Rashīd in 1891.⁷⁹ In both cases the Wahābīs re-constituted their forces and re-emerged as the dominant political and military power in the Arabian Peninsula within a decade of suffering a disastrous defeat.⁸⁰ This suggests that the efforts the Wahābīs invested in developing a common identity among their constituents at these early stages supplied them with the resilience to withstand several potentially devastating military defeats before rebounding to create the current Kingdom of Sau'di Arabia. With the Almohads having embarked on a course of continuous military conquest at the expense of developing socio-political cohesion in their empire, the seeds of political instability were sown from the very foundation of the state. In due course these seeds grew into full-scale rebellions, and with the destruction of the Almohad forces in 1212, outstripped the Almohad government's ability to keep them in check, bringing about the eventual ruin of the state.

In analyzing the trajectories of the Wahābī and Almohad movements against the trajectory prescribed by the modified version of Kennedy's theory, we find that both cases conform to the outcomes predicted by the model. The Wahābīs, who emphasized socio-political consolidation

⁷⁸ Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pg. 97

⁷⁹ Askar H. Al-Enazy. *The Creation of Saudi Arabia: Ibn Saud and British Imperial Policy, 1914-1927*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group: New York, 2010 Al-Enazy, pp. 10-11

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

as a pathway to achieving a cohesive political movement, built a resilient movement that was able to sustain several invasions by outside forces, re-emerging as the dominant political power in the Arabian Peninsula. Furthermore, the movement has endured for nearly three centuries over the course of which the overall trend of its political power has been one characterized by growth. While it is true that the Wahābīs benefitted from the discovery of large petroleum reserves in its territory in the early 20th century, which brought vast amounts of wealth into its coffers, it is important to note that the discovery of these resources and the economic power which resulted came *after* the movement had solidified its position in the region. The political fortunes of the Wahābī movement were determined long before the discovery and exploitation of these resources and therefore provide no explanatory power to the political outcome of the movement.

Likewise, the Almohad movement was birthed in the mountainous regions of north Africa where it was almost immediately pitted against the dominant Almoravid movement, which enjoyed far greater material wealth in the form of the centers of trade and agricultural production it controlled. Although portions of the Atlas ranges are capable of supporting small-scale agriculture and limited pastoral activity, the scope of the wealth that could potentially be generated by these activities is a mere fraction of the potential wealth possessed by the Almoravids, who had access to a number of coastal cities suitable for international trade along with the more fertile plains situated between the various mountain ranges and the Mediterranean coast. Thus, the initial successes of the Almohads cannot be attributed to any economic advantage. Instead, the socio-political cohesion of the movement serves as a far more powerful source of explaining the early success of the movement. This early portion of

the Almohad trajectory conforms neatly with that of the trajectory prescribed by the modified version of Kennedy's model. However, as the Almohads deviated from the trajectory of the theoretical model by neglecting to sustain their socio-political consolidation efforts, they encountered failure and collapse, just as the model predicts. In this manner we find that the Almohad case also supports the validity of the theoretical model.

This theory suggests that leaders of militant Islamist groups must actively pursue socio-political consolidation as a means of attaining a level of cohesion within their movements to support effective military campaigns to expand the scope of the movement's control, giving it access to more and better resources. When done in a sustained and judicious manner, as in the case of the Wahābīs, a proper balance between military conquests and socio-political consolidation can result in a stable state-like political entity. In instances when these two factors are out of balance, the movement will either go into decline or collapse completely.

These principles provide a useful guideline for assessing the trajectories of militant Islamist movements and may serve as an effective means for determining whether a given movement is making progress towards success or is muddling about in the throes of decline on its way toward collapse. However, it is as yet unclear to what extent the findings of this study are generalizable beyond the universe of militant Islamist movements. On a very tentative basis, I believe that the theoretical model used here may also be applied with some expectation of success not only to the militant Islamist groups covered here, but also to other ideologically-based political movements. My expectation is that the model will prove to be especially useful in analyzing the trajectory of movements that embrace a radical ideology, as opposed to those which are based on more moderate political ideals. The reason for this is that socio-political

cohesion is especially important in movements that aren't likely to attract a large number of active followers because their ideas aren't popular. In these cases, their success or failure depends on the solidarity and cohesiveness of its members in furthering the objectives of their cause, rather than on a willing acceptance by the masses. For this reason, it is likely that the theoretical model used in this study would be best applied to studies of movements that embrace extreme positions on the political poles, such as other militant, religious groups, race-based movements, and militant political factions on the extreme right or left wings of the western political paradigm. Or, in other words, the theoretical model could be reasonably applied to any movement whose ideas are "so good that they must be mandatory". Naturally, it scarcely bears mentioning that further studies would be necessary to more rigorously probe the validity of this model, but for the moment, its validity has been sufficiently proven for our purposes to take the additional measure of employing it as a yardstick with which to assess the trajectory of the Islamic State.

Introduction to the Islamic State

Before we can accurately analyze the socio-political consolidation and military conquests of the Islamic State, a brief review of the movement's history is in order so as to establish a common understanding of the movement's trajectory. This background will serve as the basis for further analysis of the movement in accordance with the modified version of Kennedy's theory I am using to assess the longevity, viability, and stability of militant Islamist movements.

The movement known today as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, commonly referred to as the Islamic State, was born in the chaos and anarchy of Iraqi society following the U.S.-led invasion of the country in 2003. Drawing on his extensive experience as a hardened mujahid, Aḥmad Faḍīl an-Nazāl al-Khalāyla, who is more commonly known by his nom de guerre, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi⁸¹ and his small band of followers, then known as Tawḥīd wal Jihād, jumped to the forefront of what would become a widespread popular insurgency against the foreign occupiers with a series of spectacular and shocking suicide bombings that targeted international support organizations and critical partners of the U.S.⁸²

By late 2004 Zarqawi's movement had gained a large following within Iraq and had emerged as the most extreme in a panoply of insurgent organizations. His status as the head of a strong and viable insurgent organization finally gained him acceptance into al-Qaida's fold as the first of several regional "franchises" for the terrorist organization, under the nominal leadership of Osama bin Laden and his inner circle. This move led to what would be the first in a series of changes in the movement's name – from Jama'at al-Tawḥīd wal Jihād to Al-Qaida in the Land of the Two Rivers, more commonly rendered as Al Qaida in Iraq (AQI).⁸³

In light of Al-Qaida's inability to carry out effective attacks against Western targets in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Zarqawi's merger with Al-Qaida had the more significant effect of placing him at the head of Al-Qaida's most active element. At the time Zarqawi's

⁸¹ Jean Charles Brisard. *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*. New York: Other Press, 2005, pg. 8

⁸² Brisard, *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, pp. 126-132; Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*. Anchor Books: New York, 2015. pp. 101-125; Public Broadcasting Service, "The Rise of ISIS", Produced by: Martin Smith and Linda Hirsch, PBS Frontline, Season 33, Episode 2, October 28, 2014.

