Islamic Terrorism and France: A Historical Comparison between the Islamic State and the Armed Islamic Group

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Terrorism and France: A Historical Comparison between the Islamic State and the Armed Islamic Group

A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Global Studies

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Among the nations of Europe, France has faced the worst forms of ISIS-inspired violence and has seen the highest number of its citizens join the Islamic State (ISIS) as foreign fighters. However, this is not France’s first encounter with Islamic terrorism. In the mid-1990s, when the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) carried out a series of attacks in France, the significant presence of radial Islam in the nation was a wake-up call for French society. This thesis investigates how and why ISIS has been successful in attracting French nationals to support its radical ideology at home and abroad. Through a comparative analysis, this thesis will investigate similarities and differences between two jihadi-salafist groups—the GIA and the Islamic State—in order to compare each organization’s geography, ideology, demographics, and recruitment methods. Drawing on network data from the Western Jihadism Project at Brandeis University, French terrorists and the networks they have developed will be revealed. This thesis argues that the Islamic State’s compelling ideology,
along with its well developed technological and human networks have been a critical factor in its successful recruitment of French nationals to the organization.
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Introduction: The Islamic State and France

On March 22, 2019, the Islamic State lost its last stronghold in Syria. The capture of Baghouz by Kurdish troops signaled the end of the so-called caliphate declared by the group’s leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2014. The Islamic State’s collapse came after several years of international intervention and many long, bloody and destructive battles.¹

For years, the Islamic State (also known by its acronym ISIS or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) controlled vast swaths of territory the size of the United Kingdom², ruled over millions of people, and carried out brutal attacks against the West. After the liberation of Baghouz, the threat that ISIS has posed will decrease significantly. The Islamic State and its pervasive ideology however, are far from fully eradicated.

Thousands of Westerners have subscribed to the State’s extreme ideology and hundreds have either planned or carried out devastating attacks in their own countries. Thousands of families have been broken apart as parents, siblings, sons and daughters have left their homes to fight in Iraq or Syria. A July 2018 study by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization concluded that 41,490 international citizens from 80 countries

were affiliated with the Islamic State. 6,657 of the total foreign fighters came from Western Europe, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand.\(^3\)

This thesis attempts to gain a better understanding as to why so many westerners have joined this deadly group. France will be used as a case study because it has seen the most foreign fighters leave the country out of all of Western Europe. It also has the longest history with Islamic terrorism.

The *jihadi-salafist* ideology that the Islamic State subscribes to has made it one of the deadliest and most extreme terrorist groups of its time. This is not the first time however, that a group has adopted this belief system. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) is one of the organizations considered to be one of the “forerunners of today’s *jihadi-salafi* groups.”\(^4\) It was this very ideology that was in the minds of the individuals who bombed the subways in Paris in 1995 for the GIA and drove a truck through crowds in Nice in 2016 for the Islamic State. It was also filling the minds of the thousands of individuals who left France to fight for ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

The question that animates this thesis is; why was the Islamic State so successful in France? Only one other Islamist terrorist group has been successful in France, and that was the Armed Islamic Group in the mid-1990s. What about these two groups has been so enticing to generations of young men and women? Are they attracted by the promise of the ideology’s religious utopia? Or are there other factors at play? While it is not possible to generalize the motives for each individual who has joined these two terrorist groups, this

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thesis will attempt to analyze four different factors (geography, ideology, demographics, and recruitment methods) in order to better understand these questions.

**The Islamic State and the Armed Islamic Group**

The use of extreme violence has made the Islamic State the most successful extremist Islamic terrorist group ever, even though it only functioned for five years. Its rise and fall are in many regards similar to the rise and fall of an older Islamist terrorist group from Algeria, the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (Armed Islamic Group or GIA). A comparative study contrasting the similarities and differences of the two groups is the focus of this thesis. The similarities will trace the rise and fall of the two organizations. The differences will highlight the various reasons why the Islamic State has been one of the most pervasive terrorist organizations in modern time.

This comparison is particularly important because the GIA, which gained prominence in the mid 1990s, acted as a harbinger for the extreme violence that the *jihadi-salafist* ideology had given rise to. In a crowded field of extremely violent terrorist organizations, there are specific reasons why the GIA and ISIS have killed more people than any others. The first reason is both organizations’ extreme adherence to *takfir* (one Muslim declaring another a non-believer). This allowed for both groups to target Muslims who did not support their cause. Al-Qaeda on the other hand, believes that it is the institutions and leaders that need to be targeted, not the citizens themselves. This limits the seemingly mindless murders of both Muslims and non-Muslims alike that the GIA and ISIS have carried out.
The second reason that the two organizations have been more destructive than other terrorist groups is their end goals. The GIA would stop at nothing to create an Islamic state in Algeria. Nothing, in their minds, was more important than destroying anything westernized and implementing strict sharia law over the land. ISIS saw their purpose as to establish an Islamic State throughout the Levant, a region of land prophesized to be the captured by Muslims at the End of Time. Both groups held an all-or-nothing mentality, which promoted a sense of necessity to their violent acts.

An analysis of “push” and “pull” factors can help clarify the question of “why” individuals choose to join extremist organizations. This model is used as a device for thinking about the motivations that drove the French volunteers to join the Caliphate, a violent mirage for a new, pure religious state.

The concepts are borrowed from terminology used in migration studies to assess the different motivations driving the decisions of migrants. Everett Lee, in his classic article, A Theory of Migration defines “push” factors as the factors that are associated with the area of origin, and “pull” factors as the factors associated with the area of destination. Within each factor there are positive and negative aspects that either attract or repel individuals.

While the motivations to join a terrorist organization are not the same as the motivations to migrate, the terminology is nevertheless relevant. In the case of terrorists, a “push” factor could be a significant criminal record in their home country or the lack of a social life. A “pull” factor could be the thought of fighting for a cause they believe in, or

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living in a regime government by religious law. Each “push” and “pull” element carries different levels of significance in the decision for each individual.

**France and Islamic Terrorism**

France has experienced a long history with Islamic terrorism. This type of terrorism was first introduced to France through the Armed Islamic Group. The group used grievances developed from France’s long, violent colonial history in Algeria to validate their cause and recruit discontented, young Algerians. In the mid 1990s the GIA staged a terrorism campaign against the French-backed secular Algerian government in order to establish an Islamic State. When the group faced repression in Algeria, it carried out a series of attacks in France.

In December 1994, the GIA hijacked an Air France jet in Marseilles and planned to crash it into the Eiffel Tower. A commando unit was able to storm the plane and save most of the passengers, three of whom were killed during the hijacking. In 1995, the GIA conducted several bombings in the Paris metro, resulting in eight deaths and hundreds of wounded civilians. The bombings continued as attacks on an open market in Paris and a Jewish school in a town near Lyon, causing a total of sixteen injuries.

On January 13, 2015, 20 years after the GIA’s attacks, the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls told the national assembly that France was in a war against terrorism. “Oui, la France est en guerre contre le terrorisme, le djihadisme et l’islamisme radicale.”6 This statement came one week after Saïd and Chérif Kouachi killed twelve people at the Charlie Hebdo newspaper headquarters in Paris, France. The shooting was the deadliest terrorist

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6 FRANCE 24, *Attentats En France - Retrouvez En Intégralité Le Discours de Manuel Valls*, accessed March 1, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcX1iQ9TLPI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcX1iQ9TLPI).
attack that France had seen in 50 years.\textsuperscript{7} The attack shook France to its core and initiated rallies and demonstrations for national unity and free speech across the country. The slogan \textit{Je suis Charlie} became a symbol for the movement, representing solidarity and community for the French. This attack however was not the last or the most violent that France would see over the next four years.

France has faced the worst of the ISIS-inspired violence in Europe. For 14 years prior to the beginning of 2015, France had an average of one death from terrorism per year. In 2015, this number sharply increased to 161 deaths.\textsuperscript{8} In March 2016 Prime Minister Manuel Valls said each day the French “trace networks, locate cells, [and] arrest individuals. Today 2,029 French citizens or residents are implicated in jihad networks.”\textsuperscript{9}

Out of all the countries in Europe, France has seen the most individuals (known as foreign fighters) travel to Syria or Iraq to fight for the Islamic State. In December 2015, there were an estimated 5,000 plus fighters who left for Syria from the European Union. Out of the total, 3,700 fighters came from just four countries: France (1,700), the United Kingdom (760), Germany (760) and Belgium (470).\textsuperscript{10}

What makes this recent wave of Islamic terrorism particularly significant for France is the controversy that has developed around the explanation for why French citizens choose to join ISIS. Some have blamed France’s lack of integration and social inequality as


\textsuperscript{8} “Global Terrorism Index: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism” (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2016), 41.

\textsuperscript{9} “French Prime Minister Says 600-plus People Have Left France For...,” \textit{Reuters}, March 20, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-shooting-jihadists-idUSKCN0WM0UU.

\textsuperscript{10} “Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq” (The Soufan Group, December 2015).
the reasons for adopting extremist beliefs. Others have argued that it is Islam that is at the root of people’s decision making.

Two prominent academics, Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy have voiced the two conflicting opinions about the emergence of terrorism in Europe, and particularly in France. Kepel, a French political scientist wrote a book on the subject called *Terror in France: the Rise of Jihad in the West*. He argues that when it comes to jihad in the West, the French case is “stronger and deeper” than the cases of other countries. He claims that between 2005 and 2012, “a great change took place in French Islam.”11 This change developed as the third generation of French Muslims sought to free themselves from state supervision and claim full citizenship in France. The political upheaval of this third generation is what Kepel attributes to the recent burst in jihadism in France.

Kepel claims that the seven pivotal years for French Islam began with the *banlieues* riots in 2005 and ended with the “Merah affair” in 2012. The riots in 2005 were triggered by the death of two teenagers suspected of burglary and a tear gas grenade that landed at the entrance of a crowded mosque. For three weeks, rioters burned cars, looted and vandalized public infrastructure, and harassed police officers, taking control of the *banlieues* to which they felt relegated. As a result, Islam became an irrepressible marker of identity in the *banlieues* and the children of postcolonial immigrants emerged as political actors.12

Kepel sees the rise in identity politics as one of the driving forces behind the rise of terrorist threat in France. He sees the fractures in the ethno-religious social fabric as breaking apart the French Republic. Islamist fundamentalism is just one example of how

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12 Ibid., 12.
religious and nationalist extremism push a new schism in French politics. The divide is particularly dangerous to French society because it is incompatible with the traditional French Republican ideals. The dissociation from France he argues, takes the form of an embrace of an “all-encompassing, strict form of Islam characterized by careful, systematic, and religiously sanctioned efforts to exert control over all aspects of life.” Societal discrimination in not what drives extremism. The politicization of Islam and extremist Islamism is what drives recruitment.

