Security Studies

ISSN: 0963-6412 (Print) 1556-1852 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fsst20

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To cite this article: Aisha Ahmad (2016) Going Global: Islamist Competition in Contemporary Civil Wars, Security Studies, 25:2, 353-384, DOI: 10.1080/09636412.2016.1171971

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2016.1171971

Security Studies, 25:353–384, 2016

ISSN: 0963-6412 print / 1556-1852 online
DOI: 10.1080/09636412.2016.1171971

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Going Global: Islamist Competition in Contemporary Civil Wars

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The global landscape of modern jihad is highly diverse and wrought with conflict between rival Islamist factions. Within this inter-Islamist competition, some factions prove to be more robust and durable than others. This research proposes that the adoption of a global identity allows an Islamist group to better recruit and expand their domestic political power across ethnic and tribal divisions without being constrained by local politics. Islamists that rely on an ethnic or tribal identity are more prone to group fragmentation, whereas global Islamists are better able to retain group cohesion by purging their ranks of dissenters. To examine these two processes, I present original field research and primary source analysis to examine Islamist in-fighting in Somalia from 2006–2014 and then expand my analysis to Iraq and Syria, Pakistan, and Mali.

GOING GLOBAL: ISLAMIST COMPETITION IN CONTEMPORARY CIVIL WARS

The global landscape of modern jihad is highly diverse and wrought with internal competition.[1] In Pakistan, factions within the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) movement have repeatedly clashed over the past decade, splintering into multiple powerful jihadist groups. In northern Mali, the ethnic Tuareg rebellion has also fractured, leading some Islamist factions to build strong ties to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).[2] More recently, the

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[1] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 9 (November 2009): 26–45, 158; Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[2] On the relationship between al Qaeda and regional affiliates, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The Local and Global Jihad of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib," *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 2 (April 2009): 213–26. See also, Karen J. Greenberg, *Al-Qaeda Now: Understanding Todays Terrorists* (New York: Cambridge

extremist group calling itself the Islamic State (IS) claims to have created a caliphate covering large swaths of Iraq and Syria, fueling a wave of controversy and conflict with other jihadists. Some extremists in Egypt, Pakistan, Libya, and Nigeria have pledged allegiance to IS, while al Qaeda affiliates in Syria, Yemen, and the Maghreb region have declared the caliphate illegitimate.

Within each of these war theaters, there are multiple Islamist groups vying for space and relevance. Not all of these groups have global identities or interests, and some actively reject transnational associations. Some welcome fighters and ideas from other parts of the Muslim world, while others are starkly xenophobic. This article addresses an important new research question in international security. In civil wars involving multiple Islamist factions, what effect do local versus global identities have on an insurgent group's competitiveness?

The conventional wisdom offers two contrasting logics of Islamist success: foreign funds versus local networks. Indeed, some scholars argue that globally oriented Islamists are better able to secure foreign support from al Qaeda networks and private financiers than groups that have a primarily local focus.[3] Over the past decade, however, this coveted global support has become increasingly limited and uncertain;[4] as a result, many of the most competitive Islamist groups in the world today actually meet their operating costs through domestic revenue generation.[5] Other researchers have argued that access to local ethnic or tribal networks make a group stronger and

University Press, 2005); Christina Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda: From Global Network to Local Franchise* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2011); Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al-Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Jean-Luc Marret, "Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb: A 'Glocal' Organization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 6 (June 2008): 541–52. See also, David A. Lake, "Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century," *Dialogue IO* 1, no. 1 (January 2002): 15–29.

[3] Monica Duffy Toft finds that foreign resources can be acquired by framing a conflict in religious terms and that this is particularly important in conflicts where these resources cannot be acquired locally. Toft, "Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War," *International Security* 31, no. 4 (April 2007): 97–131. Two authors who have written on al Qaeda financing are Leah Farrall and Daniel L. Byman, See Leah Farrall, "How Al-Qaeda Works: What the Organization's Subsidiaries Say about Its Strength," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 128; Byman, *Breaking the Bonds between Al-Qa'ida and Its Affiliate Organizations* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2012).