⁸³ Jefferey Pool, "Zarqawi's Pledge of Allegiance to Al-Qaeda: Mu'Asker Al-Battar, Issue 21" *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 2, Issue 24, December 16, 2004. <https://jamestown.org/program/zarqawis-pledge-of-allegiance-to-al-qaeda-from-muasker-al-battar-issue-21-2/#.VBeNI0k9Jy0>, accessed March 15, 2018

Jama'at al-Tawhīd wal Jihād – now rebranded as AQI - was the only portion of Al-Qaida capable of engaging the United States and its allies in a head-on fight. Thus, as the leading component of the Al Qaida organization that had led the modern Jihādist movement, AQI effectively became its spearhead.

Although Zarqawi's AQI enjoyed primacy of place among the various insurgent organizations inside Iraq, he quickly squandered whatever opportunity he might have had to develop broader appeal within Iraqi society by sparking a civil war between the Sunni and Shi'a elements of Iraq's population, most notably with the infamous bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra February 22, 2006.⁸⁴ In so doing, AQI had hoped to force Iraq's Sunni population into backing his project to form an Islamic State by creating the perception that Iraq's Shi'a groups posed an existential threat to the Sunni population in Iraq.⁸⁵ Simultaneously, AQI, in an apparent attempt to consolidate its control over the disparate Sunni insurgent groups which varied ideologically from completely secular to just as religious as AQI, began attacking elements of these groups as well.⁸⁶ This course placed AQI in the middle of a war in which it faced three opponents: the U.S.-led coalition forces, the Shi'a militant groups, and the less radical Sunni

⁸⁴ Public Broadcasting Service, "The Rise of ISIS", Produced by: Martin Smith and Linda Hirsch, PBS Frontline, Season 33, Episode 2, October 28, 2014

⁸⁵ William McCants. *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*. Picador: New York, 2016. pp. 10, 36, 146

⁸⁶ Reuters staff, "Iraqis Vow to Fight Al Qaeda After Sheikh Death", September 14, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-anbar/iraqis-vow-to-fight-al-qaeda-after-sheikh-death-idUSL1477322720070914>, accessed March 15, 2018; Rory Carroll, "Al-Qaida in Iraq Seizes Border Town as it Mobilises Against Poll", *The Guardian*, September 7, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/07/iraq.alqaida>, accessed March 15, 2018; International Herald Tribune, "Al-Qaeda Linked Group Moves to Patch Up Rift with Other Insurgent Factions" International Herald Tribune, April 17, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080127050439/http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/04/17/africa/ME-GEN-Iraq-Insurgent-Split.php>, Accessed March 15, 2018

insurgent groups. Most significantly, many of the Sunni insurgent groups that were indigenous to Iraq were closely tied to the tribal structures that dominated social life outside the major cities. By attacking these groups, AQI inadvertently turned what it intended to be a battle for ideological supremacy into a tribal feud.⁸⁷ With its leader and much of its rank and file hailing from countries other than Iraq,⁸⁸ this was a battle AQI had no chance of winning.

AQI attempted to improve its appeal to the broader Sunni insurgency first by creating the Mujahidīn Shūrā Council – a structure that would nominally serve as an organization for strategic planning and coordination among the various groups under its umbrella – and later, after Zarqawi’s death in June 2006, by announcing the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq.⁸⁹ However, both efforts failed to attract much in the way of support. The Mujahidīn Shūrā Council turned out to be a major flop, gaining the allegiance of only a small number of weaker organizations that already shared AQI’s vision.⁹⁰ Likewise, the announcement of the Islamic State in Iraq was roundly rejected by the majority of native Iraqi insurgent organizations

⁸⁷ Reuters staff, “Iraqis Vow to Fight Al Qaeda After Sheikh Death”, September 14, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-anbar/iraqis-vow-to-fight-al-qaeda-after-sheikh-death-idUSL1477322720070914>, accessed March 15, 2018

⁸⁸ Al-Zarqawi, as the name indicates, came from the Zarqa region of Jordan. Similarly, AQI, with its apocalyptic message, attracted a large number of recruits from outside Iraq. See CTC paper “Al Qaida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records” by Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman for more information on foreign fighters.

⁸⁹ Middle East Media Research Institute, “Jihad Groups in Iraq Take an Oath of Allegiance”, *Islamist Websites Monitor*, No. 8, October 17, 2006, <https://www.memri.org/reports/islamist-websites-monitor-no-8>, accessed March 15, 2018

⁹⁰ International Herald Tribune, “Al-Qaeda Linked Group Moves to Patch Up Rift with Other Insurgent Factions” *International Herald Tribune*, April 17, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080127050439/http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/04/17/africa/ME-GEN-Iraq-Insurgent-Split.php>. Accessed April 7, 2018

and drew criticism even from AQI's closest ideological allies, the Al Qaida leadership under bin Laden.⁹¹

Taking advantage of the fissures in the Sunni insurgency, the American forces, then under the command of General David Petraeus famously embarked on a strategy in which the U.S. co-opted the less extreme Sunni insurgent and tribal forces into what were dubbed al-Şahwah or Awakening, groups of militias that were deputized to confront AQI forces and purge them from the predominantly Sunni areas. Concurrently, the U.S. embarked on a relentless campaign of special operations raids and airstrikes to kill AQI's core leaders, including Zarqawi's successors, and technical specialists.⁹² This combined strategy succeeded in devastating much of the AQI network, both in its leadership and rank and file troops. Indeed, by early April 2010, what remained of the movement ceased to be a factor on the Iraqi battlefield and most of the surviving members were driven underground.⁹³