Olivier Roy, another French political scientist, challenged this view in 2015. Roy published an article in *Le Monde* a few weeks after the November 2015 Paris attacks, arguing that experts have misunderstood the jihadist movement. He argues that the problem with terrorism in France is rooted in the “revolt of the youth.” He questions the two interpretations of terrorism in France and the West. The first is the “clash of civilizations” which highlights the limits of Muslim integration. The second considers postcolonial suffering, the rejection of Western intervention in the Middle East, and the youth’s exclusion from a “racist and Islamophobic French society.” Roy however, wonders that if these problems were purely structural, “why do they only affect a small and circumscribed fringe of those who consider themselves Muslims in France—some thousands out of millions?”

In Roy’s opinion, the problem is not a “matter of the radicalization of Islam, but of the Islamification of radicalism.” He emphasized the generational revolt against what their parents represent in terms of culture and religion. The “second generation” has

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15 Ibid.
revolted by partying, smoking, and drinking and often has spent time in prison. Roy thinks that this rebellion has led this generation to Salafist Islam, which he defines as “an Islam that rejects the concept of culture, an Islam that allows them to completely refashion themselves.”  

16 It is radicalism in the form of Islam that Roy believes is what attracts the troubled youths.

Olivier Roy concludes that those who radicalize to Salafist Islam are not actually practicing Islam. Few extremists attend mosques, take part in serious religious studies, or participate in communitarian practices. They are either revolting against their parent’s form of Islam, or adhering to “the only thing on the radical revolt market.” 17 Whether Muslim or converts, they often radicalize in a small group of friends with whom they form a family-like bond of like-minded individuals. Due to the particular views of these marginalized groups, Roy asserts that terrorists are not an outcome of radicalization within the Muslim population, but actually a generational revolt that affects a particular category of youth.

Kepel ignores the social context and the important role that social networks play. While historical context is important in understanding some possible underlying causes as to why individuals from France may join ISIS, it does not always explain the reasoning behind the vast number of ISIS members from France. His book fails to explain why there has been such a wide range of individuals that are seen joining ISIS. This view does not provide an explanation for those individuals who have converted to Islam and not necessarily had the same historical grievances as some Muslims in France.

17 Ibid.
Research Design

The temporal focus of this research will be relatively contemporary. In order to compare the GIA and ISIS, the similarities and differences between the two groups from the 1990s to the mid to late 2010s will be analyzed. By considering the two groups over this period of time, an overall understanding of the development of Islamic terrorist groups in general will be realized.

When analyzing the Armed Islamic Group, both the members in Europe as well as the members just acting in France will be considered. Understanding their networks in Europe will help to highlight the fact that their primary activity took place in France. When analyzing the Islamic State, the focus will be placed upon the profiles of the native-born French individuals who have interacted with the law due to terrorism-related activities.

Data from the Western Jihadism Project is used to chart the demographic profiles and the networks of French ISIS supporters. The project was founded in 2006 by Jytte Klausen, and has accrued over 6,000 terrorist offenders from Western Europe, the Antipodes, Canada, and the United States. Profiles of the offenders are created from publically available, open source documents, which include government reports, press releases, news articles, and court documents.

The Western Jihadism Project defines native-born as an individuals who was born in the Western country they live in, or if they spent their formative years in the country (at or before the age of 14).18 This will greatly narrow the scope of this project because there have been thousands of individuals from different countries who have joined ISIS.

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Currently, over 1,000 individuals identified as involved in French terrorist incidents are included in the data collection. I will be able to analyze individual profiles to understand the demographics of French volunteers and how certain actors have been integral to the Islamic State’s recruitment strategy. I will also be able to examine larger sets of data on French terrorists, which will provide me with trends or patterns in the data that will answer my main question.

I will not be able to conduct a statistical sampling of the French terrorists. In order to conduct a statistical sampling, I would have to presume that I know that terrorists make up a specific part of the population. This information however, is not knowable. For example, in 2017 there were an estimated 5.7 million\textsuperscript{19} Muslims in France.\textsuperscript{20} Out of those Muslims in France, there are about 550 known cases of “homegrown”\textsuperscript{21} terrorists. Thus, about 1 in every 10,400 French Muslims (25% of whom are converts) becomes a homegrown terrorist. There is no way of analyzing that individual, and creating a generalized population from that one individual. I will instead have to rely on quantitative anthropology to analyze the French terrorist in a case-by-case study.

The network analysis and visualization software Gephi will be used to create informative visuals representing the ISIS and GIA networks in France. The network visualizations will emphasize the vast number of interpersonal links that make up these terrorist networks. They will highlight the various cell systems (small groups of individuals

\textsuperscript{19} These numbers were measured by a census or survey conducted by the Pew Research Center that asks, “What is your religion, if any?”


\textsuperscript{21} In this thesis, a “homegrown” terrorist is defined as an individual who has carried out terrorist activity within the country that he/she possesses a citizenship.
functioning as a part of a larger movement) and how even people in those separate cells are interconnected with individuals outside the cells.

Roy and Kepel represent two popular but opposing explanations about why individuals are drawn to the Islamic State. One of these theories is that Muslim youths and Islam are considered unable to integrate within Western societies and today’s international system. The second theory is that negative postcolonial legacies lead to feelings of being ostracized from Western societies. A third, alternative interpretation will consider the role of networks as a more central role to the pull of the Islamic State. By adding the aspect of networks to the analysis, a more accurate and comprehensive argument will develop in explaining why many French citizens and residents join ISIS.

**Structure of Analysis**

Throughout this paper, a comparison will be conducted between the Islamic State and the Armed Islamic Group. Various aspects of the Islamic State will be analyzed, while the GIA will work to highlight how various Islamic terrorist groups can differ and relate, especially in relation to France.
**Table 1** Similarities and Differences Between the Islamic State and the Armed Islamic Group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Islamic State</th>
<th>The Armed Islamic Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geography</strong></td>
<td>Large geographic scope. Focused on controlling territory in the Middle East.</td>
<td>Small geographic scope. Focused primarily on Algeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology</strong></td>
<td>Establishing an Islamic state now vs. later. Sanctioned killing of other Muslims.</td>
<td>Revolutionary group against the Algerian government. Sanctioned killing of other Muslims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics (in Europe)</strong></td>
<td>Greater emphasis on homegrown terrorists.</td>
<td>Majority immigrant population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment Methods</strong></td>
<td>Technologically advanced. Use of the Internet, encrypted messaging applications, and networks.</td>
<td>Less advanced technology. Use of physical newsletters (<em>Al-Ansar</em>).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table demonstrates, there are various similarities and differences between the two terrorist groups that will be discussed throughout this paper. Before these differences are discussed, chapter one will provide a historical and theoretical context for the GIA and ISIS. The theoretical context will be critical in understanding the rise in global terrorism and how it is inextricably tied to globalization. The history of the two groups will provide a context for how and why the two groups in particular have developed. With this background, this new wave of Islamic terrorism can be understood.

Chapter two will analyze geographic ambition of the Islamic State and how it differs in comparison to the Armed Islamic Group. Describing ISIS's objectives for territorial control will help to emphasize the group's apocalyptic sentiment, which is a unique aspect to their ideology and recruitment tactics. Through the use of maps and charts, this chapter
will highlight the breadth of the Islamic State’s territory, which was significantly bigger than the GIA’s ever was.

Chapter three will then discuss the ideology of ISIS, which can be related to previous *jihadi-salafist* groups such as the GIA. Knowledge of the ideology is a critical insight to the reason why individuals join these extreme groups. The ideology for both groups provided answers to individuals for how to react to the complex events going on at the time. The GIA was responding to with Algeria’s failing government in the late twentieth century. The Islamic State was responding to the unrest and violence happening in the Middle East in the early twenty-first century. Each group utilized these events to legitimize their desire to establish an Islamic state ruled by Sharia law.

The fourth chapter, focusing on the demographics of the two groups, will highlight what types of individuals have been drawn to the two organizations. This section will focus primarily on the population of individuals who conducted their terrorist activity in France for the Islamic State and for the Armed Islamic Group. The comparison will emphasize the significance of the Islamic State functioning in France today.

The fifth chapter will wrap up the comparative analysis by evaluating the two organizations’ recruitment tactics. These tactics are split into three categories; the violent approach, the significance of networks, and the time frame. Each category mentioned plays an important role in how the two terrorist organizations were able to attract individuals.

After the conclusion of the comparative chapters, this paper will be able to explain why French individuals have been drawn to fight for the Islamic State and whether or not this is a unique phenomenon to France. The motivators for joining the Islamic State are more than identity politics or the inability for Muslims to integrate into a Western society.
Understanding the variety of reasons why French individuals join ISIS is the first important step in preventing this dangerous migration. This paper does not provide any concrete steps on how to stop individuals from joining the terrorist organization. It does however put the decision making process into a broader context, which could be the first step in stopping the phenomenon.
Chapter 1: Theory and History

Terrorism is a tactic that has been used by government and non-state groups for centuries. In the broadest sense, terrorism is the deliberate use of violence against noncombatants for political effect. Terrorism is not a recent phenomenon, but the use of terrorism as a political tool has significantly increased in recent years. After World War 2, anti-colonial movements saw terrorism as a device to “both generate publicity for the cause and influence global policy.” Terrorism brought local conflicts to an international level, which paved the way for the current wave of international terrorism.

Theoretical Context

The modern wave of international terrorism has been a major threat to Western societies in the early 21st century. The unpredictability and violence of attacks conducted by modern terrorist groups have initiated an urgency for Western governments to understand why the terrorists do what they do, and how they can be stopped. Modern terrorism needs to be placed in the context of a world that is becoming increasingly connected.

Globalization is experienced by all societies. The benefits that much of the Western world has enjoyed however, have not been shared by non-Western societies. While the

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West enjoys increasing power and influence on a global level, other regions of the world do not and thus feel particularly threatened by globalization.