[4] Access to foreign funds has become considerably more difficult given the stricter and more robust international legal controls that have been established over the past decade. Daniel Byman suggests that al Qaeda is so cash strapped that it has since charged its affiliates for services and training. See Byman, "Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations," *Security Studies* 23, no. 3 (July–September 2014): 431–70, esp. 460. See also Greg Bruno, "Al-Qaeda's Financial Pressures" (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, February 2010).

[5] For a discussion of domestic finances and Islamist power, see Aisha Ahmad, "The Security Bazaar: Business Interests and Islamist Power in Civil War Somalia," *International Security* 39, no. 3 (January 2015): 89–117.

more competitive.[6] In civil wars across the Muslim world, however, locally organized Islamists have struggled to keep up with more globally oriented jihadists. Foreign funding and local networks both fail to provide a complete explanation of what makes Islamists competitive.

This article puts forward two new arguments for study: first, that a global Islamist identity allows a group to better recruit political support across ethnic and tribal divisions than locally defined groups; and second, that Islamist groups that primarily rely on ethnic or tribal identities are more prone to fragmentation, whereas global Islamists maintain cohesion by appealing to a wider identity framework and purging their ranks of dissenters. To explore these two processes, I present an in-depth examination of competing Islamist insurgencies in Somalia and then extend the analysis to observations from Iraq and Syria, Pakistan, and Mali.

The case studies illustrate why and how, in a competition among rival Islamist groups, a global identity can be more advantageous than reliance on ethnic or tribal networks. This finding is surprising because the existing civil war literature indicates that ethnic and tribal identities are a powerful basis for mobilization.[7] In the contemporary Muslim world, however, the imagined conception of a global *ummah,* a universal Islamic nation that transcends territorial boundaries, constitutes a unique alternative to these other local identities.[8] This imagined global identity provides an Islamist group with a mechanism to clear the heavy gravitational field of ethnic or tribal politics that so often characterize civil wars.

Concepts, Cases, and Methods

Because competition between Islamist groups in civil war remains relatively understudied in the academic literature, inductive research is appropriate and necessary. Using an inductive approach, this research presents two initial propositions for future hypothesis generation and testing. Specifically, I argue that a global identity provides Islamist groups with two types of utility in civil war competition: (1) the ability to recruit and expand across ethnic or tribal divisions; and (2) the ability to maintain group cohesion in the face of internal dissent. Accordingly, global Islamists have an advantage in both recruitment and cohesion over Islamists that are defined by ethnic and tribal identities.

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[6] Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of California Press, 1985); Stephen M. Saideman, Beth K. Dougherty, and Erin K. Jenne, "Dilemmas of Divorce: How Secessionist Identities Cut Both Ways," *Security Studies* 14, no. 4 (October–December 2005): 607–36.

[7] Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Saideman, "Dilemmas of Divorce," 607–36; Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[8] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

Importantly, this distinction between local and global Islamist groups is not perfectly neat.[9] Islamists that are fundamentally driven by a transnational agenda must still negotiate with the local politics of the host states they operate in, whereas groups that are predominantly focused on local politics will often signal solidarity with Islamists in other parts of the world.[10] Nor does a global Islamist identity guarantee perfect intragroup harmony; even the most committed transnational jihadists have demographic biases and ideological differences within their ranks.[11] These groups are diverse and non-static.[12] Many will embrace a hybrid of local and global causes.[13]

Even without a perfect distinction between local and global Islamists, however, meaningful conceptual categorization within this spectrum is possible.[14] For this analysis, I define an Islamist group narrowly as a substate armed faction that utilizes Islamic ideas, symbols, and rhetoric, and which states its objective to be the reconstruction of political order based on Islamic laws and institutions.[15] I then distinguish between local and global Islamist