Following the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, Iraqi Prime Minister Nūrī al-Mālikī, a Shi'a Muslim, set about creating a de facto Shi'a state in which few Sunnis were incorporated into the government and many were targeted as potential threats to the al-Mālikī regime.⁹⁴ This scheme of directed disenfranchisement continued through at least 2013 and fostered the fears of many Sunnis that they had no future in the state of Iraq.⁹⁵ At the same time, in neighboring

⁹¹ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, pp. 44-45, 93-94

⁹² Public Broadcasting Service, "The Rise of ISIS", Produced by: Martin Smith and Linda Hirsch, PBS Frontline, Season 33, Episode 2, October 28, 2014

⁹³ Author's personal observations while serving as an analyst for the United State Army during the period between June 2007 – June 2010

⁹⁴ Public Broadcasting Service, "The Rise of ISIS", Produced by: Martin Smith and Linda Hirsch, PBS Frontline, Season 33, Episode 2, October 28, 2014.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

Syria, what had begun as a popular resistance movement in a local manifestation of the Arab Spring phenomenon that swept through much of the Arab world in early 2011, had developed into a civil war with much of the country's Sunni majority population pitted against the Alawite-controlled government. Seeing an opportunity to inject some much-needed vitality into the flagging Islamic State brand, which had remained quietly underground, but nonetheless alive since 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi sent a small force into Syria to establish ties with the nascent Sunni insurgency and begin expanding the movement. This initial foray into the Syrian conflict was met with success and the IS movement began attracting increasing numbers of recruits and conquering patches of Syrian territory.⁹⁶

Reinvigorated by the successes in Syria, Baghdadi ordered the IS forces to begin a series of attacks in Iraq, which led to the capture of Al-Fallūjah in December 2013. After successfully defending al-Fallūjah against repeated efforts by the Iraqi Army to recapture the city, the Islamic State embarked on a blitzkrieg campaign of conquests that saw the movement capture vast swaths of territory, particularly in Iraq's Sunni heartland including most notably, the northern city of Mosul, which fell to the Islamic State in June 2014.⁹⁷ This drive continued into Syria where the movement succeeded in capturing a number of cities in the eastern portion of the country, where much of the population shared tribal ties with their Iraqi neighbors.⁹⁸ By

⁹⁶ Vice News, "The Islamic State", Vice News Specials, Season 1, Episode 673, Hosted by Ben Anderson, located at: https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/The-Islamic-State/559ea2a9884e6b677d5e2b25, accessed on March 15, 2018; Vice News, "Fighting the Islamic State with Iraq's Golden Division: The Road to Fallujah" Vice News Specials, Season 1, Episode 136, Hosted by Ayman Oghanna, located at: https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/fighting-the-islamic-state-with-iraqs-golden-division-the-road-to-fallujah/575052f347622d6745e44de6, accessed March 16, 2018

⁹⁷ British Broadcasting Corporation, "How can militants take over Iraqi cities?" June 11, 2014 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25588623>, accessed April 4, 2018

⁹⁸ Vice News, "The Islamic State", Vice News Specials, Season 1, Episode 673, Hosted by Ben Anderson, located at: https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/The-Islamic-State/559ea2a9884e6b677d5e2b25, accessed on March 15,

the beginning of 2015 the Islamic State controlled a large swath of contiguous territory stretching from central Syria to the outskirts of Baghdad in Iraq. Included in this territory were numerous oilfields and refineries and other key pieces of infrastructure that served as a source of revenue for the Islamic State to sustain its governance efforts.

Islamic State Socio-Political Consolidation

The Islamic State was formed on the basis of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Tawhīd wal Jihād organization, which was itself forged in the Jordanian prison system and on the battlefields and training camps in Afghanistan during the 1990's and early 2000's.⁹⁹ This small, but intensely focused cadre formed the nucleus of Zarqawi's movement which was responsible for initiating the conflict in Iraq during the insurgency stage of the organization's trajectory. However, the size of the initial socio-political entity on which the movement was built offered it only a narrow base of support from which to draw recruits. Throughout the course of the Iraq war, the Islamic State occasionally formed alliances with smaller tribal groups, but never gained a significant or enduring foothold with any of them.¹⁰⁰ In choosing to forego any serious attempt to harness the movement to a base with a broader appeal, such as an existing tribal confederation or political party, the Islamic State, in its early stages, was forced to rely on the

2018; Vice News, "Fighting the Islamic State with Iraq's Golden Division: The Road to Fallujah" Vice News Specials, Season 1, Episode 136, Hosted by Ayman Oghanna, located at: https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/fighting-the-islamic-state-with-iraqs-golden-division-the-road-to-fallujah/575052f347622d6745e44de6, accessed March 16, 2018

⁹⁹ Brisard, *Zarqawi*, pp. 63-125

¹⁰⁰ Rory Carroll, "Al-Qaida in Iraq seizes border town as it mobilises against poll", *The Guardian*, September 7, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/07/iraq.alqaida>. Accessed April 7, 2018

support of outsiders to generate adequate recruits and funding to sustain and expand its mission.

There is little documentation of any efforts that the Islamic State undertook to achieve socio-political consolidation during the Iraq war. However, its propaganda machine routinely churned out material that cast its opponents in a negative light by drawing on historical references. In particular, Islamic State propaganda commonly portrayed its Shi'a opponents as "Safavids" in reference to the Persian empire which popularized Shi'a Islam through forced conversions and engaged in a sectarian war with its Sunni counterpart, the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰¹ Similarly, all secular Muslims, especially those who were aligned with official state governments were referred to as "Apostates", hearkening to the tribal groups which seceded from the Islamic Ummah in the immediate aftermath of the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. Likewise, any Western elements were designated as "Crusaders" in an obvious recollection of the crusades that took place during the Middle Ages.¹⁰² Here, the goal of these propaganda efforts appears to have been one of consolidating the Islamic State's base through a process of elimination, whereby the movement and its core allies were not so much defined by who they were as much as they were defined by *who they were not*.