Fathali Moghaddam, an Iranian psychologist labels this uneven effect of globalization as “fractured globalization.” This term emphasizes the tendency for local and international forces to pull in different directions. She explains that the sociocultural disintegration pulls in a local direction while the macroeconomic and political systems pull towards the international direction. This divide can involve conflict-ridden changes, as it becomes evident that the political-economic forces are fundamentally different from the psychological-cultural forces within a globalizing society.

The fractured nature of globalization Moghaddam argues, creates a space for the strengthening and revival of “ethnocentrism, fundamentalism, support for authoritarianism, and a decline in support for the open society.” These counter movements to globalization can manifest themselves in radical or even violent ways as particular groups feel their traditional identities and ways of life are threatened.

Religious fundamentalists have felt threatened by the impact of globalization and the spread of modern ideas. Islamic fundamentalist’s reaction to globalization is particularly important to consider, because they are the only religious fundamentalist group that is governing or competing to govern states. Islamic fundamentalist values clash with the new values of “equality, liberation, and freedom associated with the transformed role of women.” Moghaddam explains that the modernization that is imposed by globalization is terrifying and immediate for Islamic fundamentalists. They feel they must

24 Ibid., 8.
25 Ibid., 20.
preserve their traditional heritage against this gigantic global force. The Islamic
fundamentalist groups that see this threat as existential and respond through violence are
known today as Islamic terrorists.

Audrey Cronin, a professor of international security at American University
emphasizes the complexity of defining terrorism. At a minimum, terrorism has a
fundamentally political nature, uses violence against seemingly random targets, and targets
the innocent. According to Cronin, modern terrorism and the term “terror” is considered
to have originated in the late 18th century, during the French Revolution. Since then, Cronin
refers to a series of different “waves” of terrorism, a theory developed by David Rapoport,
that have been tied to “the breakup of empires, decolonization, and leftist anti-
Westernism.” The fourth and modern wave is part of a religiously inspired form of
terrorism perpetuated by al-Qaeda.

Cronin defines the newest international terrorist threat as the “jihad era” which was
influenced by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan. This era
is particularly stimulated by “alienation combined with elements of religious identity and
doctrine.” The alienation has developed through antiglobalization sentiment between
those countries privileging from globalization and those struggling with it. Western
countries have been blamed for the corruption of native customs, religions, languages, and
so on, due to their influence on the international level. As the threat to these indigenous

26 Audrey Kurth Cronin, “Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism,” *International
27 Ibid., 35.
28 Ibid., 38.
values increases, frustrated populations and international movements become more inclined to lash out against Western-led globalization.29

Louise Richardson, a political scientist, de-emphasizes the idea that terrorism is caused by “religion, globalization, political structures, or psychopaths.” Globalization can create a permissive environment for the occurrence of terrorism, but that it is not the root cause. Her main argument for the emergence of terrorism is not focused on the threat of globalism, but rather the risk factors of “political and economic inequalities and social alienation.”30

The risk factors alone Richardson acknowledges, do not cause terrorism. Instead terrorism is “ignited by particular events, policies or leaders that mobilize the disaffection they generate into violent action.”31 Religion is a particularly important method of mobilization that is used by Islamist terrorists today. Religion can be used to “legitimize the use of violence to redress (...) political and socioeconomic grievances.”32 She concludes that once grievances are expressed in religious terms, the conflict ultimately becomes more difficult to solve.

Using religion as a method of mobilization is not the only way that terrorist groups can form. As seen in other regions around the world and as pointed out by Richardson, terrorism can emerge as a reaction to events, policies, or leaders. There are five primary terrorist groups that are categorized by their source of motivation. Left-wing and right-wing terrorist groups are intertwined with the Communist and Fascist movements

29 Ibid., 51.
31 Ibid., 9.
32 Ibid., 12.
respectively. Groups such as the New People's Army in the Philippines have used extreme violence to demand a change in the political environment. Other groups such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Tamil Tigers) in Sri Lanka have used terrorism to fight for the creation of an independent state. While each of these groups have proven to be extremely lethal, terrorist groups motivated by religion are especially dangerous.

Religious terrorism is not only made up of Islamists as is often portrayed in the western media. There are other religious extremist groups that have used religion as their motivating factor. In Sri Lanka, Buddhist extremists target Muslims, blaming them for turning Sri Lankans away from Buddhism and making them immoral. In India, Hindu extremists target Christians and Muslims who are categorized as foreign faiths that were imposed by foreign conquerors. Similar to the Buddhist extremists, Hindu extremists feel their religious-nationalist ideology is threatened, and so must act for the good of their faith.

This “us vs. them” mentality that many terrorist groups possess is particularly dangerous when put in the context of religion. Audrey Cronin cites at least four reasons why religious terrorism has made today’s terrorist groups (ISIS, and before it the GIA and Al-Qaeda) especially threatening. First, they feel they are in the ultimate struggle of good against evil. This broadens their targets to anyone who does not subscribe to their religious beliefs and dehumanizes them further by considering the nonmembers as infidels or apostates. Second, they respond to the unpredictable impulses of a deity, which can make

33 Cronin, Behind the Curve, 39.
their acts of violence especially erratic. Third, they consider themselves unconstrained by the laws of the society. This connects to the fourth point that religious terrorists display complete alienation from the social system. Because they are fighting to replace an entire system, they see the apocalyptic methods of destruction as a necessity to achieve their goals.36

**History of the Islamic State**

The Islamic State originated as Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad (JTWJ), a group founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 1999. After spending five years in prison in Jordan, Zarqawi moved to Afghanistan and gained permission (and a $200,000 loan) from al-Qaeda to establish a training camp. The training camp eventually developed into the group JTWJ, which was made up of primarily Palestinians and Jordanians. Zarqawi’s established enemies were Jordan and the Shia, whom he viewed as the main threats to Sunni power in Iraq and the broader region.37 Their primary goal was to “topple to Jordanian monarchy, with the rest of the Levant presumably to follow” and to establish an Islamic state.38

The group quickly earned international attention for a December 1999 plot to attack Amman’s Radisson Hotel and other tourist sites. A few months after U.S. forces invaded Iraq in March 2003, Zarqawi “became a household name for his brutal personal beheadings and fast-paced suicide bombing campaign against Shiite religious targets and Sunni

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36 Cronin, *Behind the Curve*, 41.
civilians.” His infamous activity in Iraq became a draw for other foreign fighters, and his group began to grow. Due to this growth and prominence, JTWJ became the center of a “growing jihadi umbrella in Iraq, incorporating other similarly minded groups.” In September 2004, Zarqawi recognized the need for resources to expand the group’s operations, and pledged baya (religious oath of allegiance) to Osama bin Laden. JTWJ was renamed al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) as it became a part of the al-Qaeda network.

This pledge came after months of tense negotiation between Zarqawi, bin Laden, and bin Laden’s number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri. The two groups’ fundamental differences eventually led to the division between AQI and al-Qaeda. While Zarqawi came from a poor family and had little education, bin Laden grew up in the upper middle class and had a university education. Zarqawi had a criminal past and extreme view of takfir (accusing another Muslim of heresy and thereby justifying his killing), which created major friction and distrust with bin Laden. The tension grew as AQI continually targeted Shia civilians in brutal attacks. Zarqawi’s opinion of the Islamic world was that it was corrupted and needed cleansing through the use of violence even if that meant killing fellow Muslims. Zawahiri on the other hand believed that Muslims were not the problem, but instead it was the “‘apostate’ institutions needed to be changed.” This difference continued to fuel the discontent between the two groups, leading to the eventual division.

By January 2006, AQI announced its consolidation with five other groups to form Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen (MSM). The group was further solidified after Zarqawi’s death in June 2006. Abu Hamza al-Muhajir took over the group after Zarqawi and pledged baya to

39 Ibid., 2.
40 Lister, Lasting and Expanding, 9.
41 Zelin, the War between, 3.
the newly appointed leader of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. ISI had announced its establishment in October 2006, and it began to focus on taking territory and governing in Iraq’s Anbar province.\textsuperscript{42} The group was not officially disaffiliated with al-Qaeda until February 2014, when al-Qaeda aired its grievances with ISIS for ideological difference and not adhering to its baya pledge.

**History of the Armed Islamic Group**

The Armed Islamic Group developed in response to the modern and Western-influenced government, the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN). The government was established in 1962 after the Algerian war of independence against France. Even as the FLN claimed independence from France, aspects of the old colonial ruler continued to surface in Algerian politics. Islamists in Algeria began to emerge, arguing that a “Western-oriented secularized elite had confiscated the revolution from the common people who had made the revolution in the first place.”\textsuperscript{43} These views became increasingly popular as the numbers of poorly educated, unemployed and rural-urban migrants increased.

A huge drop in oil prices, a deepening economic crisis and a widespread belief that the government had become corrupt and aloof intensified the discontent in the country in 1986. Civil war broke out after the liberalized reforms that attempted to respond to the deadly riots that broke out in 1988. Algerians were unhappy with their prospects of employment, their lack of voice in their own affairs, and their deteriorating standard of living. The *Front Islamique du Salut* (the Islamic Salvation Front or FIS) emerged as a Sunni

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 3.
\end{footnotesize}
Islamist political party that confronted the non-Islamist, French system of government that the FLN had adopted. The civil war continued into the 1990s as the regime continued to crack down on members associated with the FIS or any other Islamist party.

The Armed Islamic Group came to fruition after the Algerian government (the FLN) decided to revoke the 1992 popular elections, which would have brought the FIS into power. The FLN, who represented colonial France and its values in the political realm, were traitors to an Islamic Algeria and thus the enemy of the GIA. To bring Algeria back to its rightful state (in the minds of GIA members) the French and thus Western influences in the country needed to be eliminated.

The jihadi-salafist movement of extreme brutality overtook the groups loyal to the FIS and attracted “along with large numbers of hittistes [urban poor], a sprinkling of intellectuals who had previously gone underground.” The group was led by a succession of young amirs (commanders) who died one after another in combat. Based in the countryside, the GIA was one of the most extreme Islamist terrorist groups, “often using tactics more brutal than those employed by some of the most savage terrorist organizations operating today.”

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Chapter 2: Geography

Geography was a critical element for both the GIA and the Islamic State’s aspiration as an organization. In order to establish a functioning Islamic state, both groups needed to attain governing control over a swath of land. Territorial control also provided a sense of legitimacy and was a physical representation of the groups’ success. The two groups diverged however, over the scope of their geographical goals.