[9] There is an emerging literature on the relationship between domestic insurgent groups and transnational networks. Daniel Byman, "Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations," *Security Studies* 23, no. 3 (July–September 2014): 431–70; Daniel L. Byman, *Breaking the Bonds*. For a survey of conceptual definitions of terrorism, see Martha Crenshaw, "Explaining Suicide Terrorism: A Review Essay," *Security Studies* 16, no. 1 (April–June 2007): 133–62. For a discussion of the debate among Islamist militant groups, see Assaf Moghadem and Brian Fishman, eds., *Fault Lines in the Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[10] There are often serious tensions between the local and global Islamist. For a discussion of their interactions, see David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[11] Even al Qaeda Central had and continues to have a heavy Arab dominance in its leadership. In fact, when a segment of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, joined al Qaeda in 1998, the new group was accused of being dominated by Arabs who were more concerned with Egyptian and Arab politics than their transnational mission. Reuven Paz, "Middle East Islamism in the European Arena," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6, no. 3 (September 2002): 67–76; Guido Steinberg, *German Jihad: On the Internationalization of Islamist Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 15. See also Daniel L. Byman, "Al-Qaeda as an Adversary Do We Understand Our Enemy?" *World Politics* 56, no. 1 (October 2003): 139–63; Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[12] For the evolution of al Qaeda's ideology, particularly the spread of suicide tactics, see Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al-Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). For a history of modern pan-Islamist jihad, see Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[13] As Olivier Roy aptly asks, "How do we begin to isolate and categorise the complex and multilevel practices of more than 1 billion Muslims living in so many different social, cultural and geographical conditions?" Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 6. See also Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 2.

[14] For example, Akbar S. Ahmed uses the concept of Islamic group solidarity, *asabiyya*, to measure these changes across time and space. Ahmed, *Islam Under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post- Honor World*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, UK: Malden, MA: Polity, 2003).

[15] The terms political Islam and Islamist are the subject of much discussion and debate. In the social movement literature, many scholars use these terms broadly to connote a movement that is rooted in

groups by looking at their primary set of identities and political objectives, with the understanding that these are points along a spectrum. I consider a local Islamist group one that identifies itself by narrower ethnic or tribal criteria.[16] The local Islamist primarily relies on preexisting kinship networks for its organization and admits members on the basis of these parochial identities.[17]

In contrast, I consider a global Islamist group one that demonstrates a cosmopolitan identity that supersedes ethnic and tribal divisions, and which has a political agenda that transcends state borders. This contemporary global Islamist is defined by a neo-fundamentalism that gives primacy to a borderless identity and adopts an inclusive membership criteria based on an imagined worldwide *ummah*.[18] I limit my analysis to conflict among rival Sunni Islamists, rather than sectarian conflict between Shi'i and Sunni populations, which would require a different analytical frame.[19] I define insurgent "cohesion" as a unified organizational structure governing a single identified group and "fragmentation" as the formal splitting of a single organizational structure into two or more distinct groups, each with its own identity, agenda, and leadership.[20]

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the idea that Islam serves as a guide for social and political life; this definition can include a wide array of groups ranging from peaceful civil society organizations to extremist terrorist organizations. See Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*. Others use the term Islamist more narrowly to refer to militant organizations that are motivated by religious causes and beliefs; for this see Jacob N. Shapiro and C. Christine Fair, "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan," *International Security* 34, no. 3 (January 2010): 79–118. While these different conceptual definitions are inherently contentious, this literature has helped to identify and classify important types of new social and political movements that have emerged across the world.

[16] For a discussion of how ethnicity and tribe are overstated in analyses of Afghanistan's insurgency, see Seth G. Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (April 2008): 7–40.

[17] Because in many parts of the world, ethnic and tribal identities cross state borders, many of these groups will have local, but regional, characteristics. On the tensions between states and nationalities in Africa, see Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, 1st ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Goran Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood," *World Politics* 35, no. 01 (October 1982): 1–24.