In its reincarnated form in 2013, the Islamic State made a much more serious effort to win over the support of the Sunni tribes in Iraq's Anbar Province.¹⁰³ After enduring several years of ostracization and outright persecution at the hands of the Maliki government, Iraq's

¹⁰¹ Anonymous, "The Return of Khilafah" *Dabiq*, Issue 1, Ramadan 1435 (June-July 2014), pp. 9, 42

¹⁰² Anonymous, "Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa" *Dabiq*, Issue 8, Jumada al-Akhirah 1436 (March-April 2015), pp. 2, 4-6, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18, 20, 25-26, 28

¹⁰³ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, pp. 136-137

disenchanted Sunni population was a ripe target for the Islamic State recruitment drives and propaganda campaigns.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, the Sunni population of Syria, which was bearing the brunt of the Syrian military's counterinsurgency efforts offered a similarly fertile ground for gaining both active and passive support for the movement. This time, with a much broader base of sympathizers, the Islamic State was able to rapidly expand its scope of political control through a series of military campaigns that captured most of northwestern Iraq and much of eastern Syria.

While there is no record of deliberations among senior Islamic State leaders over the need to consolidate their movement's socio-political base as a precursor to continued expansion, it is nevertheless clear from the movement's emphasis on preaching and governance in the areas it controlled that the organization learned from its previous failures in Iraq to change its approach in 2013. By late 2014 the Islamic State had launched an impressive project of outreach to the population living in areas under its control. The documentary titled "The Islamic State", produced by Vice News offers irrefutable evidence of the numerous mechanisms employed by the Islamic State to achieve socio-political cohesion through a comprehensive effort to consolidate the population, including camps for religious indoctrination of children, military training for teens, forced attendance at prayers, maintaining centers for Islamic outreach, education and religious rehabilitation programs for criminals, and public celebrations of the Islamic State.¹⁰⁵ Beyond these institutions, the Islamic State also established the government

¹⁰⁴ Public Broadcasting Service, "The Rise of ISIS", Produced by: Martin Smith and Linda Hirsch, PBS Frontline, Season 33, Episode 2, October 28, 2014

¹⁰⁵ Vice News, "The Islamic State", Vice News Specials, Season 1, Episode 673, Hosted by Ben Anderson, located at: https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/The-Islamic-State/559ea2a9884e6b677d5e2b25, accessed on March 15, 2018; See also Vice News, "Fighting the Islamic State with Iraq's Golden Division: The Road to Fallujah" Vice News

office of the *Ḥisbah*, the institution responsible for regulating public behavior and ensuring that it conformed to the Islamic principles to which the Islamic State subscribed.¹⁰⁶ Notably, the Islamic State’s approach with regard to socio-political consolidation employed a multi-tiered approach, which targeted members of all age groups, particularly the youth, which it hailed as “the generation of *Jihād*” – young men who would grow up knowing no other way of life than that which it learned under the tutelage of the Islamic State.¹⁰⁷

The Islamic State’s efforts to develop socio-political cohesion were not limited to the areas under its control. Rather, its messaging continued to reach international audiences through an expanded propaganda engine that churned out professional-quality videos and online magazines through a wide array of internet sites in multiple languages, including Arabic, English, Turkish, and French. These productions typically included testimonials of life in the Islamic State, videos of attacks to demonstrate the military prowess of Islamic State fighters, videos of execution to highlight the judicial credentials of the Islamic State’s judicial apparatus in implementing the *Ḥadd* punishments prescribed by the *Qur’an* and *Hadith*, and sermonizing articles which variously laid out the Islamic basis for the creation of an Islamic State and the need for all true Muslims to join it by any means available to them.¹⁰⁸

Specials, Season 1, Episode 136, Hosted by Ayman Oghanna, located at: https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/fighting-the-islamic-state-with-iraqs-golden-division-the-road-to-fallujah/575052f347622d6745e44de6, accessed March 16, 2018

¹⁰⁶ Vice News, “The Islamic State”, Vice News Specials, Season 1, Episode 673, Hosted by Ben Anderson, located at: https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/The-Islamic-State/559ea2a9884e6b677d5e2b25, accessed on March 15, 2018

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous, “Inside the *Khilafah*”, Episodes 1-7, Al Hayat Media, posted to Jihadology website at: <http://jihadology.net/2017/08/20/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-inside-the-caliphate-3/>, accessed April 5, 2018; See also Anonymous, *Dabiq*, Multiple Issues (June-July 2014 – July-August 2016)

Strikingly, the Islamic State routinely highlighted the diversity of its international constituency through articles that featured Afghan, African, European, and other non-Arab members of its ranks.¹⁰⁹ As the movement expanded and gained loyal followers among other radical groups across the globe in a version of “franchising”: similar to that of Al Qaida’s regional charters, the propaganda productions began to include articles discussing these groups and their specific projects under the Islamic State banner.¹¹⁰ The reasoning behind these featured articles was likely to attract recruits from diaspora communities. However, these messages also served a very clear secondary purpose, which was to portray the Islamic State as an overarching identity that was composed of Muslims from all nationalities whose true identity lay not in their ethno-linguistic characteristics, but rather in their adherence to the Islamic faith and loyalty to the mission of the Islamic State.

Islamic State Military Conquests

During the early years of the Iraq War, the Islamic State, then known variously as Jama’at at-Tawhīd wal Jihād or Al Qaida in Iraq (AQI), never achieved sufficient military strength to undertake a campaign of conquests whereby it intended to capture and defend terrain. Rather, the movement was, during this stage, a purely insurgent movement that controlled little territory outside of its bases of popular support in portions of Anbar, Salahadin, Ninevah, and Diyala provinces. This, however, does not mean that the movement did not have at least

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous, “A Call to Hijrah” *Dabiq*, Issue 3, Shawwal 1435 (July-August 2014), pp. 6-11; See also Anonymous, “A Call to Hijrah” *Dabiq*, Issue 6, Rabi al-Awwal 1436 (December 2014 – January 2015), pp. 40-55

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

partial control over some portions of the Sunni heartland as there are, in fact, reports of it imposing its interpretation of Shariah law in several villages and towns between 2004 and 2008.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, it is important to note that the goals of the Islamic State at this point were more focused on creating a hostile environment to force the withdrawal of the U.S. occupation than it was with creating a viable state-like political entity at that time.¹¹²

Due to the overwhelming military superiority of the U.S.-led occupation force, the Islamic State was at this stage in its existence limited to waging an insurgency against the occupying forces and the nascent Iraqi military. As such, this campaign was less one of military conquest than it was one of military resistance. This situation remained the norm for the majority of the war's duration, with the Islamic State relying on bombings and small-scale raids to harass the foreign forces and their Iraqi government partners and undermine their legitimacy. Meanwhile, the foreign occupation forces relied on tribal allies and Iraqi security forces to control territory while the Western militaries conducted a sweeping campaign of raids using special operations forces to capture and kill key members of the Islamic State. As the tribal Awakening movement gained traction in Sunni areas of the country and the Western special operations raids killed off a stunning number of its leaders and technical specialists, the Islamic State found itself increasingly on the defensive.