The GIA’s expanse was significantly smaller than the Islamic State’s, highlighting their narrower objectives. Their goal was to establish an Islamic state in Algeria, so their focus remained on the one country. The Islamic State hoped to rule over the Levant, a large area in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The Islamic State’s expansive domain as well as its relative resilience to US-led coalitions heightened the group’s reputation and validity in the eyes of many recruits.

The Islamic State

On June 19, 2014, Abu Muhammad Al ‘Adnani Al-Shami the chief propagandist and strategist of the Islamic State produced a document called “This Is the Promise of Allah.”46 The document’s purpose was to proclaim the revival of the caliphate. The caliphate is an Islamic state, led by a caliph (successor) to the prophet Muhammad. The timing of this

46 Abu Muhammad Al ‘Adnani Al-Shami, “This Is the Promise of Allah,” (June 19, 2014).
document could not have been more significant, as shortly after the publication the Islamic State expanded its territorial control significantly.47

The document itself is full of historical references, religious warnings, and political and legal announcements. The text calls for unity among Muslims, while at the same time describing how it is Muslims’ fault that they have sunk so low. ISIS has done the work necessary to raise them up and restore the honor of Islam.48

(...)

shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace, for the era of lamenting and moaning has gone, and the dawn of honor has emerged anew. The sun of jihad has risen. The glad tidings of good are shining. Triumph looms on the horizon. The signs of victory have appeared.49

The imagery used in this section emphasizes the apocalyptic narrative that is essential to the legitimacy of the Islamic State’s actions. Comparing their plight to the rising sun affirms the certainty of the State’s rise to power. By using the phrase “looms on the horizon” ISIS is recalling the prophecies of the Mahdi coming to liberate the Arabs at the End of Days.

The authority of this message comes from the religious terminology that is used throughout the document. The religious terminology however does not stop it from serving simultaneously as a political text. Throughout the text, religion and politics are supported, justified and given meaning by the other.

(...)

the Islamic State has no shar‘ī (legal) constraint or excuse that can justify delaying or neglecting the establishment of the khilāfah [caliphate]

(...)

the Islamic State (...) consisting of its senior figures, leaders, and the shūrā council – resolved to announce the establishment of the Islamic khilāfah, the appointment of a khilāfah for the Muslims, and the pledge of allegiance to the shaykh (sheikh), the mujāhid, the scholar who practices


49 Al ‘Adnani, This Is the Promise of Allah, 4.
what he preaches, the worshipper, the leader, the warrior, the reviver, descendent from the family of the Prophet [al-Baghdādī] (...)50

The Islamic State attempts to establish itself as a political identity by describing its senior figures, leaders, and council. At the same time, the many titles of their leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi indicate the religious authority of the group. The document highlights how the organization uses their ideology in order to legitimize their territorial claims.

Throughout the document, each point that is made concerns “the reestablishment of the caliphal institution.”51 For the Islamic State, controlling territory is crucial. Two cities are particularly important for ISIS’s caliphate: Raqqa and Mosul. Raqqa is the “de facto capital” and “operational nerve center” for the state.52 Mosul is where al-Baghdadi led prayers during his only public appearance as the self-declared “Caliph Ibrahim”. By 2015, the Islamic State had control of both cities. With the motto “Remaining and Expanding” the Islamic State will remain in control of the territory it has, while expanding until the world has been filled with the truth and justice of Islam.53

In 2015, ISIS had control over a significant swath of territory throughout Syria and Iraq. In their short-term goals, the Islamic State aspired to control the entire Levant region, which includes Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.54 Eventually, they were to take over the world. The claim to be “remaining and expanding” seemed conclusive, which furthered

50 Al ‘Adnani, This Is the Promise of Allah, 5.
51 Wasserstein, Black Banners of ISIS, 30.
53 Ibid.
54 “Global Terrorism Index” 52.
the notion that ISIS really was the caliphate. This legitimized Baghdadi’s men in the minds of many recruits.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Figure 2.1 Map of ISIS controlled territory in January 2015}
\textit{Source: The Washington Post}

Figure 2.1 displays the amount of territory ISIS controlled during the peak of their expansion. According to the Middle East Institute, this territory spanned 34,000 square miles across Syria and Iraq.\textsuperscript{56} While much of the territory is uninhabitable desert, the Islamic State was able to claim significant towns and cities. By taking such a significant swath of land, the Islamic State became more legitimate to its many followers.

The increase in territory led to a drastic increase in lethality. The number of deaths resulting from ISIS attacks in 2015 only saw a 1\% increase from attacks carried out in 2014. From 2014 to 2015 however, the amount of attacks were reduced by 11\%. There were about 6.4 deaths per attack in 2015 compared to about 5.7 deaths per attack in

\textsuperscript{55} Joscelyn, \textit{US Counterterrorism Efforts in Syria}.
\textsuperscript{56} “Where is ISIS today?”
This pattern highlights that as the group evolved and continued to learn from their previous attacks, their destructiveness increased. The Global Terrorism Index says in 2014, 40% of the attacks carried out by ISIS did not lead to any deaths, whereas only 23% did not lead to deaths in 2015. The group was able to focus their energy on carrying out deadly attacks because they were confident in their increasing prowess in Syria and Iraq.

The increase in territory also led to an increase in the Islamic State’s influence in other parts of the world. In 2015, there was an increase in the number of groups that claimed affiliation with ISIS. In 2014, there were 13 countries that contained active ISIS affiliates. By 2015, the number of countries containing groups that had pledged allegiance to ISIS increased to at least 28. The number of countries that were targeted by ISIS also increased during this time. ISIS carried out various attacks in 11 countries in 2015, compared to 5 countries in 2014. The Islamic State carried out attacks in 252 different cities in 2015.58

**Figure 2.2** Deadliest terrorist groups from 2013-2015  
*Source: The Global Terrorism Index*

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57 Global Terrorism Index, 52.  
58 Ibid., 52.
Figure 2.2 emphasizes the increase in lethality and influence of the Islamic State in comparison with other prominent terrorist groups of today. The Islamic State is referred to by its other acronym ISIL in this graphic, which stands for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. As of 2013, the Islamic State's lethality was close to that of al-Qaeda and Boko Haram. By 2014, the lethality of both ISIS and Boko Haram increased significantly. The Islamic State went from about 1,500 deaths in 2013, to about 6,000 deaths in 2014. While the number of deaths form Boko Haram’s attacks decreased by about 1,000 from 2014 to 2015, the Islamic State’s number increased slightly. From 2014 to 2015 the Islamic State was not only increasing the number of attacks and the lethality of those attacks, it was also expanding territoriality.

Within the last few years, the Islamic State has lost significant territory. By 2015, the Islamic State ruled over a territory about as large at Italy. From January 2015 to January 2017, the Islamic State began to lose ground. However, the territory that they lost was not as significant as what was lost in late 2017. By January 2018, the Islamic State only controlled a few pockets of land. This was due primarily to intensive aerial bombardments carried out by the US-led coalition. By the end of 2017, there were a total of 74 countries that joined the US-led coalition fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria. According to the BBC, since 2014, “14,600 strikes have been carried out by coalition forces, which include Australia,

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Bahrain, France, Jordan, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and the UK.”

Figure 2.3 Comparison of ISIS controlled territory from January 2015 to January 2018

Source: The BBC

Figure 2.3 highlights the extent of the organization’s decline from January 2015 to January 2018. The two major cities, Raqqa and Mosul, that once represented the prophetic nature of the State are now lost. The Iraqi government announced in December 2017 that its war against ISIS was over. As of 2018, the US-led coalition says “98% of territory once claimed by the jihadist group across Iraq and Syria has been recaptured.”

The Islamic State is struggling to regain their footing after this major setback. However, the geographical prowess of the Islamic State in 2014 and 2015 was extremely influential in the group’s reputation. The Islamic State’s recruitment process and

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61 “The War against ‘Islamic State’ in Maps and Charts”
62 Ibid.
attractiveness to French citizens will be better understood by putting the group’s territorial goals and achievements in context. Without land, ISIS would not have had any legitimacy in the minds of recruits. Without establishing the caliphate in a prophetic part of the Middle East, the Islamic group may have not ever attracted the number of people it did over the years.

**The Armed Islamic Group**

What differentiates the Islamic State from other *jihadi-salafist* groups of the past is the expansiveness of its territorial goals. The Armed Islamic Group for example, had a much narrower scope in mind. The GIA “vowed to raze the secular Algerian government and, in its place, establish a Muslim state ruled by sharia.”63 While their goal, similar to that of ISIS, was to establish a Muslim state, they focused their energy almost entirely on Algeria and the Algerian government.

Throughout 1993 and into 1994, the Algerian government began to lose control of the mountain and rural districts throughout Algeria. Even main roads and working-class sections of the cities were passed into the hands of armed insurgents. While the still evolving GIA was not directly engaged in these actions, many young men who would eventually support or join the GIA “managed to expel the police from their neighborhoods and proclaim them ‘liberated Islamic zones’.”64 This shift in territorial control represented the transfer of influence from the “devout bourgeoisie to the working class”, solidified

when the GIA won supremacy over the FIS in 1993-94.65 Territory held by the working class was a mobilizing factor for the GIA, which provided it with legitimacy and influence on the national level.

In January 1994 the GIA Command Council came out with a strategy plan. The plan highlighted the group’s current and future strategy, considering both immediate and overall problems. One of the steps to the plan was to “break the siege that has been imposed on the Medea province by extending the circle of the operations in order to incorporate all parts of the country.”66 The GIA underscored its territorial goals by adding this step to their strategic plan. Rather than just emphasizing the establishment of a new government, the GIA clearly highlights the importance of acquiring operational control over the entire country.

Geography provided a source of validation for both the GIA and ISIS. The Armed Islamic Group’s small geographical scope allowed the group to emphasize their focus against the Algerian government. The GIA’s focus on Algeria however, made their recruitment scope much smaller. Because many individuals abroad could not relate to the grievances of the Algerian people, the cause did not attract large numbers. The few non-Algerians who were sympathetic to the group were petty criminals who supported the group’s ideology but did not have a real knowledge of Islam.67

The Islamic State’s geographical scope was attractive to thousands of individuals from all over the world. Part of this was rooted in its prophetic location in the Middle East. The territory that ISIS held fed directly into the narrative that the organization was fighting

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67 Ibid., 29.
in the End of Times against the misguided infidels. The territory also represented a place where Sharia law (religious law derived from the Quran and Hadith) could be practiced to its fullest extent. Because ISIS’s territorial scope was not limited to one country like the GIA’s, the organization could appeal to many more individuals.
Chapter 3: Ideology

The ideology of both the Islamic State and the GIA are centered on \textit{jihadi-salafism}. This strict form of Islam works something like a cult in the way it demands its members to devote 100\% of their identity to the group and its particularistic ideology. In order to better understand why France has been so affected by this form of Islamist extremism, the ideologies of the two groups must be understood.