[18] Olivier Roy explains the phenomenon of globalized Islam as a "deterritorialisation" of Islamic culture. I build on Roy's detailed theoretical work to develop this concept. Roy, *Globalized Islam*. For a criticism of this characterization, see Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism*, 1st ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

[19] For an historical account of Sunni-Shiite relations, see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006).

[20] These definitions are consistent with scholars who gauge fragmentation according to the number of organizations competing for dominance in the overall movement representing the group or the degree of splits in the organization. See Victor Asal, Mitchell Brown, and Angela Dalton, "Why Split? Organizational Splits Among Ethno-Political Organizations in the Middle East," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (February 2012): 94–117; Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Divide and Conquer or Divide and Concede: How Do States Respond to Internally Divided Separatists?" *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 2 (May 2011): 275–97; Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, Kristin M. Bakke, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "Shirts

Turning to empirics, I use in-depth investigation based on narrative, qualitative analysis of the rise of Islamist power in Somalia to explore these two processes for hypothesis generation. Somalia is an especially useful case for inductive exploration of this phenomenon. Since the collapse of the government in 1991, Somalia has endured a brutal civil war in which tribal identity constituted the primary fault line of conflict.[21] Although the Somali people share a common language, culture, ethnicity, and religion, their society is deeply divided along tribal lines. Given these social divisions, Somalia has historically been an especially hard case for Islamist success.[22] As one of the most complexly divided societies in the modern world, Somalia is also a tremendously tough case for insurgent group cohesion at any level. Throughout Somalia's civil war, virtually all armed factions have experienced extreme clan-based infighting and fragmentation.[23]

The inductive research on the Somali conflict draws upon fieldwork conducted from 2007 to 2013. This research included key informant interviews with members of the Islamic Courts movement, prominent figures within the Mogadishu business community, clan-based warlords, Somali policy analysts, and local civil society actors.[24] Interviews were semi-structured and repeated over the course of several years. Furthermore, I provide insights based on intensive participatory research with local humanitarians operating

Today, Skins Tomorrow: Dual Contests and the Effects of Fragmentation in Self-Determination Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (February 2012): 67–93; Michael Findley and Peter J. Rudloff, "Combatant Fragmentation and the Dynamics of Civil War," *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (October 2012): 879–901. Others rightly view cohesion or fragmentation as ideal types existing on a spectrum. See Kristin M. Bakke, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars," *Perspectives of Politics* 10, no. 2 (June 2012): 265–83; Paul Staniland, "Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia," *International Security* 37, no.1 (Summer 2012): 142–77; Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[21] For further reading on the collapse of Somalia, see Jamil Abdalla Mubarak, *From Bad Policy to Chaos in Somalia: How an Economy Fell Apart* (Westport: Praeger, 1996); Ken Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping," *International Security* 31, no. 3 (July 2007): 74–106; Benjamin Powell, Ryan Ford, and Alex Nowrasteh, "Somalia After State Collapse: Chaos or Improvement?" *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organization* 67, no. 3 (September 2008): 657–70.

[22] Clint Watts, Jacob Shapiro, and Vahid Brown, *Al-Qa'ida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa* (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007); Ken Menkhaus, "Quasi-States, Nation-Building, and Terrorist Safe Havens," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 7–23; Matt Bryden, "No Quick Fixes: Coming to Terms with Terrorism, Islam, and Statelessness in Somalia," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 24–56.

[23] For a journalist account of the early war period, see Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda* (New York: Routledge, 2001). For an academic analysis of Somalia's fragmentation, see Ken Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping," *International Security* 31, no. 3 (January 2007): 74–10.