By mid-2010, the Islamic State had suffered a catastrophic military defeat, which saw the majority of its leaders either killed or captured and the few remaining survivors forced

¹¹¹ McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, pp. 36-39

¹¹² Ernesto Londoño, "Resurgent al-Qaeda in Iraq seeks to undermine government", *Washington Post*, November 22, 2009, online at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/21/AR2009112102009.html>. Accessed April 7, 2018

underground. We have little insight into how its new leaders characterized the movement and attempted to make progress toward achieving its goals after 2010. However, the rapid re-emergence of the movement with the appearance of Jabhat al-Nuṣra in Syria in 2012 and its subsequent military successes in Iraq in 2013-14 indicate that the movement remained active in an underground status and continued its efforts to quietly mobilize a capable field army.

After gaining experience in the Syrian battlefields in 2012 and 2013 under the banner of Jabhat al-Nuṣra the Islamic State moved into the town of Ramadi in Iraq in force after the Sunni population of Anbar mounted a large-scale attack against government forces in Fallujah, expelling them from the city in December 2013. At the outset of the operation, Islamic State fighters were welcomed into the city, but within several days they had managed to incur the wrath of the Sunni tribes and were once more ousted from the city. From there, the movement made several attempts to capture cities elsewhere in Iraq but made little progress.¹¹³ At the same time, a number of rebel groups in Syria joined forces against the Islamic State, including several factions from the Jabhat al-Nuṣra, which had originally been founded by the Islamic State. The result of this was that by the middle of 2013, as the Islamic State found itself pushed out of the Western portions of Syria and parts of Anbar, the movement was pushed into the Eastern region of Syria which is adjacent to the Western provinces of Iraq, where it had maintained its base since early 2003.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Muhammad al-'Ubaydi, Nelly Lahoud, Daniel Milton, and Bryan Price. *The Group that Calls itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State*, The Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point. West Point, New York: December 2014. pp. 23-25

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*

The concentration of Islamic State forces in Eastern Syria and Western Iraq enabled the movement to mass its forces against Iraq government elements, which enabled it to eventually overwhelm the Iraqi military and police units in the Ninevah Province, leading to the capture of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, in June of 2014.¹¹⁵ The Islamic State's conquest of Mosul, which received wide coverage in the media around the world had two major effects. First it caused widespread panic among Iraqi government and tribal forces, which allowed the Islamic State to quickly expand through intimidation as much as through military prowess. Second, the capture of Mosul caused such a stir around the world, that a large number countries, both in the Middle East and the West formed several coalitions for the express purpose of crushing the Islamic State. The gains the Islamic State was able to make through its military campaigns were mostly limited to the Sunni Arab areas in Iraq, where local opposition either rallied to support the movement against the oppressive Maliki government or were easily overwhelmed. Although the Islamic State made some penetrations into Kurdish territories and threatened the outskirts of Baghdad (which had become a predominantly Shi'a city on account of the ethnic cleansing that occurred there during the sectarian civil war that Zarqawi had initiated during the U.S. occupation), these gains were quickly reversed as numerous foreign governments poured resources into the country to stem the tide of Islamic State conquests.

By October 2014 a number of regional countries, including Jordan and the United Arab Emirates joined with an alliance of Western powers to support the Iraqi government in regaining the territory it had lost to Islamic State advances. Additionally, Iran had offered direct

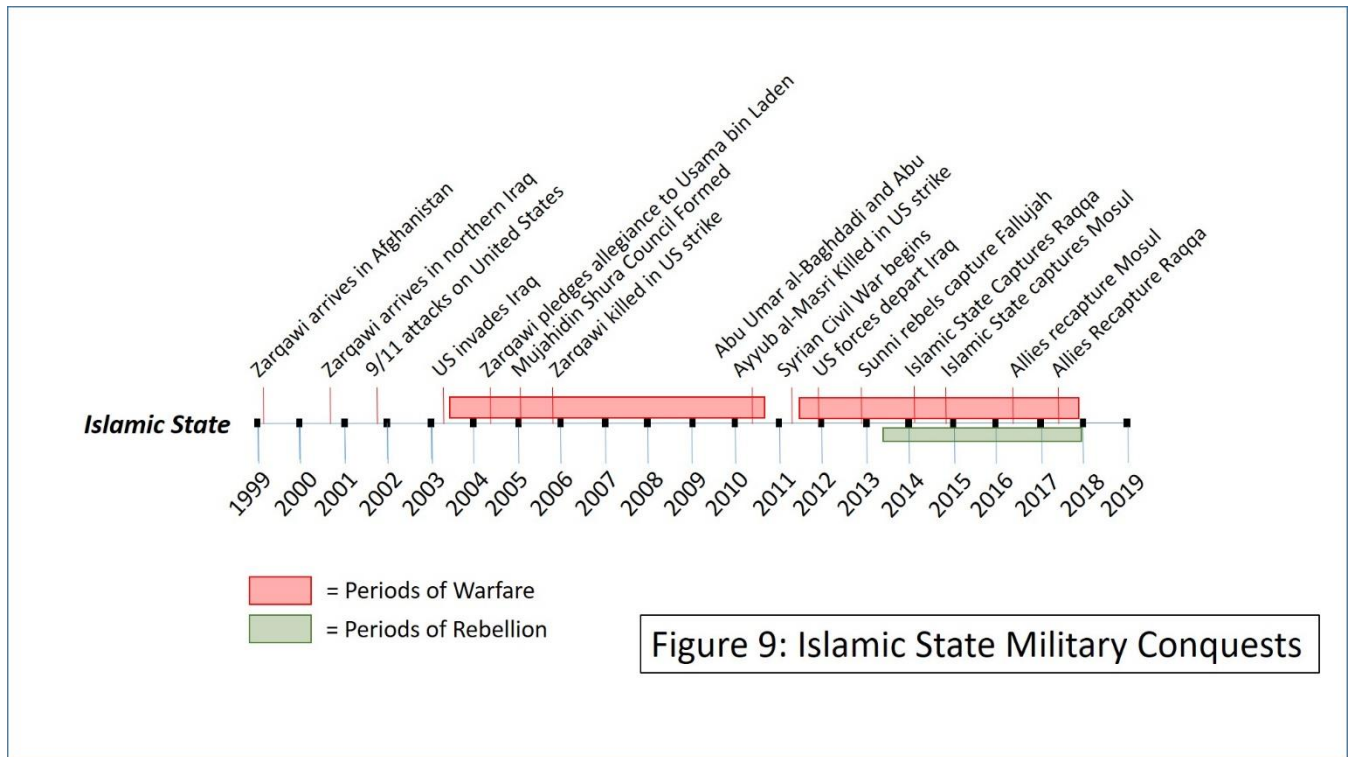
¹¹⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation, "How Can militants Take Over Iraqi Cities?" June 11, 2014 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25588623>. Accessed April 7, 2018