The Islamic State

The Islamic State is one of the most lethal terrorist groups of modern time. It has become even more lethal than its estranged relative Al-Qaeda. What makes the Islamic State so dangerous is its apocalyptic rhetoric and messianic fervor. Using medieval theological language that even Arabic-speaking Muslims can hardly understand, the Islamic State justifies its brutality as a necessity for establishing God’s kingdom, the caliphate. The organization’s followers adhere to an extreme form of Islam known as \textit{jihadi-salafism}, which is intimately tied to their dystopian understanding of the Islamic State.

In order to understand the term more fully, Jihadism and Salafism must be defined separately. Jihadism comes from the Arabic and Islamic term \textit{jihad}, which means struggle or holy war. For most of the Muslim world the term refers to the internal spiritual campaign that one wages with oneself. The world’s counter-terrorism community has used the term to “refer to Sunni Muslims who use violence in order to pursue their universalistic
political agendas.” 68 Because this term is so quickly thrown around, many Muslims see the term as “having normative implications that unfairly associate Islam with terrorism.”69 Terrorists on the other hand function with the understanding that jihad is inherently centered on fighting and terrorism is a legitimate and necessary form of fighting.70

Salafism falls into a theological category rather than a political one. Islamists often use it as a normative term, while observers understand it as a descriptive term. Salafism is the theological movement in Sunni Islam that is focused on purifying the faith. Significant Salafi thinkers came from the Wahhabi movement, which is a subset of Salafism tied to the Saudi political establishment. In the late 18th century, the Saudis helped the Wahhabis spread their ideology by “waging jihad against perceived heretics for the sake of eliminating shirk [idolatry] and affirming tawhid [God’s Oneness].”71 Thus, the violence of jihad has been closely linked to Salafism from the beginning.

When the term is used by academics, they generally are alluding to a “nebula of actors whose practice of Islam is more puritan and more rigorous than other Muslims.”72 The term is popular among extreme Islamists because it “connotes doctrinal purity and therefore affords a degree of religious and political legitimacy”73 to those who use it. Together, Salafism and Jihadism work to define a small group of extreme Islamists who believe in a very puritanical form of Islam. In order to protect it from the infidels (often

70 Brachman, Global Jihadism, 49.
71 Bunzel, From Paper State to Caliphate, 8.
72 Hegghammer, Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries, 249.
73 Ibid., 249.
seen as the West or Westerners) they believe that they must carry out *jihad* and establish an Islamic state.

The Islamic State has used obscure and ancient Islamic texts to advance its legitimacy and build an apocalyptic narrative. Islamic End-Time prophecies of Mahdi “the Rightly Guided One” first began to circulate in the seventh and eighth century AD with the Umayyad dynasty. People were unhappy with the Umayyad rule, and looked to prophecies of “Mahdi appearing in the End of Days to lead the final battles against the infidels.”\(^7^4\) Over the years, the Mahdi prophecies earned many claimants, who used the spiritual and political power of the Mahdi as a compelling recruitment pitch.\(^7^5\) The revolutionaries justified their cause by aligning themselves with the Prophet and the Mahdi that was to come.

The prophecies of the Mahdi were associated with legends of soldiers fighting under black flags who would come to free the Arabs from the Umayyad rule. Some of these black flag prophecies were sited as coming from the Prophet himself:

> ‘The black banners will come from the East, led by men like mighty camels, with long hair and long beards; their surnames are taken from the names of their hometowns and their first names are from kunyas’ (...) ‘If you see the black banners coming from Khorasan, go to them immediately even if you must crawl over ice because indeed among them is the caliph, al-Mahdi’.\(^7^6\)

The intense imagery used in these texts generates a rallying cry for action, from the mouth of the Prophet himself. The color black, in early Islam, was associated with mourning but

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\(^7^5\) Ibid., 23.

\(^7^6\) Ibid., 26.
also revenge for a wrongful death.77 Fighting under this symbol of power and vengeance represents an ancient narrative that has been used to justify conflicts for centuries.

The Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative has been bolstered by the recent events in the Middle East. Before the United State’s invasion of Iraq in 2003, many Sunni Muslims categorized apocalyptic thinking with crazed conspiracy theorists. After the invasion and the immense violence that followed, the Sunni public’s appetite for apocalyptic explanations grew. This also underscored the rift that was growing between Osama bin Laden’s “languid apocalypticism” (or apocalyptic discourse) and Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s “urgent apocalypticism.”78 To Zarqawi, the founder of the extremist group al-Qaeda in Iraq that eventually became ISIS, the violence in Iraq represented the prophesized bloodbath between the righteous and the immoral.

The belief in the imminent apocalypse drove Zarqawi’s successor Abu Ayyub al-Masri to quickly establish the Islamic State in 2006, believing the caliphate had to be in place in order to fight for the Mahdi who would appear any day. When his rash predictions made in 2006 failed, the first commander of the faithful, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi a fellow Iraqi became more legitimate in 2007. When Masri and Abu Umar were killed in 2010, another Iraqi stepped into the role of commander of the faithful. The Islamic State’s scholars argued that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the current leader of ISIS) was one of the few prophesized caliphs who would rule before the end of the world. This prophetic fulfillment was a cunning way to prolong the apocalyptic expectations while providing an opportunity for the Islamic state to focus on institution building.79

77 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 26.
78 Ibid., 146.
79 Ibid., 146-147.
The apocalyptic narrative allows for any loss to be reframed as a win in the overall struggle forward. The Islamic State’s motto “Enduring and Expanding” highlights how the group has been able to reframe their losses as prophetic wins. When ISIS was being attacked on all sides from Iraq and the United States in 2007, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi adopted a slogan to emphasize its impressive survival: “Enduring”. This term seems nonsensical by 2008 when ISIS was almost defeated. However, the slogan “took on the aura of prophecy when the State made a comeback after 2010.”\textsuperscript{80} After its miraculous survival, ISIS began to march into Syria, adding “Expanding” to their slogan. The ISIS magazine \textit{Dabiq} declared,

\begin{quote}
  The shade of this blessed flag will expand until it covers all eastern and western extents of the Earth, filling the world with the truth and justice of Islam and putting an end to the falsehood and tyranny.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

ISIS believes they must conquer every country on earth, determined to fulfill the Prophet’s prophecy.

Drawing from scriptures, prophecies, and histories of the Islamic religion, the Islamic State has attempted to revive the early days of its faith. As events continue to develop in the Middle East, their apocalyptic thinking becomes less abstract and more attractive to some individuals. The apocalyptic narrative paints a portrait of their present and future aspirations, while providing a sense of legitimacy to every action they make. The religious terrorism that ISIS adheres to is a dangerous combination of apocalyptic thinking, religious affirmation, and violent implementation.

\textsuperscript{80} McCants, \textit{The ISIS Apocalypse}, 139.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 140.
The Armed Islamic Group

Understanding the ideology of an older Islamist terrorist group like the GIA will help to emphasize some important distinctions of the Islamic State’s philosophy. The ideological foundations of the GIA were similar to many of the other Islamist groups emerging in the late 1980s. Rabasa writes that the founders of the group “saw the establishment of an Islamic government in Algeria as their primary goal.”\(^2\) They were greatly influenced by Egyptian Islamist theoreticians, such as Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood.\(^3\) The only way to attain an Islamic state in Algeria for the GIA was through political actions characterized by violence.

The first few leaders of the GIA had recently returned from the war in Afghanistan and had received training in guerrilla warfare as well as a significant amount of religious indoctrination. They were greatly influenced by the power of jihad, which was able to bring down a superpower like the Soviet Union.\(^4\) One of the amirs published a communiqué indicating, “godless foreigners as well as godless Algerians were legitimate targets for the jihad.”\(^5\) By adhering to jihad, the GIA was able to justify the violence it carried out as righteous and religiously legitimate.

The GIA subscribed to the Islamic term takfir that is seldom used in regular Islamic practice. This term indicates the act of declaring a Muslim an infidel or a nonbeliever. In classical Islamic law, takfir is an extremely serious action that can “only be pronounced by

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\(^2\) Rabasa Beyond Al-Qaeda, 26.
\(^3\) Bunzel, From Paper State to Caliphate, 9.
\(^4\) Rabasa Beyond Al-Qaeda, 26.
\(^5\) Kepel, Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam, 264.
qualified religious authorities under very specific circumstances. At first, the GIA focused their attacks and assassinations on key government, intellectual, and cultural figures in Algeria. Over time, the group turned to large-scale civilian massacres, often killing hundreds of Muslim civilians at a time. The group labeled these as justified killings because the targeted Muslims were not “true” Muslims, and must be eliminated in order to attain an Islamic state in Algeria.

The Jihadi-Salafist Ideology

The origins of the term jihadi-salafism are unclear. The first textual evidence suggests that the term became popular in the Islamist community in London in the early 1990s. It appeared in the London-based jihadist magazine al-Ansar in 1994, which often praised the GIA. While there is no clear definition for the term, many scholars understand it as having three significant political characteristics. The first is that jihadi-salafist groups are more extremist and intransigent than other groups. The second is that they draw on Salafi or Wahhabi religious tradition and discourse. And third, they are more internationalist and anti-Western than other groups.

ISIS developed its affiliation with the jihadi-salafism ideology due to the beliefs of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He was first introduced to the strict tenets of jihadi-salafism through his close relationship with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Over the years as the two began to argue over the true meaning of jihadi-salafism, Zarqawi began to develop his ideology, which can be better defined as a “hyper-violent antiestablishment ethos than a

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86 Hegghammer, Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries, 247.
87 Ibid., 251.
88 Ibid., 253-254.
89 Bunzel, From Paper State to Caliphate, 13.
formal ideology." The particular ideology has been referred to by some as Zarqawiism, and can be distinguished by two core ideas:

1. An extremely narrow vision of what it means to be a “true Muslim,” such that the vast majority of the world’s Muslims are considered apostates deserving death. (...) Zarqawiists and the Islamic State assume that most people in the world are legitimate targets of violence, even those who profess to be Muslim.

