Global Jihad: A Brief History

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Two Arguments

• The phenomenon of global jihad is best understood as having four distinct iterations, or waves, since the 1980s, each with its own distinct causes and ideological formulations. For all: international systemic crisis, not local problem.

• That global jihad is a variant form of a ‘movement of rage’ marked by nihilistic violence and apocalyptic ideologies – and is thus not sui generis, but is comparable to other, religious and non-religious, forms of extreme political violence.
Introduction

• Rise of Islamism or "political Islam" in 20th Century. Non-violent(ish).


Wave 1: Liberate Occupied Lands, 1979-1990

• Crises:
  • Specific: USSR occupation of Afghanistan
  • General: Occupation of Muslim lands by infidels around the world

• Key ideologue:

• Key documents: Fatwa and book Defense of Muslim Lands; Book Join the Caravan.
‘Azzam’s Ideological Innovations: the Jihadi International to liberate occupied Muslim lands.

1. “First obligation after faith is the defense of Muslim lands.”
2. The Jihadi International (al-qa’ida al-sulba)
3. Jihad as Permanent Revolution – linked to tawhid (tawhid ‘amali)
4. The Cult of Martyrdom
Wave 2: “America First” 1996-2011

- Crises:
  - Specific: defeat of jihadi movements in Egypt and Algeria, and growing US military footprint in 1990s.
  - General: the durability of apostate regimes

- Key Ideologue: Usama Bin Laden, d. 2011

- Key Documents: 1996 Declaration of War, 1998 “fatwa” to kill Americans
Bin Laden’s Ideological Innovations: Drive the Americans Out, Weaken the Apostate Regimes

• “After faith, there is no more important duty than pushing the American enemy out of the holy land.”

• Flipping the Far Enemy / Near Enemy dichotomy on its head.

• Obligatory (fard ‘ayn) for Muslims to kill Americans, military and civilian, anywhere in the world they are found.
Wave 3: the “Caliphate” 2003-2017

• Crises:
  • Specific: Destruction of Iraqi state, Syrian civil war, rule by infidel Shia
  • General: Apostasy itself


Ideological Innovations under ISIS: (Pre-Westphalian) State Building to Banish Apostasy

• Declaration of Caliphate, build state based on sharia.
• Management of Savagery (*idarat al-tawahhush*): Gory, performative violence as political strategy.
• Apocalyptic ideology: End Times
• Story-telling trumps theology
• Extreme Sectarianism
• *Jihadi Cool* / Propaganda of the Deed
Wave 4: Jihad Fardi, 2001--??

• Crises:
  • General: looming defeat of global jihad movement

• Key ideologue: Abu Musab al-Suri

• Key Document: *Call for Global Islamic Resistance*, 2005
Fourth Wave Ideological Innovations: Nizam, la Tanzim! – Survival of Movement

- A Networked System which uses modern media forms
  - Personal, Leaderless Jihad (*jihad fardi*)
  - Wiki-narrative
  - Violence and Gore, especially against civilians

- *Stochastic Terror* is hallmark of the 4th wave
Global Jihad and Violent Political Movements

• Most violent political movements in last century attached to some version of the Enlightenment: science, liberty, justice, progress.
  • Leninism
  • National Liberation
  • Fascism (“Making the trains run on time”)

• Other conceptual approaches (e.g., fourth wave religious terrorism, cosmic war) miss both
  • the parallels between secular and sectarian groups
  • The sociological element: parochial elites from marginal cities and towns.
A Distinctive Form of Violence:
Movements of Rage

• My version of Ken Jowitt’s idea.
• Key Characteristics that define a Movement of Rage:
  • Nihilistic violence (in political, not philosophical, sense).
  • Apocalyptic, anti-Enlightenment ideology where cultural contamination is a feature. Gnosicide.
Other Examples of Movements of Rage

• Exemplar: Khmer Rouge in Cambodia
• Red Guards in China
• Boko Haram in Nigeria
• Brownshirts in Germany
• Elements of White Nationalism today
Global Jihad as Variant Form of Movement of Rage

- Nihilistic Violence
- Apocalyptic Ideology with element of cultural contamination (gnosicide).
- Variant: ideology and violence situated at global level, not national level
*Glenn Robinson makes a signal contribution to our understanding of the history and the essence of global jihad. This concise book delivers much more than its modest little promises, and renders comprehensible the causes of global jihad since the 1980s."

—Robert Springborg, Naval Postgraduate School

*Glenn Robinson has produced a masterful book that is incisive, insightful, and comprehensive—a tour de force on the evolution of jihadism. For anyone interested in better understanding the contemporary politics of the Middle East and Islam, Global Jihad is essential reading.*

—Mehran Kamrava, author of Inside the Arab State

*Glenn Robinson brilliantly dissects the religious ideology underpinning jihadist movements, as well as the social factors that draw young Muslims to them. With Global Jihad, he outlines what attracts young people to the nihilistic violence of ‘movements of rage,’ all framed in a story bigger than themselves.*

—Joel S. Migdal, University of Washington

*If you have been searching for an accessible introduction to jihadism, look no further. In Global Jihad: A Brief History, Glenn Robinson masterfully summarizes five decades of jihadi history with the insight and accuracy that only a veteran scholar with deep area knowledge can provide. Highly recommended for anyone seeking to understand 9/11, ISIS, and the future of militant Islamism.*

—Thomas Hegghammer, author of The Caravan: Abdullah Azzam and the Rise of Global Jihad

*Global Jihad is provocative, informative, and beautifully written. Robinson provides a superb analysis of global jihad’s leadership, violence, goals, and support from the 1980s to 2020. An essential guide for policymakers, soldiers, diplomats, and anyone seeking to understand and deal with radical and extremist Islam.*

—Jack A. Goldstone, George Mason University

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