[24] The term warlord is contentious, even in the Somali context. See Roland Marchal, "Warlordism and Terrorism: How to Obscure an Already Confusing Crisis? The Case of Somalia," *International Affairs* 83, no. 6 (November 2007): 1091–106. For more on warlord politics, see Kimberley Marten, *Warlords: Strong Arm Brokers in Weak States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012); William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

in Islamist-held territory in Somalia over the course of two years. I also analyze insurgent media in multiple languages. These primary source materials provide an opportunity to review how competing Islamist groups present their identities and goals to different audiences, and construct the narrative around their armed struggle.[25]

Finally, I test the generalizability of the two arguments through an initial investigation of three other critical cases of inter-Islamist conflict: Iraq and Syria, Pakistan, and Mali. These cases are all highly fragmented civil wars, with multiple Islamist factions active in each theater. I rely on secondary sources for my analysis of the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and Mali. For the Pakistan case, I use a combination of field research and library sources; I conducted several months of fieldwork in Peshawar and Islamabad from 2006 to 2009, which involved meetings with high-ranking members of the Pakistani military and intelligence community, who were directly involved in dealing with militant Islamist groups, as well as local policy analysts, academics, and journalists working in the tribal areas where extremist groups operate. Building on the case evidence, I conclude with an agenda for future research and recommendations of the policy community.

Theorizing Inter-Islamist Competition

In civil wars across North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, Sunni Islamist groups have hailed from a wide range of traditions, from Deobandi to Ikhwani to Salafi to Takfiri-Jihadism.[26] These theological and ideological differences are substantive and meaningful, and affect group membership, goals, and behavior.[27] In many cases, these Islamist factions fight each other as fiercely as they do their common enemies. Yet despite a tremendous amount of violence among rival jihadist groups, there has been surprisingly little scholarship on the fault lines of this inter-Islamist conflict.

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[25] Over the past decade, Islamist groups around the world have learned to use online media and video production to broadcast their group's identity and agenda to both local and global audiences. These materials constitute an important source of information about how these groups actively seek to construct the narrative around their armed struggle. I specifically reviewed videos by Al-Kataib Foundation for Media Productions, which produces in-house video messages for Al-Shabaab. Christopher Anzalone, "The Rapid Evolution of Al-Shabab's Media and Insurgent 'Journalism,"' openDemocracy.net, 16 November 2011.

[26] While these are distinct approaches within the global Islamist community, there is also learning and evolution within each of these traditions. For example, Islamist groups that originated out of a Deobandi tradition in Pakistan and Afghanistan have evolved over the past decade to adopt Salafi and Takfiri ideas, fundamentally transforming their ideological orientation. While this variation is important, a complete analysis of the ideological variation within the global jihadi community is beyond the scope of this particular paper. For a discussion, see Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*. See also Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35, no. 3 (December 2010): 53–94.

[27] Hegghammer, "The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups." Shapiro and Fair, "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan."

The reality is that civil wars are chaotic and dynamic environments.[28] Although the traditional civil war literature simplifies these messy environments into a two-actor game, recent research has shown that these conflicts typically involve many substate armed groups.[29] Seden Akcinaroglu shows why and how competing rebels can form powerful, interdependent insurgent alliances.[30] Just as often, however, insurgents engage in "dual contests," fighting one battle against the government and another against rival factions.[31] Most contemporary civil wars are characterized by these complex interactions among multiple armed groups, which both clash and cooperate over the course of the conflict.

Building on these insights, in civil wars in the Muslim world, there are also often multiple Islamist factions active in the war theater, some with local ties and others with a global vision. David Kilcullen's model distinguishes among these groups to explain why tribal guerrillas sometimes choose to cooperate with global jihadists.[32] These Islamist factions do not just cooperate, however; there is also a tremendous rivalry among them for space and legitimacy in a civil war. Monica Duffy Toft suggests that this competition is a form of religious "outbidding," in which political elites compete for

[28] Over the course of a civil war, multiple and competing rebel groups build flexible alliances, alternating between balancing against and bandwagoning with either the government or other rebel groups. For a detailed analysis of civil war balancing, see Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Peter Krause employs a balance of power model focused on internal power distribution to explain the success or failure of competing national movements. Krause, "The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness," *International Security* 38, no. 3 (January 2014): 72–116.