2. A dramatic redistribution of ideological and political authority from a rarified class of religious scholars to frontline jihadists, who by committing to violence for their faith are considered better Muslims. (...) Zarqawiists hold laypeople personally responsible for their “apostasy”.

The two beliefs have continued to define the Islamic State to this day. The first point highlights the group’s staunch views on takfir. Similar to the GIA, takfir has been used to justify extreme and unapologetic violence that the Islamic State carries out. The group’s willingness to kill laypeople demonstrates the Islamic State’s desire to hold individuals accountable for their misguided views.

The second point emphasizes the Islamic State’s black and white view on the Islamic faith. The practice of jihad in the eyes of the Islamic State is necessary in sorting the “true” Muslims from the apostates. In Zarqawi’s own words,

“The supposed Muslim who follows the pure creed but who refrains from jihad is corrupt and immoral. A Muslim who carries out jihad for God but who is influenced by heresy is better than the [Muslim] with no resolve who does not take part in jihad.”

For the Islamic State, Jihad calls for an apocalyptic global war against the infidels. The nonbelievers must be wiped off the face of the earth, and this order comes from God himself. This concept is paired with the belief that “time on earth is a testing ground for a

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91 Ibid., 60-61.
92 Ibid., 65-66.
longer and more important existence after death”93, making the thought of fighting and
dying for the cause all the more appealing. If an individual were to die fighting jihad, they
would earn the personal salvation only achieved through violence against infidels.

It is the hardline orientation to jihadi-salafism and the emphasis placed on takfirism
that led al-Qaeda to disavow both groups. The GIA was disavowed by Osama bin Laden in
1996 during the Algerian civil war. Bin Laden worried about the GIA’s ideology as they
began to shift their focus from the Algerian regime to other Islamist groups.94 This shift in
target and their ideas of takfir conflicted with the mainstream jihadi thinking that al-Qaeda
subscribed to. They believe that “most Muslims have forgotten the true faith and must be
brought back to it” and that laypeople should be exempt from violence, while their leaders
should be targeted.95 Laypeople can be reformed while the institutions need to be changed.
These fundamental differences are what led bin Laden to disavow the GIA and go on to
create a less radical Algerian group known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
(GSPC) in 1998.96

Al-Qaeda’s previous interaction with the GIA proved to play an important role when
the group began to distance itself from the Islamic State. When Zarqawi was still the leader
in 2005, he received many letters from al-Qaeda advising him against many of his actions.
One of the letters came from Atiyah Allah Abd al-Rahman al-Libi who had first-hand
experience of the extreme violence of the GIA. The letter “advised Zarqawi not to be so
brutal and to focus the group’s efforts on the American forces” rather than the innocent

93 Fishman, The Master Plan, 71.
94 Aaron Y Zelin, “Al-Qaeda Disaffiliates with the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham,” The
Washington Institute, February 4, 2014, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-
95 Fishman, The Master Plan, 60-61.
96 Zelin, Al-Qaeda Disaffiliates.
Sunni Muslims that were being caught up in the violence.\textsuperscript{97} Al-Qaeda feared that by killing Muslim civilians, their group would repulse the broader Muslim population.

The significance of this separation highlights the most dangerous aspects of ISIS’s ideology. The Islamic State targets Muslims with violence, endorses violence against anyone that does not support them, and thinks its first mission is to sort the “true” Muslims from the “apostates.”\textsuperscript{98} However extreme the ideology may be, the terrorist group has surprised countries around the world by attracting tens of thousands of fighters to join its cause.

\textsuperscript{97} Fishman, \textit{The Master Plan}, 60.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 63.
Chapter 4: Demographics

Who are the individuals that join these extreme terrorist organizations? Individual profiles of terrorists vary widely, but when analyzed together, overarching trends begin to emerge. When comparing the demographics (primarily immigration status) of individuals who were/are part of the GIA and ISIS, it is clear that the Islamic State has shifted its strategy from that of the GIA, making it a more lethal terrorist organization in Western countries.

The Islamic State

Terrorist activity today has been greatly influenced by individuals who have radicalized within their home country and either carried out attacks, or been involved in terrorist networks. Some of the most destructive terror attacks in France within the last few years have been carried out by radicalized French citizens. For example, Ibrahim and Salah Abdeslam and Foued Mohamed-Aggad were all French citizens that played key roles in the string of attacks in Paris in 2015. Karim Cheurfi, born and raised in France carried out a shooting on the Champs-Élysées in April 2017. Finally, Chérif Chekatt killed 5 people in Strasbourg, France the city where he spent his whole life.
The first fact that becomes evident from this graph is the number of females in France who are implicated for terrorism. Out of the total 1,020 individuals analyzed in this dataset, there are only 79 women total. Out of these women, the vast majority (77%) is native-born (excluding the “unknown” category). When including both genders, it is apparent that even without the “unknowns”, French citizens are more commonly involved in terrorist activity than immigrants. 53% of terrorists in France are native-born, while just 21% are immigrants.

What makes ISIS particularly dangerous is that unlike the GIA, the organization relies on citizens in their home country to carry out acts of terrorism. This is partly because of the increasing role that technology plays in recruitment and communication, and partly due to the expansive nature of the organization itself. Unable to survey people as they move across borders, it becomes difficult to keep track of the individuals who may be sympathizing with the Islamic State.
While the GIA was primarily made up of urban youth with a sprinkling of intellectuals, the Islamic State’s demographic configuration is more complex. It counters the popular narrative that the individuals who join ISIS are uneducated, unemployed individuals who lack legitimate opportunities in society.\(^{99}\)

![Education Level of French Terrorists by Number, 1993-2019](image)

**Figure 4.2 Education level of French terrorists by number, 1993-2019**  
*Source: The Western Jihadism Project*

While this table is a representation for only about 20% of the French terrorists documented, it still provides an opportunity to explore the diversity of educational backgrounds of ISIS sympathizers and fighters from France. Just 20% of the population either has dropped out of high school or below, or has not attended any form of schooling. That means that 80% of the individuals with education information coded have at least a high school degree.

The education levels of these terrorists translate to their occupational status as well. Again, only 20% of the French terrorists have their occupation documented. The majority (41%) of those coded are service/manual workers. 12% hold jobs that require higher

education including jobs in the medical and engineering fields. Another 15% are coded as religious leaders.

**The Armed Islamic Group**

From the 1990s to now, there has been an evident transition from terrorism carried out by immigrants and terrorism carried out by native born citizens. Terrorist networks in Europe before 2002 were primarily made up of foreign-born immigrants from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. These networks were comprised of 42.75% Algerians, 11.70% Tunisians, 10.94% Moroccans, and only 3.56% White-Europeans. Now, native-born individuals are more involved in terrorist networks.

Both the Armed Islamic Group and the Islamic State had terrorist networks functioning abroad. This however, is where the similarities between the two groups end. The GIA was a transplant from Algeria, pushed out of the country as popularity for the group decreased drastically. When functioning in Algeria, the group was primarily made up of “young Algerian poor in the cities” and “jihadist-salafist intellectuals” who were influenced by their experience fighting in Afghanistan.101

At first, the actions of the GIA were supported. Between 1990 and 1992 when the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) controlled many municipal authorities, the middle class and intellectuals retained local power. They worked to fight corruption and improve public morals, so when the government robbed them of the election in January 1992, they were furious. When the young Algerians seized local power by force in 1993-94, “Islamist

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notables, entrepreneurs, and shopkeepers (...) funded the hittiste amirs, journeymen workers, and plumbers”, who functioned as tools for their political revenge.102

The GIA’s primary international shift came around 1995-96 as their local support quickly deteriorated. The group’s strategy of jihad became too violent to accept for the majority of Algerians. Members of the Armed Islamic Group began to immigrate to different countries and often kept their ties to the terrorist group.

**Figure 4.3** Number of Algerian terrorists by country and how many were connected to the GIA, >2001
*Source: The Western Jihadism Project*

Each individual included in this graph has in some way interacted with the law for terrorist-related activity. Out of the 293 Algerians, 150 (51%, represented in red) have been specifically connected to the GIA. These GIA members were either connected with the various attacks in France in 1995 or conducted non-violent action for the group. This non-

violent activity ranges from general material support to more specific actions such as creating false documents such as passports, visas, and credit cards.\textsuperscript{103}

Out of the 293 Algerians documented in figure 4.3, only 44 individuals are native born; proving the wave of terrorism that the GIA was connected with was brought by a majority of immigrants. Due to the extensive relationship between France and Algeria and the number of ex-patriots already living in France, it is not surprising that half (51\%) of all Algerian immigrants connected with terrorism landed in France. This emphasizes the extent to which France, out of all other European countries, was affected by terrorism stemming from Algerian immigration.

Out of all the native-born Europeans with Algerian ethnicity documented in the graph, 32\% (14 out of 44) come from France. The remaining individuals fall under “immigrant”, and “unknown”. If an individual is labeled as “unknown” it can be assumed that there was not enough public information about the individual to make an accurate deduction. Even without the “unknown” category included, 63\% of Algerians connected to the GIA in Europe were immigrants. If the “unknown” category is assumed to be immigrants as well, this percentage jumps to 85\%.

Out of the 69 GIA members in France, 44 are labeled as “immigrant”, 14 are labeled as “native”, and 11 are labeled as “unknown”. Excluding the “unknown” category, 64\% of GIA members in France were immigrants. When including the “unknown” category, this percentage rises to 80\%. Such a high percentage of the GIA terrorist network abroad is made up of immigrants. These numbers, along with the total number of immigrants

conducting terrorist related activity in Europe, emphasize the impact that immigrant terrorism had on Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s.

By analyzing the education and occupation levels of French terrorists, it is clear that many of them have been well integrated into French society. The majority are citizens, have gone through the French education system, and occupy some form of work. Compared with the majority immigrant population that made up the international ranks of the GIA, the Islamic State has obtained a vast network of educated French nationals. This transition from Algerian immigrant terrorists in the late 1990s to homegrown terrorists now highlights how terrorist groups have adapted over time.
Chapter 5: Recruitment Methods

If both the GIA and ISIS had similar ideology, why has one group seen success in recruitment, while the other hasn’t? The primary differences between the Islamic State and the GIA when it comes to success in recruitment methods is the brutality of the groups’ tactics, the networks of each organization, and the time period that the groups were operating in.

