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Commentary

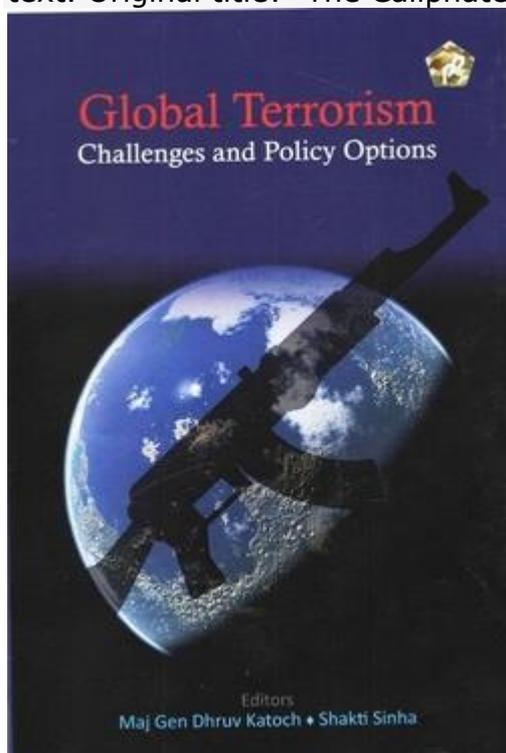
What Do Jihadis Want? The Caliphate

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A question often asked is, "What do the jihadis [Mujahideen] want?" The answer is surprisingly obscure, as most of their attacks do not include clear demands. The horrific attacks on Mumbai in November 2008 and on Paris in November 2015 were carried out by suicide squads, with gunmen carrying out mass shootings. Elsewhere, they have resorted to machine gun assaults, beheadings, bombings, hijackings etc. After the attackers have been neutralised by the security forces, an assessment is carried out of the damage they caused and detectives attempt to trace the identities of the perpetrators, to look into possible motives. Shadowy websites then

make post-hoc unauthenticated claims, which still belie the question, "What do the jihadis want?"

Motives for Jihadi Attacks

Why do the motives go unexplained? Post the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, analysts are still speculating on the likely motives. In broad terms however, we can state that there are two general categories or motives for attacks.

The first is to change specific policies of the state which has been targeted. As an example, this could pertain to seeking withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan or to get Riyadh to expel foreign troops from its soil. It could also be aimed at pressuring governments to end support for Israel or to pressure New Delhi to cede control over Kashmir.

The second category is more broad-based and is aimed at weakening non-Muslims in general, undermining their economy, creating fear in the minds of their populace and attempting to establish Muslim superiority. But both the categories point to something even larger. The jihadis seek to establish a world dominated by Muslims, Islam, Shari'a and the caliphate. We see jihad take two forms, based on the relative strength of the Muslim population in an area. Where non-Muslims rule, the attempt is to gain control over the levers of power, and to be in charge. The aim is to overthrow *kafir* rule. There is no direct attempt to convert, but the war is a war for territory. Where Muslims rule, the aim is to apply Shari'a in its entirety. The hope or end state is for a pious, just, ruler who can make Muslims strong and rich and who can end their divisions. The end state of both is however a global caliphate. The Caliph rules over all the peoples of the world and implements Shari'a law in its entirety.

Brief History

The succession to Muhammad saw deep divisions in Islam which remain to this day. At the heart of the dispute was who would occupy the prophet's place at the head of the Muslim community, which even now creates a divide amongst Shias and Sunnis. The successors to Muhammad, however, oversaw the great Islamic conquests for the next three hundred years. The executive caliphate ended in 940s and though the title passed on, it was nominal. The last Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad ended in 1258 CE, following the Mongol sack of Baghdad. During the latter half of the Abbasid rule, Muslim rulers had however started using other titles, such as *sultan*. Atatürk ended the caliphate on 3 March 1924, but the idea lived on as seen in the [Indian] Khilafat movement from 1919-26.

The more recent articulations of a caliphate have been of Osama bin Laden, who wanted a "pious caliphate [that] will start from Afghanistan". His successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, envisioned a caliphate through which, "history would make a new turn." As per Fazlur Rehman Khalil, another al-Qaeda leader: "Due to the blessings of jihad, America's countdown has

begun. It will declare defeat soon," and will be followed by a caliphate. In 2005, al-Qaeda started the Sawt al-Khalifa radio station.