[29] Wendy Pearlman and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham address this trend in the literature, see Pearlman and Cunningham, "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation, and Conflict Processes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (February 2012): 3–15. There is a growing literature on both rebel alliances and rebel versus rebel conflict. Cunningham argues that treating rebel groups as unitary actors has restricted scholarly understanding of civil war dynamics, and her research finds that group fragmentation increases the probability of civil war, see Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Actor Fragmentation and Civil War Bargaining: How Internal Divisions Generate Civil Conflict," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 3 (March 2013): 659–72. See also Hanne Fjelde and Desirée Nilsson, "Rebels against Rebels Explaining Violence between Rebel Groups," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 4 (August 2012): 604–28; Navin A. Bapat, "Alliances between Militant Groups," *British Journal of Political* Science 42, no. 4 (October 2012): 793–824.

[30] Seden Akcinaroglu, "Rebel Interdependencies and Civil War Outcomes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 5 (October 2012). In contrast, Navin A. Bapat argues that building alliances between rebel groups is hampered by credible commitment problems. See Bapat, "Alliances between Militant Groups," *British Journal of Political* Science 42, no. 4 (October 2012): 793–824.

[31] Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, Kristin M. Bakke, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "Shirts Today, Skins Tomorrow Dual Contests and the Effects of Fragmentation in Self-Determination Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (February 2012): 67–93.

[32] Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla*, 17. By coopting local grievances, Kilcullen argues, transnational jihadists are able to create powerful alliances with tribal militias to lead the fight on the frontlines. The cooption of local grievances by groups that have a broader, more global ideology is well documented in the literature on rebellion, particularly in Southeast Asia. See Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948–1960* (London: Muller, 1975); Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

credibility as the legitimate representatives of Islam.[33] Within this competition, I propose that Islamist insurgents with a modern global identity have an advantage in recruitment, expansion, and cohesion over more traditional insurgents that ordinarily rely on nationalist or subnationalist ties.[34]

I put forward two specific ideal-type theoretical propositions. First, I posit that global Islamists are better able to generate domestic political support across ethnic and tribal divisions, whereas Islamists that rely on narrower identities are often constrained and frustrated by local politics.[35] Unlike nationalism or tribalism, global Islamism can "nurture feelings of loyalty and identity towards a large reference group that exceeds ethnic boundaries" and evoke nostalgia over an idealized Islamic history that predates statehood.[36] Despite its homage to the past, however, this imagined global *ummah* is an inherently modern response to the failures of both nationalism and tribalism across the Muslim world.[37] Global Islamism is thus a broadly aimed rejectionist project against both state and substate loyalties.

A global identity therefore allows an Islamist group to differentiate itself from divisive local politics, creating a recruitment advantage over rival factions that are more obviously affiliated with ethnic or tribal identities. While ethnic and tribal factions are better able to recruit deeply within their own communities, this reliance on local identities also reinforces xenophobia and limits enlistment of ideologically dedicated fighters from outside the group. In contrast, because global Islamists have more inclusive entry criteria for membership, they can recruit, support, and extend influence across these social divisions, while also incorporating dedicated foreign fighters into their

[33] Toft, "Getting Religion?" 102–3.

[34] Ahmed argues that traditional ethnic and kinship solidarity, or asabiyya, in the Muslim world has been eroded over time and replaced with a type of "hyper-asabiyya" that has extremist characteristics. See Ahmed, *Islam Under* Siege, 74–90.