The Violent Approach

For the Islamic State, their brutal tactics have not dissuaded tens of thousands of individuals from joining its ranks. One explanation for this is tied to the events that took place in the Middle East during the rise of the group. As the number of conflicts increased, along with Western (particularly U.S.) presence in the region, many Sunni Muslims began to see validation in violence as a reaction to these conflicts. The second U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the civil wars to follow were the “prophesied bloodbath between true Muslims and false” in the “very places mentioned in the prophecies.”104 Islamic State fighters viewed themselves as living in the End Times, so the violence needed to fulfill the prophecies was and is justified. This gave ISIS a powerful recruitment narrative. Either do nothing and die with the rest of the infidels, or come fight for this apocalyptic cause.

While both groups have used extreme brutality throughout their campaigns, this ultimately hurt the GIA’s recruitment, while it did not have as much of an effect on the

104 McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 146-147.
Islamic State’s recruitment. Within Algeria, the Armed Islamic Group only experienced a brief period of significant and successful recruiting. In the spring of 1994, the GIA had a significant recruitment capability. They were recruiting around 500 young men and sometimes women every week. The violence that was unleashed in 1994-95 put an end to this lucrative recruitment period.

The GIA attacked families, young people and imposed taboos leading to aberrant behaviors. (...) Every other day we discovered bodies, including of young girls. They were sometimes hung to a post or tied up with metal wires (...) there seemed to be no limit to horror and this explosion of barbaric acts was totally incomprehensible to us.106 Algeria had just been liberated from over 100 years of brutal colonial oppression, and they were not ready to experience more violence, especially at the hands of their own people. This sentiment was felt across the nation and became a decisive element in the group’s eventual collapse.

The Significance of Networks

Just from the data pulled from the Western Jihadism Project, it is clear that the GIA had a significantly smaller network than the Islamic State. By 2001 there were 182 terrorists operating outside of Algeria for the GIA. The majority had immigrated to France, Italy, and Spain. The few individuals who had left Algeria and attempted to operate abroad did not have the vast network that the Islamic State has with its foreign operates.

Out of all the ISIS fighters coded in the database, France alone makes up over 1,000 individuals. Out of this number, 545 are confirmed native born with 250 individuals who

106 Ibid., 12.
are coded as “unknown” and could potentially fall into this category. Just within the 545 individuals who are coded as native born, there are over 850 links. These links vary from ambiguous links such as “associate of” or “social media contact” to more specific links such as “sibling of” or “shared plot”.

Figure 5.1 provides a visual to understand complexity of the Islamic State’s networks that formed over the years. The network gets significantly larger and more complex when the links included are between French natives and French immigrants or terrorist with other nationalities. This expansive network is a representation of the various relationships between native-born French extremists.

**Figure 5.1 Interpersonal links of all French native-born terrorists, 1993-2019**

*Source: The Western Jihadism Project*
This graphic provides a visual representation for what “over 850 links” actually means. Almost every node (black dots) has more than one edge (lines connecting the dots). The nodes that have been colored represent four prominent individuals’ networks. The four individuals include Omar Diaby, Fabien Clain, Abdelilah Himich, and Jérémie Felix Louis-Sidney, each prominent members of ISIS who have either led or recruited many individuals for the State.

Omar Diaby, who is also known as Omar Omsen, was born in Senegal but grew up and spent his formative years in France. He was therefore coded as a “native” citizen of France. He is one of the most prominent French jihadist recruiters for the Islamic State. 36 different relationships are coded in relation to Diaby, making him the most connected native French individual in the database. Out of the 36 different links, 25 of them are either coded as “leader of” or “recruiter of”. His prominence has led to the recruitment of many French jihadists, many of who hailed from Nice, a southeastern city in France.107

The orange nodes in figure 5.1 that represent a direct connection to Omar Diaby have many of their own edges sprouting off, representing relationships that are not in any way connected to Diaby. These edges highlight the complexity of the French native-born network. While many of the black nodes pictured may not have any connection to Diaby, they have been indirectly influenced by his actions. Diaby was building up a tight network of individuals who would then go on to befriend, recruit, travel with, or share a plot with many other French jihadists.

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Every node and every edge speaks volumes to the breadth of the French jihadist network. For the GIA, this network is much smaller. Out of all the French-coded individuals (not necessarily native-born), there are a total of 60 links represented in Figure 5.2 below.

**Figure 5.2** Interpersonal links of all GIA members in France, >2001

*Source: The Western Jihadism Project*

Figure 5.2 proves that the GIA network in France was significantly less interconnected and expansive than the ISIS network. The four colors represent four individuals who were prominent members of the GIA networks. These individuals include Cristophe Caze, Salah Achour, Mohamed Semmache, and Rachid Ramda, all key members to the GIA’s various terrorist cells. For example, Mohamed Semmache was a prominent
member of a cell that planned to mimic the 1995 metro bombings in Paris, in December 1995.

As figure 5.2 shows, the colored nodes are often only connected to the other nodes of that same color, or just have one edge connecting individuals outside those networks. This means that the networks that were formed were not interconnected, or spread much past that individual group. Only one individual from Rachid Ramda’s network was connected to someone from Cristophe Caze’s network. This is different from the Islamic State’s network in France, where individuals from one network are often connected to others outside of that network.

Networks play a significant role for each terrorist organization. Without the support from other individuals, many plots would not have been carried out. The most brutal attacks conducted by both the GIA and ISIS have been executed by a number of terrorists who work together as a team. Members of a group of like-minded individuals often are encouraged by one another and supported by their shared ideology and behavior. With the GIA’s network in France being significantly smaller and less inter-connected than that of ISIS, it was easier for the cells to be isolated and broken up by law enforcement. When individuals are arrested or killed by law enforcement in the ISIS networks, their acquaintances are able to connect to other members who share their ideology.

**The Time Frame**

One aspect that has contributed to the successfulness of the Islamic State’s network in France is modern technology. The Islamic State has taken advantage of encrypted messaging applications, news agencies, and the Internet disseminate private messages,
extremist ideology, and other forms of media. And encrypted messaging system that ISIS relies heavily on is Telegram. This system supports end-to-end encryption, which means, “only the recipients, with a private key, are able to decrypt the message”. This means that police or intelligence officers can see who sent the message to whom, but not the content of the messages. This form of communication provides a simple and secure way for terrorists to quickly convey information or provide support to one another. It also allows for individuals to converse while in different parts of the country.

The Amaq News Agency is an official news outlet that is linked to the Islamic State, though not officially part of the ISIS media system. It often uses the Telegram app to publish a “heavy stream of short releases” based on tips that it gets straight from ISIS. After any major attacks, it is often the first to announce that ISIS has claimed responsibility. This news source, similar to that of Al-Ansar, provides a sense of legitimacy for the group. However, with a more direct link between ISIS and Amaq News Agency, the Islamic State is able to play a role in what is shared when.

The Internet is the most beneficial tool that the Islamic State has utilized for their recruitment tactics. Romain Quivooij, a research fellow at the Radicalisation Studies Programme, cites eight traits that make the Internet particularly key for virtual jihad.

Un accès et une disponibilité aisée; un coût financier peu élevé; un anonymat relative; une absence globale de censure et de régulation; des communications rapides et interactives; un environnement multimédia; la capacité de développer et de transmettre rapidemment des volumes

Each trait highlights the benefits that the Internet can bring to a non-state actor like ISIS who doesn’t have a legal way of disseminating information. Relative anonymity along with absence of global censure and regulation allows many terrorists to feel secure in their communications with other like-minded individuals. The amount of information that can be shared over the Internet at a rapid speed provides “un formidable outil de diffusion et de discussion des dogmes et pratiques musulmanes.” This “wonderful tool” has allowed for networks like the one in France to expand quickly and effortlessly.

The GIA operated from the 1990s to the early 2000s. During that time, technological advancements were not anywhere near the level they are today. The group used the less-advanced Internet at the time disseminate their communiqués (or publications) claiming responsibility for attacks and sharing their ideology. Some of the GIA’s communiqués incorporated “calls for enlisting to join the struggle or donate material and aid to the struggle.”

Other than Internet publications, the GIA’s primary method of communication was through a bi-monthly newsletter Al-Ansar known as “the voice of the jihad in Algeria and throughout the world.” Abu Musab and Abu Qatada, two leading Afghan veterans, published the newsletter in London (a centralized hub at the time for jihadi-salafists).

The newsletter was particularly effective during the Algerian Civil War when it worked to translate the GIA’s activities into the international salafist network’s politico-

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111 Ibid., 20.
112 “Islamist Insurgencies, Diasporic Support Networks, and Their Host States”, 30.
religious language and categories.\textsuperscript{114} This gave the terrorists in Algeria who had a primitive understanding of Islam in the first place, a sense of support from more legitimate actors in the \textit{jihadi-salafist} world. Intellectual preachers and jihadists in London were religiously endorsing their violent acts, glorifying and encouraging their behavior.

Even though \textit{Al-Ansar} was disseminated through the modern technology of the time (internet and fax machine\textsuperscript{115}), the distance between London and Algeria proved to be an issue. The editors, who had no real connection to Algeria and any way of communicating with individuals on the ground, often wrote about the happenings in Algeria through an Afghan lens.\textsuperscript{116} The disjointed newsletter eventually came to an end in 1996 as the London intellectuals distanced themselves from the massacres of civilians carried out by Djamel Zitouni. Thus, the GIA’s international support waned, and the group began to disintegrate.

Violent tactics, networks, and technology have all played a major role in the Islamic State’s recruitment methods. By analyzing these same factors for the GIA, it is clear that ISIS has successfully utilized these tools to recruit a much more successful and far-reaching network. The GIA struggled for years after its first burst of recruitment in 1994 as its tactics became extremely brutal. Its networks abroad were not particularly interconnected, allowing for easy defection once the group began to disintegrate. This brutality also led to a lack of support from prominent intellectuals abroad, which decreased the group’s legitimacy.

ISIS has been able to take what did not work for the GIA and improve upon it. The Islamic State has recruited tens of thousands of individuals over the past 10 or so years.

\textsuperscript{114} Kepel, \textit{Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam}, 305.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 304.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 305.
Some have stayed within their own countries, operating for the State without ever leaving its borders, while others have joined the estimated 30,000 foreign fighters who have left their homes for Syria and Iraq. They are drawn by the notion that they are fighting an apocalyptic battle against the infidels that will lead to their eternal salvation.