support (independent of the Western-led coalition) to mobilize and coordinate a number of Iraqi Shi'a militias that had been created during the sectarian war in Iraq.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile in Syria, the Islamic State still had to contend with the smattering of rebel groups that had pushed it into eastern Syria, along with an alliance of Russian, Syrian, and Iranian government forces, and other militias, such as Lebanese Hizballah.¹¹⁷ The combination of opponents, pressing it on multiple fronts eventually pushed the Islamic State back into the major cities of Mosul and Ar Raqqa, which were then recaptured by Western-backed Iraqi and Kurdish forces in July 2017 and October 2017, respectively, thereby effectively ending the Islamic State as a political entity that controlled any significant amount of territory.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Chris Carroll, "Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal authorized for Operation Inherent Resolve", Stars and Stripes, October 31, 2014, published online: <https://www.stripes.com/news/global-war-on-terrorism-expeditionary-medal-authorized-for-operation-inherent-resolve-1.311466>. Accessed April 7, 2018

¹¹⁷ Bilgay Duman. "A New Controversial Actor in Post-ISIS Iraq: Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi (The Popular Mobilization Forces)", Translated by: Sercan Doğan, *Orsam*, Report No. 198, May 2015. Pp. 7-23. Published online at: <file:///C:/Users/abugh/Desktop/Thesis%20Research%20Materials/Popular%20Mobilization%20Forces.pdf>. Accessed April 7, 2018

¹¹⁸ British Broadcasting Corporation. "Battle for Mosul: Iraq PM Abadi Formally Declares Victory" BBC Online, July 10, 2017. Published online at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40558836>. Accessed April 7, 2018; See also: British Broadcasting Corporation. "Raqqa: IS 'capital' Falls to US-backed Syrian Forces" BBC Online, October 17, 2017. Published online at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41646802>. Accessed April 7, 2018



Analyzing the Islamic State

In reviewing the Islamic State’s trajectory in light of our modified version of Kennedy’s theory, it is apparent that the Islamic State did not adhere to the stages prescribed by the theoretical model. From its foundation, the Islamic State – at the time a very small cadre of career Mujahidīn – never sought to ally itself with an existing cohesive political entity, including any of the numerous tribal elements present in the Sunni-dominated areas of western and central Iraq. Instead, the movement independently initiated a war of insurgency against the American-led force that was then occupying the country. This insurgency rapidly gained in popularity, but the majority of the other insurgent organizations in Iraq refused to accept the Islamic State’s (then known as Jama’at al-Tawḥīd wal Jihād, and later as AQI) leadership and

eventually turned against the movement. The situation that resulted from this was one in which the Islamic State found itself confronting not only the occupation forces and the Iraqi government forces, but also rival insurgent groups, many of which were tied into the existing tribal network. Hopelessly overmatched by an overwhelming array of enemies, the Islamic State inevitably suffered a massive defeat that was equivalent to the one sustained by the Wahābī movement at Dir'īyah in 1818.

The members of the movement who survived the defeat of 2010 found an opportunity to reverse their fortunes and reconstitute their forces by harnessing the groundswell of Sunni dissatisfaction with the Alawite government in Syria and rebuilding its insurgent force. When combined with renewed overtures to some of the tribal elements in Iraq's Sunni heartland, the combination led to military conquests in both eastern Syria and western Iraq. In the areas it captured, the Islamic State was rapidly able to implement at least a partially effective system of government by establishing a range of governmental institutions, the result of which was a State-like political entity. However, the movement's insistence on pursuing additional conquests in Iraq and Syria in the face of two separate multinational alliances once more brought about an inevitable military defeat and the collapse of the Islamic State.

In failing to connect the movement to an existing cohesive political entity during the early days of Jama'at al-Tawhīd wal Jihād and its subsequent transition to AQI, Zarqawi skipped a crucial step in establishing a secure base upon which to build his movement. This necessarily limited the movement's ability to recruit from the local tribes and to benefit from the material resources at their disposal. This decision placed the Islamic State in a position whereby it was largely dependent on support from outside elements, which placed it at a marked disadvantage

in a competition for power with existing political entities in Iraq such as the tribes and other insurgent groups. This disadvantage became readily apparent when the Islamic State attempted to force these other entities to join its movement and found itself the inferior force.

Nevertheless, the few members of the Islamic State who survived the sectarian war with the Shi'a militias in Iraq, the insurgency against the Iraqi government and its Western backers, and the tribal conflicts with the majority of Iraq's Sunni population appear to have adjusted their strategy following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the country in 2011. Here, the movement's leaders adopted a new approach toward the tribes and sought to harness the widespread unrest among the Sunni populations in Iraq and Syria which chafed under the oppressive rule of Shi'a and Alawite governments, respectively. The new strategy seems to have borne some fruit for the Islamic State as it was only after this that it was able to capture and defend significant amounts of territory in the region straddling the Iraq-Syria border for the first time in the movement's history.