[35] Much of the existing literature suggests that individuals adopt identities for rational, strategic purposes. See Stephen M. Saideman, Beth K. Dougherty, and Erin K. Jenne, "Dilemmas of Divorce: How Secessionist Identities Cut Both Ways," *Security Studies* 14, no. 4 (October–December 2005): 607–36; David Laitin, *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). See also Francisco Sanín, "Ideology in Civil War: Instrumental Adoption and Beyond," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (March 2014): 213–26. Stathis Kalyvas challenges the idea that ethnic identity in such conflicts is static and argues that identity shift and ethnic defection occur over the course of a civil war. See Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Kalyvas, "Ethnic Defection in Civil War," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 8 (August 2008): 1043–68. Indeed, many scholars emphasize the fluid and/or socially constructed nature of ethnicity and ethnic identity. See also James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 845–77.

[36] Quote from Jean-Phillipe Platteau "Redistributive Pressures in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Emmanuel Akyeampong et al., *Africa's Development in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 198.

[37] Roy argues that this reimagined contemporary *ummah* is a modern phenomenon and a response to the stress of globalization. For a detailed exposition, see Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). For a discussion of the interactions between local and global Islam, see also David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

TABLE 1 Group Identity, Recruitment, and Durability

Primary Group Identity	Scope of Recruitment	Group Cohesion
Transnational	Broad recruitment across ethnic and tribal divisions	Intra-group conflict results in purges
Ethnic/Tribal	Deep recruitment within ethnic and tribal communities	Intra-group conflict results in splits

ranks. In this way, global Islamists can distinguish themselves from the local politics of exclusion, which hamper other groups that are fighting for space and relevance in a civil war competition.

Second, as seen in Table 1, I propose that global Islamists are less prone to internal fragmentation than ethnic and tribal groups, but more likely to purge detractors from their ranks. Under enough pressure, it is possible that any insurgent group will split. Islamists that are primarily organized along ethnic or tribal identities, however, are more likely to break into multiple groups along their internal subdivisions. Islamists that rely on these local identities for power and legitimacy therefore enjoy pockets of within-group solidarity and commitment but chronically suffer from infighting along these same lines. These local Islamists are inherently exclusive and fragmentary.

In contrast, global Islamism creates a new mechanism for creating insurgent group cohesion across deep ethnic and tribal divisions. Unlike their rivals, the global Islamist constructs legitimacy and authority from the idea of an imagined global community that transcends and negates other sources of identity and power. They reinforce their primary identity as representative of a borderless *ummah* and actively reject other national and subnational loyalties. They take deliberate steps to co-opt and undermine local networks and strengthen control over their forces. With this consolidated power, they are then able to police their ranks for dissenters, detractors, and other internal threats to the group.[38] Global Islamists are therefore less prone to splitting and better able to purge internal opponents in order to retain group cohesion.

This analysis departs from the conventional wisdom in the literature that ethnic solidarity is a relatively robust mechanism for insurgent mobilization and cohesion.[39] The existing scholarship suggests that kin-based

[38] For a discussion of insurgent intelligence and policing, see Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion*, chap. 7

[39] Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Saideman, Dougherty, and Jenne, "Dilemmas of Divorce," 607–36; Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible

solidarity has a powerful ability to facilitate within-group recruitment and commitment. Indeed, ethnic loyalties are often much stronger than civic nationalism in many weak and conflict-affected states.[40] A common ethnic identity can also improve social communication, reduce uncertainty, and facilitate collective action within a group.[41] Donald L. Horowitz posits that ethnic solidarity produces a highly effective framework for social mobilization, arguably greater than either class or ideology.[42] Looking at Afghan insurgents, Abdulkader Sinno demonstrates how clan structure was a powerful source of cohesion for local militias, as tribal networks promoted camaraderie and commitment.[43] Martinez argues that the solidarities of kinship, clan, and local community were critical factors in the Algerian civil war, more than even Islamist ideology.[44] Meanwhile, Theodore McLauchlin finds that armed groups that recruit along ethnic dimensions often have better information about their co-ethnic members and should therefore suffer fewer defections

Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (April 1996): 136–75; Elaine K. Denny and Barbara F. Walter, "Ethnicity and Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (March 2014): 199–212. See also Paul Collier, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2003). See also Henry Hale, *The Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of States and Nations in Eurasia and the World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Ashutosh Varshney, "Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Rationality," *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 1 (2003): 85–99.