The Caliphate



Fatih Alev, imam of Copenhagen's Dansk Islamisk Center.

Pronouncements by certain leaders and a general feeling amongst the population gave a sense that a caliphate was in the offing. At a Hizb ut-Tahrir meeting in Copenhagen, its imam, Muziz Abdullah, surveyed a hall filled to standing-room only capacity. "Ten years ago, when I started, it was totally unrealistic to think there could be a caliphate," he stated. "But now, people believe it could happen in a few years." Fatih Alev, an imam in Copenhagen, stated: "As of now, the caliphate is totally irrelevant. As of tomorrow, it could be relevant. I would not exclude it."

There was a sense of imminence of a caliphate amongst the common people too. As per Kerem Acar, a tailor in central Istanbul: "I won't live to see it, and my children won't, but one day maybe my children's children will see someone declare himself the caliph, like the pope, and have an impact." Ertuğul Örel, a cafe owner in Istanbul, expressed a hope for the caliphate, but did not believe it would come about. "A caliphate means, there would be [only] one voice," he said. "But I know, neither the Americans nor the Europeans will ever allow it." Ali Bulaç, a Turkish authority on Islam and Turkey was quite explicit when he stated, "The concept of the caliphate is very much alive in the collective memory of society."

Much the same view was expressed by Zeyno Baran, an expert on Hizb ut-Tahrir. "A few years ago people laughed at [it]. But now that bin Laden, Zarqawi, & [others] are saying they want to recreate the caliphate, people are taking them seriously." Posters with big, bright-red lettering calling for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate in Lebanon can now be seen around many streets in Sidon, pasted up by members of Hizb ut-

Tahrir. The posters call for "reviving an Islamic Caliphate state after the enemies in the malicious and colonial West underestimated our spiritual force. We will only come out strong with an Islamic state'."

As per James Brandon in the *Christian Science Monitor*: "Hizb ut-Tahrir promises that a revived caliphate will end corruption and bring prosperity. ... It will let Muslims challenge, and ultimately conquer, the West." He quotes Abdullah Shagr, a Jordanian member of the group: "The Muslim world has resources like oil but it lacks the leadership that will rule us by Islamic law and make this jihad that the whole world is afraid of." Shagr indicates that the caliphate's success will bring more conversions to Islam and turn the whole world Muslim. However, the route to the Caliphate, as propagated by Hizb ut-Tahrir is gradual and mostly peaceful. For the al-Qaeda, it is violent and revolutionary.

Non-Muslim Views



Dick Cheney understood the caliphate better than many professors of Islamic studies.

Beyond the Muslim world, the understanding was of a different order. In 2004, Dick Cheney when talking about Osama bin Laden, explicitly stated that "they talk about wanting to re-establish what you could refer to as the seventh-century caliphate," to be "governed by Sharia law, the most rigid interpretation of the Koran," he said. Many others in the George W. Bush administration followed suit and in 2005, *The Daily Telegraph*, rang the warning bells, stating, "Fanatics around the world dream of the Caliph's return"

The idea did seem impossible at that time and the Bush-hating Left, including Islam specialists (Kenneth M. Pollack, John L. Esposito, Shibley Telhami) pooh-poohed the whole topic. Investigative journalist Robert

Dreyfuss was rather dismissive of the idea of the aspiration to a caliphate. He described as 'idiotic' the notion that Islamist forces wished to establish a caliphate from North Africa to Southeast Asia. "This was utter nonsense", he said. "What was happening was that those in the administration who made such declarations based them on what they read on al-Qaeda and other jihadi websites." "Such threats," he added, "were in the nature of fantasies and should be treated as such."

A Caliphate Exists

When a Caliphate suddenly appeared on June 29, 2014, announced by an "Islamic State" and headed by Caliph Ibrahim, it was unanticipated. The announcement was followed by spectacular military victories, especially Mosul, which gave it unique global prestige. Groups such as Boko Haram paid it homage and it had an electrifying effect on Sunni Muslims. The potential impact of the Islamic state as a Caliphate is that it boosts the dream of a single rule across "Islamdom" and beyond, inspires others to do the same, and radicalises Islamist movements.

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