The lightning conquests were followed up with the implementation of a complex system of governmental institutions that provided a range of services to the population residing in areas captured by the Islamic State. This resulted in the emergence of a state-like political entity. However, as the Islamic State continued to pursue additional conquests in the midst of trying to fend off military campaigns from two separate international alliances, it eventually suffered a series of military defeats, which ultimately brought about the collapse of the state-like entity the movement had built. See Figures 10 and 11 below.

Figure 10: Islamic State Trajectory

Militant Islamist Movement → Insurgency → Military Defeat,
Survivors of Military Defeat + Syrian Civil War → Reconstituted Force in Syria,
Reconstituted Force in Syria + Tribal Engagement → Military Conquests,
Military Conquests + Governing Institutions → State-like Political Entity,
State-like Political Entity + Continued Conquests → Military Defeat → Collapse

Figure 11: Modified Theoretical Trajectory¹¹⁹

Militant Islamist Movement + Cohesive Political Entity → Militant Islamist Insurgency,
Militant Islamist Insurgency + Social-Political Consolidation → Cohesive Movement,
Cohesive Movement + Military Conquests → State-like Political Entity,
State-like Political Entity + Socio-Political Consolidation → Stability

In terms of purely military analysis, it is difficult to ascertain whether the trajectory of the Islamic State is most similar to that of the Almohads, who ultimately failed to create a durable state-like entity or to the Wahhabis, who remain in control of the Arabian Peninsula after first starting the movement nearly three centuries ago. In some respects, the trajectory of the Islamic State appears very similar to that of the Almohads, who initially built a solid foundation

¹¹⁹ This is merely a copy of the model presented in Figure 2 above, replicated here for the sake of the reader's convenience in comparing the two, side by side.

of socio-political cohesion through a lengthy consolidation project but expanded far and wide, without incorporating its new subjects into the movement and then collapsed when their military might was destroyed. Indeed, it would be tempting to believe that the defeats sustained by the Islamic State at Ar Raqqa and Mosul are analogous to the Almohads' defeat at Las Navas de Tolosa and will ultimately spell the doom of the movement. Upon closer examination, however, the pattern of socio-political consolidation observed in the Islamic State during its brief stint as the dominant form of government in the portions of Iraq and Syria that it controlled suggests that the Islamic State's trajectory may be more closely aligned with that of the Wahhabis.

Consider that while the Almohads pursued a course by which they installed their governors over conquered subjects and made no attempt to bring these new subjects into the Almohad system, the Wahhabis sought the allegiance of conquered opponents and immediately incorporated new subjects into the Wahhabi doctrine, which became for them a form of social identity that superseded their former identities of family and tribe. Available evidence of the system of governance employed by the Islamic State reveals that incorporating the population under its control into the identity of the Islamic State was a core priority for the movement once it came into power. This can be seen in the multi-tiered efforts by the Islamic State government to indoctrinate the people at all levels of society with their brand of political Islam. For children they use religious schools, for youth, military camps, for general society there are the religious centers that provide public education and other services, and the preaching trucks to reach those living in areas where there is no Islamic Center, along with the *Ḥisbah* to enforce conformity in daily life. For criminals, there are the calls to repentance in the prison system,

who are taught the Islamic State's values over a period of days or weeks before being sentenced by a judge.

Similar to the Wahhabis, who began with outreach to neighboring communities through correspondence with scholars and leaders across the Arabian Peninsula, the post-2011 version of the Islamic State has also committed significant resources to produce professional-quality propaganda which it disseminates on a global scale in numerous languages through a wide range of social media. Although some of the content of this propaganda is, of course, targeted to hostile audiences to portray the Islamic State as a capable military force, the overwhelming majority of the content is directed at Muslim audiences living in areas outside the Islamic State's control to convince them of the righteousness of the Islamic State and their obligation as Muslims to join the movement. Furthermore, one other apparent goal of this propaganda is to highlight the social nature of Islam as one that transcends racial, geographic, and ethno-linguistic distinctions and unites its followers under a universal and eternal identity as Muslims.

Perhaps the most shocking aspect of the Islamic State's conquests was the speed with which the movement was able to implement effective governmental structures in the areas it conquered. Numerous propaganda and media articles included pictures of freshly-emplaced professional-quality signage that appeared on government buildings and on infrastructure proclaiming the rule of the Islamic State in these areas, often within days of having been captured. More importantly, the Islamic State rapidly implemented a vast system of governmental organizations, including the aforementioned *Hisbah*, educational institutions, court system, and training camps in conquered areas. The emphasis on establishing these institutions reveals that the Islamic State's leaders have a well-conceived notion as to what

institutions are necessary to support their movement's goals and that they have taken measures to prepare to exploit any opportunities that may develop to implement these institutions.

What is most surprising about the Islamic State's emphasis on governmental institutions is the alacrity with which the movement was able to generate the requisite manpower and expertise to implement these institutions following its military victories in Iraq and Syria. Given the catastrophic defeat the movement suffered in 2010, it is difficult to imagine that it was capable of fielding not only an army of fighters capable of executing a sweeping conquest over vast territories, but to also create and staff a government with a complete judicial system, an educational and outreach branch, a media apparatus, and *Ḥisbah* within a scant four years of having been nearly annihilated by a coalition of Shi'a militias, Sunni tribal militias, and multinational military forces.

The speed of the Islamic State's transition from nadir to apogee indicates that along with a revised strategy for engaging the Sunni tribes in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State has also been pursuing socio-political consolidation in these areas. This would offer a plausible explanation for how the Islamic State was able to draw a large following of professionals with bureaucratic skills – possibly unemployed and disenfranchised members of the Saddam Hussein-era Iraqi government – who were able to create the governing structures of the Islamic State's state-like entity between mid-2013 and late 2017.

Prognosis for the Islamic State's Future

In light of the foregoing study, it seems rather clear that the Islamic State has on separate occasions violated both Ibn Khaldun's principle of "group feeling" or socio-political cohesion and Kennedy's principle of overreach at different stages of its trajectory. These deviations from the theoretical trajectory prescribed by the model based on a revised version of Kennedy's theory led to the movement's defeat and collapse in both instances. However, the military defeats suffered by the Islamic State in 2010 and 2017, comprehensive though they were, did not completely eradicate the movement. In the aftermath of the defeat of 2010, the Islamic State, despite have suffered very high levels of attrition, particularly amongst its leadership, was able to rapidly regroup and re-emerge as a powerful political and military force, bringing into reality an Islamist government that exceeded even the grandiose and seemingly Quixotic aspirations announced in the creation of the Islamic State in Iraq in October 2006. See Figure 12 below.¹²⁰ Going forward, the rapid reversal of the Islamic State's fortunes between 2010 and 2014 should inspire a deep sense of sobriety in our assessment of the Islamic State's future prospects.

