



## Preface

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To cite this article: Ahmed Al-Hamli (2016) Preface, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27:5, 729-732, DOI: [10.1080/09592318.2016.1208288](https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2016.1208288)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2016.1208288>



Published online: 05 Aug 2016.



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## Preface

Jihadist insurgency is a phenomenon in today's world where armed groups are using violent tactics to challenge existing power structures locally, nationally, and globally. The primary justification for these challenges and the use of violence being used are derived from interpretations based upon beliefs, doctrines, and practices derived from Islam. At the outset, it is important to note that the violence is based on interpretations the insurgent group sees as authoritative; they are far from consistent or widely accepted.

The term *jihad* is particular to Islam and it has a wide range of meanings and applications within the faith. At its core, jihad is about striving to apply our efforts to the maintenance of the faith – *al-jihad fi sabil Allah* ('striving in the way of God'). This is most commonly understood as an individual's striving to ensure adherence to the faith. Jihad is also used to describe outward-facing action against those, whom it is believed, are threatening the Islamic faith. In this respect, jihad has been used to describe holy wars, such as confronting the Crusaders, or to describe violent action against fellow Muslims when one self-selecting group determines that they are the only true believers and all others are transgressors. In the first meaning, jihad is about struggle and striving in a personal way for the believer to better connect with their faith. In the latter version, jihad is explicitly about the use of violence in a manner that is justified as upholding and protecting the faith against any challengers. It is this violent version of jihad that we hear about most often today. A wide number of violent organisations and individuals claim that their actions are justified by beliefs in Islam. Despite efforts to explain how jihad is not inherently about violence, we remain in a situation where jihad, as a foundational element of the Islamic faith, and violence have become synonymous.

The complexities and challenges of jihadist insurgency are immense, and responses require new forms of thinking both in operational aspects of the insurgents and in the debate and discussion about justifications for the use of violence. To this end TRENDS Research & Advisory of Abu Dhabi, UAE came together with the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence of King's College, London, UK for a two-day conference in 2015 to explore the complexities and challenges of modern jihadist insurgency. A number of the papers presented at that event are included in this special issue, along with further contributions. What the conference and subsequent papers show is that we can use our existing understandings of insurgency to categorise and discuss jihadist insurgency and plan operational responses. At the same time, how we respond to jihadist insurgency is a complex issue where security, politics, and beliefs in particular worldviews overlap and often conflict. Military and security responses are not enough when

addressing the threats from jihadist insurgency. The key matter for understanding jihadist insurgency is that the violence and objectives being pursued are about more than achieving a particular political goal. At the core of jihadist insurgency is the view, albeit distorted, that there exists a divinely inspired obligation to implement a version of Islamic law and practice around the world.

Modern jihadist insurgencies are similar to other insurgent movements in that the group is seeking a form of political power and control over a territorial space. The insurgent movement will argue that they are somehow marginalised or excluded from power and therefore remedial action through the use of violent means must be taken to achieve their objective. In this respect, it is possible to identify the desired outcome of the insurgent movement: the object of political power or inclusion being sought. Insurgent movements will also be driven by some sort of ideological stance that may or may not be directly connected to the political objectives, but the violence of insurgency is directed at achieving political power. With jihadist insurgencies, the desire for some form of political power is a recognisable objective as well. However, there is also the ideological claim that there exists the higher obligation of implementing their version of Islamic law. Furthermore, a common characteristic of the modern jihadist insurgency is that the implementation of Islamic law is not limited to a particular political or geographical space, but must encompass the entire world. We also have the added dimension that jihadist insurgent movements are based on a worldview in which it is believed that God/Allah is sanctioning and supporting their actions. Within this there is the belief that death in the conduct of a jihadist insurgency guarantees the highest possible level of salvation. These psychological elements make the motivation underpinning jihadist insurgency very difficult to address. Regardless of any political or military achievements, the jihadist insurgency will continue to argue that the violence must be continued against anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim, who does not agree with their views until a strict, and misguided, interpretation of Islamic law has been imposed on all aspects of society.