Interpersonal relationships play a substantial role in the Islamic State’s recruitment success. As is demonstrated by figure 5.1, many of the French nationals are directly or indirectly connected to multiple different individuals or groups. Even though one recruiter may have recruited 15 individuals, those individuals often go on to recruit a few of their own friends or relatives. These types of networks

The technology that the Islamic State uses is the underlying force that helps ISIS export its apocalyptic ideology and form its tightly knit networks. It provides a platform for new recruits to ask questions and veterans to publicize their beliefs. It is through their use of technology that the group publicizes its actions both in the Middle East and abroad. Without the technology, the Islamic State would not be nearly as prominent on the global level as it is today.

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Conclusion

This thesis has explored various features of the Islamic State in order to gain a better understanding as to why individuals, from France in particular, have joined its ranks. By comparing it to the GIA, a Salafi-jihadist group that predates the Islamic State by about ten years, certain unique characteristics of ISIS appear. The similarities that the groups share provide a better understanding of Islamic terrorism, while the differences emphasize the relatively successful life of the Islamic State. Together, the similarities and differences underscore the complexity of the Islamic State and the thousands who embrace its rule.

First, the forward march of the Islamic State discussed in Chapter 2 brings to light the geographical expansiveness of the organization compared to that of the GIA. The GIA was primarily focused on liberating Algeria from the apostate rulers and establish an Islamic state through the use of jihad. Their geographic goals remained firmly on Algeria until one amir (leader) Djamal Zitouni controversially brought the conflict to France. Even as the group attempted to expand outward, it lacked the drive of territorial expansion that the Islamic State was known for.

Even to this day, territory is one of the first things mentioned when the Islamic State is discussed in the news. At its height in 2015, it covered a swath of land stretching across Syria and Iraq. This territorial control gave the group an immense amount of legitimacy in the eyes of many radical Islamists. The Islamic State took over land that was prophesized in

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ancient Islamic texts, and established a state governed by the puritanical version of the faith.

The geographical prowess of the Islamic State, along with its attractive ideology examined in Chapter 3 are both “pull” factors for individuals who join the organization. The territory ISIS held around 2015 fed into the apocalyptic narrative that they would pump out across the world to potential recruits. The notion that members of ISIS would be fighting in the final battles at the End of Time in the prophesized land drew many individuals to the State.

The *jihadi-salafist* ideology that both the GIA and the Islamic State subscribed to attracted thousands of individuals over time. This ideology emphasized the “other” (anyone but the members of their organization) as an apostate deserving of death. For the Islamic State, it created an impression of “us vs. them”, a sense of community, and a feeling of belonging. For the GIA, it gave young, angry Algerian youth an outlet for their frustration and Afghanistan veterans a justification to implement *jihad*. Because the ideology is centered on a mistaken understanding of Islam, members of the Islamic State and the GIA believed that God was on their side, and that they were righteous in their actions. This ideology, though not comprehensible to the average Muslim, became a major “pull” factor in the decisions of many misguided people.

Chapter 4 provided an interesting glimpse into the demographic profiles of individuals from the GIA and ISIS. The GIA, when acting in Europe, was made up of a majority of immigrants. Out of the 69 GIA members documented from France, 64% were coded as “immigrant”. Another 16% were coded as “unknown”, which suggests the GIA may have been made up of more than just 64% immigrants. These numbers are particularly
significant when compared to the demographic profiles of the Islamic State’s members in France.

Out of all the 1,020 individuals connected to ISIS from France, 53% are native-born while just 21% are immigrants. The other 26% fall into the “unknown” category, again potentially shifting these percentages. Either way, it is clear that many more of the ISIS members from France are native-born than those from the GIA. The difference in number of native-born individuals highlights the shift from a more country-centered terrorist group to one that is truly functioning across borders.

The data could have been more accurate if the “unknown” category was defined. The difficulty in defining native-born status comes from working with open source documents to collect data. While many articles provide sufficient information to fully code profiles, some articles do not provide enough information. When native-born status is either not explicitly stated or cannot be inferred in a definite way, the section must be filled out at “unknown”.

The significance of native-born individuals connected to ISIS in France is highlighted in Chapter 5 through the organization’s networks. Individuals who become jihadists often already know someone who is a jihadist. Figure 5.1 in Chapter 5 emphasizes this point through the hundreds of connections exhibited in the network graph. While there are still many evident groupings within the network, there are hundreds of other edges that branch out from these groups. The GIA network on the other hand, shows a significantly smaller network that is less interconnected. By comparing the two organizations’ networks, it becomes clear that the Islamic State has utilized recruitment through relationships to build their prowess abroad.
The recruitment methods mentioned in Chapter 5 may be the most striking comparison between the two terrorist organizations. Throughout the chapter, it is clear that ISIS militarized modern technologies to extend its reach in a way that was unparalleled to that of the GIA. The Islamic State was able to use technology as a primary mode of communication, advertising, and recruitment. This is a pivotal difference between the two groups and their success.

The GIA’s primary method of communication was the newsletter *Al-Ansar* written by two prominent intellectuals in London. It was a detached newsletter that validated the Algerian’s actions, but did not express what was going on from the Algerian perspective. The GIA was able to circulate it amongst its members in Algeria, highlighting that their cause was a righteous one supported by Islamists around the world.

ISIS has utilized the Internet to disseminate its ideology and indoctrinate individuals in a direct way. By widely disseminating its own narrative over the high-speed Internet, ISIS was able to have direct control over its recruitment strategy. The Islamic State’s intellectuals published their writings, its news sources published videos, and its members sent personal messages to potential recruits. With a much more immediate and accurate exchange of information, the Islamic State was able to directly influence its targeted audience.

After analyzing the geographical expansion, ideology, demographics, and recruitment methods of the Islamic State, it is evident that the factors combined together make a lethal recruitment machine that has attracted thousands of French individuals. These factors also prove that it is not just the failures of social integration that push these individuals towards the terrorist organization. The lack of integration may be an
underlying factor but it does not explain how or why a small minority of French Muslims and converts to Islam become attracted to extremist ideas and engage in political violence.

It highlights the significant “pull” factors rather than the “push” factors that also play a role in the decision to join a terrorist organization. To further this analysis, I would ask, what are the significant “push” factors that act in the decision to join a terrorist group? Which factors, “push” or “pull”, are more significant in the individual’s decisions? In what ways are the “push” and “pull” factors interconnected?

This thesis, by focusing on the significance the Islamic State and its ideology plays in recruitment, can be applied to the arguments made by Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy. Because they are both primarily focused on how the issues in France itself (whether that be political dynamics or social exclusion) have incentivized people to join ISIS, this thesis is able to highlight a third side of the argument. It adds another complex layer to the reasoning behind individuals joining ISIS and creates a more accurate and complete understanding of the issue.

When terrorists like Cherif Chekatt carry out attacks in France, it is tempting to side with Kepel's argument. Chekatt killed 5 individuals in a shooting rampage at a Christmas market in Strasbourg, France in December 2015. He was born and raised in Strasbourg and dropped out of school at a young age. Not able to hold down jobs and active in petty crime, Chekatt fits into the mold that Kepel fabricated. He argues that the political upheaval and general dissatisfaction of the third generation of immigrants in France has led to a disenfranchised population of young French Muslims. They turn away from secularism to embrace a strict form of Islam that works to control all aspects of life.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{119} Kepel, \textit{Terror in France}, 138.
Kepel's chief contribution to this thesis is his emphasis on the rise of identity politics. The ultraconservative Salafi preachers in France have advocated for a version of Islam that separates Muslims from the perceived evils of French society. This exclusivity plays directly into the Islamic State's “us vs. them” mentality.

What Kepel’s argument lacks however, is the acknowledgement of the significant role that networks have played in the lives of many French Islamists. Cherif Chekatt was in and out of jail over 27 times throughout his life. It was in jail, during one of his later sentences, that he became radicalized.\textsuperscript{120} He was interacting with other radicalized individuals who shared with him the attractive ideology of the Islamic State.

Kepel also argues that individuals in France are particularly susceptible to online jihadist propaganda because of a “breakdown of allegiance to the once fundamental French principles of secularism and colorblindness.”\textsuperscript{121} While this may play a role in the attraction to jihadist propaganda, it does not provide any explanation as to why it works. The narrative that the Islamic State produces provides an enticing fantasy of fighting and dying for a higher power in a righteous war. If the propaganda were not effective, the individuals Kepel refers to would not actually join the organizations.

This study broadly supports Olivier Roy’s argument. Roy dismisses the role of religion altogether. He thinks that young Muslims and/or converts are rebelling against what their parents represent. They want to go to the extreme by adhering to an Islam that “rejects the concept of culture, an Islam that allows them to completely refashion


themselves.” He concludes that those who radicalize to Salafist Islam are not actually practicing Islam. Thus it is not the radicalization of Islam but instead the “Islamification of radicalism.” As explored in the ideology chapter of this thesis, it is clear that the Islam that ISIS observes is a distorted form of the religion.

However, this thesis does not completely absolve the extremist form of the Islamic religion from blame. The religion actually adds validation to the struggle in the eyes of the jihadists. They are emboldened by the thought that if they die a martyr, they will achieve eternal glory. They feel that the land they control is rightfully theirs and must be ruled by Islamic law. In ISIS’s eyes, it is fulfilling a prophetic proclamation made by the Prophet himself. Each argument they make is backed by specific (yet often distorted) interpretations from ancient Islamic texts.

The thesis has added to the discussion of Islamic terrorism by comparing the Islamic State with an older Islamist group, the Armed Islamic Group. It has brought to light the strategy that ISIS has used in recruiting individuals, and how successful that recruitment has been, particularly in France. However, because ISIS uses the same recruitment strategies throughout many different countries, it cannot be assumed that French individuals experience any more of a “pull” from the organization than others with different nationalities.

Both the GIA and ISIS are significantly less influential (if not completely inoperative) today. This does not eliminate the concern that other Islamist terrorist organizations will crop up in the future. These groups’ territorial significance may be reduced, but the ideology is still relevant in the minds of many. If Islamic terrorist groups crop up in the

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122 Roy, *Jihadism.*
future, this analysis will help to provide a base-level understanding of the defining features of Islamic terrorism. It also provides a glimpse into the many factors that pull the thousands of individuals towards the extreme organizations.
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