¹²⁰ A number of high-quality maps depicting the Islamic State's territorial holdings have been published since 2014, however, an overwhelming majority of these are subject to copyright laws. The map included in Figure 12 was posted by the Mujahidin Shūrā Council in its official announcement of the creation of the Islamic State in Iraq in October 2006. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) posted this map in its translated article of the announcement.

Middle East Media Research Institute, "Jihad Groups in Iraq Take an Oath of Allegiance", *Islamist Websites Monitor*, No. 8, October 17, 2006, <https://www.memri.org/reports/islamist-websites-monitor-no-8>. Accessed March 15, 2018



To begin, the Islamic State’s defeat in 2017 was not nearly as complete as was the defeat in 2010. The elements of the Islamic State which have survived the years-long campaign to remove them from power as a sitting government have not eliminated the group entirely. In fact, the remnants of the Islamic State are almost certainly stronger than AQI was at the height of the Iraq war between 2003-2008. Not only does the Islamic State in its current state of defeat boast a larger force, probably totaling at least several thousand fighters, but it is also financially and materially stronger having benefitted from control over vast sums of money, capital, and military equipment that it captured between 2013-2015. While it is certainly true that much of this wealth has been either destroyed or recaptured by the multinational coalitions, it is also true that some of this booty has remained in the hands of surviving members of the Islamic State, leaving it in a stronger position in terms of material resources than was the case in 2010. In view of this, the Islamic State of 2018, defeated as it is, is

nevertheless far better positioned to mount a comeback today than was the case in 2010, at least in terms of human and material resources.

More disturbing than its material and numerical strength are the roots the Islamic State established among Iraq and Syria's children and youth during its brief rule over portions of those countries. The foregoing assessment of the Islamic State's strength accounts only for the fighters and equipment that are an active part of the movement today. During the period of about four years that the Islamic State actively controlled territory, it invested heavily in the indoctrination and education of an entire generation of Iraqi and Syrian children. While the effectiveness of these efforts won't yet be clear for several years, it is very likely that at least some portion of these children will take up the Islamic State's cause as they reach maturity, thereby giving the movement an element of generational depth which it did not enjoy prior to its rise in 2013.

The problem of the Islamic State is not confined by the geographic boundaries of Iraq and Syria. The popularity of the movement's cause has also taken root in a number of regions around the world, with "franchises" pledging allegiance to the Islamic State forming in places such as Libya, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Chad, The Gaza Strip, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Some of these Islamic State "franchises" control modest amounts of territory, which could offer a refuge for fighters fleeing the battlegrounds of Iraq and Syria to recover and regroup. These "franchises" also give the overall movement a foothold for resurrecting their dream of creating another pseudo state or potentially using these safe havens as a base for launching terror attacks against Western countries and their allies around the world. While none of these "franchises", threaten the stability of their host countries in the same way that the Islamic State

threatened the governments of Iraq and Syria, collectively, they create a dispersed movement which is exceedingly resource-intensive to monitor and contain.

Lastly, the Islamic State has proved itself to be a highly adaptive movement, learning from its strategic blunders in defeat and implementing revised strategies to achieve victory. Most significantly, the Islamic State appears to have at least partially come to understand the importance of socio-political cohesion as a key component in the long-term viability of the movement. This is evident in the movement's decision to pursue an alliance with several of the Anbar tribes in 2013 and its creation of a complex array of governmental institutions to spread its ideology to all levels of society in the areas it controlled between 2013-2017. Were these socio-political consolidation efforts to gain traction with even small portions of a society in which the Islamic State was present (now more numerous than was the case in 2010), it would greatly improve the movement's resilience in the face of military defeat - as demonstrated by the foregoing study.

Conclusions

In summary, the Islamic State is well on its way to suffering a massive defeat on the battlefields of Iraq and Syria. At the time of this writing Iraqi forces were conducting independent operations to mop up the few remaining pockets of territory under Islamic State control and most of the country was back in government hands, following a years-long campaign by several multinational coalitions to restore government control. This defeat has led to the Islamic State losing virtually all of its territory along with much of its military capacity.

However, scholars and strategists alike would do well to take note of the fact that even in defeat, the Islamic State of 2018 is in far better shape than was the case following its defeat in 2010, in terms of numerical and material strength, financial health, generational depth and geographic scope. Most significantly, the Islamic State has demonstrated its capacity to adjust its strategy on the basis of lessons learned from its failures and has recently revealed a newfound emphasis on socio-political consolidation.

Taken together with the resilience the movement showed in its recovery between 2010 and 2013, these factors highlight the likelihood that the Islamic State will be able to recover from this defeat over the space of the next few years unless the international community is able to maintain pressure on the movement in all of its manifestations around the globe. The resource-intensive nature of such a campaign makes such a prospect rather improbable, given the geopolitical realities facing many of the key countries that would be necessary to its successful prosecution. Absent a multinational effort to suppress the movement, it seems exceedingly likely that the Islamic State will once more be able to establish some form of a pseudo-state in one corner of the world or another in the coming years.

Since a sustained international campaign focused on eliminating the threat of the Islamic State seems unlikely at this point, an alternative strategy is called for to prevent the tragedy of another segment of the world's population being subjected to another iteration of the Islamic State's brand of wholesale slaughter, rape, theft, religious oppression, and general indecency. While a military component was certainly necessary to bring the Islamic State to this stage, the lessons of the Wahabi and Almohad movements reveals that movements which achieve socio-political cohesion can survive repeated military defeats, but those which suffer from a lack of

socio-political cohesion cannot. The theoretical model presented in this study of militant Islamist movements suggests that those responsible for seeking the defeat of the Islamic State might find a more permanent and satisfying solution were they to privilege the disruption of the movement's socio-political cohesion over the continuation of a decades-long effort aimed at destroying the movement through predominantly military means.

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