There is a range of jihadist insurgent approaches seeking to force a version of Islam upon all others. We see the extensive violence and war being carried out by Daesh/Islamic State based on their argument that most Muslims are not true adherents to the faith and that non-Muslims must be forced to comply. Daesh attempts to use Islamic doctrine to justify their actions, and their programme has received support from extremists around the world, primarily due to the understanding of the world that Daesh presents. We also see jihad as an integral part of *athnā'ashariyyah*, an Iranian doctrine that has been translated into a political and foreign policy objective by Iran. This belief makes jihad, primarily understood in the violent manner, an obligation upon Muslims where all non-believers must be brought into conformity. *Athnā'ashariyyah* itself is not directed solely at violent activity, but Iran has made it part of its foreign policy efforts in supporting violent organisations around the Middle East to challenge anyone who does not comply with their version of Islam. We can also look to organisations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which are not typical insurgent movements as their primary objective is working within the existing political system, but whose ultimate objective is a return to what they see as the only true version of Islam based on highly conservative and restrictive understandings of the faith. In the US case of *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*,

evidence was placed before the court showing the Muslim Brotherhood clearly calling for 'eliminating and destroying the Western civilization'. The evidence showed that political mechanisms were to be used where possible, but that recourse to the sword always remained an option.

This then is the crux of the issue in dealing with jihadist insurgency. It appears that these movements will not be satisfied until there is a complete reorganisation of the entire world on their terms and understanding of Islamic law – an understanding that is not shared widely among the entire Islamic community. This is not to reject the relevance of Islamic law. We, as Muslims, follow sharia in our day-to-day lives, but in the modern world we have to follow a wide range of laws, regulations, and practices that govern our societies, our states, and our interactions with others, which may or may not be obtained from a religious doctrine. While a faith can hope that new adherents wish to join, and Islam is currently the fastest growing religion in the world, a true sign of its success, we cannot use violence to force people to adopt a belief system and worldview. In response to the current challenges and threats posed by jihadist insurgency, politicians and commentators have attempted to conclude that the Islamic faith is the core cause of the violence. Yes, we can find statements, beliefs, and doctrines in Islam that can be used to support acts of violence, but this does not represent the entirety of the faith, and it is imperative to articulate understandings that not only challenge the beliefs of the jihadist insurgent movements but also discredit their actions. Individuals and political leaders may feel uncomfortable criticising the ideology of jihadist insurgencies as this may appear to be a challenge to Islam itself. Where we have to be clear is that the tactics of jihadist insurgency are very much against the spirit and practice of Islam.

In response to jihadist insurgency, we must redouble our security-based efforts, but we must also directly address the worldview and justifications that are being used to support their violence. We need to give attention to the different meanings of jihad because this helps to distance the term from any exclusive connection with violence. The core meaning of jihad relates to striving, taking extraordinary measures, and exerting oneself in the faith. For the individual, this act of striving can be in relation to a number of activities, most pertinently for jihad is the striving for an individual to become closer to their faith. The striving of jihad is about overcoming challenges and temptations that may weaken an individual's faith. Historically, these challenges came from outsiders seeking to use jihadist theology in order to defend, as they say it, the Islamic faith through force. In today's world many Muslims reject the idea that violence is an acceptable way to uphold their faith. Daesh has attempted to portray the use of violence as a religious obligation upon all Muslims grounded in doctrine and history; we have to reject this.

As with any belief system we can find elements within Islam that support peace and violence, understanding and intolerance. The true struggle today is to convince all extremists that violence, however justified, is unacceptable. The evidence is on our side as violence and extremism represent only a small percentage of human society. It is a very small group within Islam who say that the modern world is to be rejected through violence alone; we cannot let their understandings of our faith dominate global security. Today we live in a world where there are rules, processes, and norms that govern relations between peoples, societies, nations, and religions. These rules,

processes, and norms are not wholly Islamic, but Islam is recognised and respected. The world is a highly diverse place in which all belief systems can contribute. We have to reject the claims of jihadist insurgency that the world must comply with their distorted understanding of Islam. Instead we have to strive to ensure that Islam is part of the global efforts to make the world a more secure place. Looking at the world today, it is clear this will be a substantial struggle. The research presented in this special issue is an important contribution to these efforts.

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