[40] There is a vibrant debate in the African politics literature about ethnic loyalties versus civic nationalism. See William F. S. Miles and David A. Rochefort, "Nationalism Versus Ethnic Identity in Sub-Saharan Africa.," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 02 (June 1991): 393–403; Nicholas Sambanis and Moses Shayo, "Social Identification and Ethnic Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (May 2013): 294–325; Stephen N. Ndegwa, "Citizenship and Ethnicity: An Examination of Two Transition Moments in Kenyan Politics," *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 3 (September 1997): 599–616. On Islamic identity versus ethnic or secular nationalism, see also Mariam Raqib and Amilcar Antonio Barreto, "The Taliban, Religious Revival and Innovation in Afghan Nationalism," *National Identities* 16, no. 1 (January 2014): 15–30; Anthony Hyman, "Nationalism in Afghanistan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 2 (May 2002): 299–315.

[41] Roger D. Congelton, "Ethnic Clubs, Ethnic Conflict, and the Rise of Ethnic Nationalism," in *Nationalism and Rationality*, ed. Albert Breton et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 71–97; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); James Habayarimana et al., *Coethnicity: Diversity and the Dilemmas of Collective Action* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009). See also Ted Robert Gurr, "Why Minorities Rebel: A Global Analysis of Communal Mobilization and Conflict since 1945," *International Political Science Review* 14, no. 2 (April 1993): 161–201; Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[42] Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*.

[43] Abdulkader Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). On the Haqqani network, see also Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973–2012* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[44] Luis Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War, 1990–1998*, trans. Jonathan Derrick (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

from their ranks.[45] Even in conflicts that are not primarily motivated by ethnic grievances, kin-based solidarity facilitates within-group recruitment and organization of insurgencies.[46]

Although it is possible for any insurgency to split, based on this existing research, scholars should expect groups with robust ethnic and tribal networks to enjoy a greater level of internal cohesion.[47] Victor Asal, Mitchell Brown, and Angela Dalton state that ethnopolitical groups "enjoy intense member loyalty and group solidarity" and argue that the splintering of these otherwise cohesive groups is due to a factional leadership structure.[48] Paul Staniland finds that insurgent groups with strong pre-existing social networks are often more effective and disciplined, while those built on weak social bonds are more likely to suffer from internal splintering.[49] According to his model, it is not simply ethnic or tribal identities but prewar social endowments that explain why some groups are highly integrated.[50] This existing literature rightly acknowledges the significance of prior networks in explaining insurgent fragmentation.

What is striking about modern global Islamists, however, is that their power and influence stem from an abjuration of pre-existing social networks. While local Islamists understandably rely on ethnicity and tribe for recruitment and organization, the global Islamist actively rejects and undermines these seemingly valuable sources of identity. Rather than seeking legitimacy and solidarity from within traditional networks of power, the global Islamist

[45] Théodore McLauchlin, "Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion," *Comparative Politics* 42, no. 3 (April 1, 2010): 333–50. See also Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: States Security in Divided Societies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Scott Gates, "Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Rebellion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (February 2002): 111–30; Paul Staniland, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (February 2012): 16–40; Chaim Kaufmann, "Intervention in Ethnic and Ideological Civil Wars: Why One Can Be Done and the Other Can't," *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (July–September 1996): 62–100; Jason Lyall, "Are Coethnics More Effective Counterinsurgents? Evidence from the Second Chechen War," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 01 (February 2010): 1–20.

[46] In the literature on African civil wars, which does not treat identity as causal, these social networks still play an important role in the organization and trajectory of conflicts. See Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[47] T. Camber Warren and Kevin K. Troy, "Explaining Violent Intra-Ethnic Conflict Group Fragmentation in the Shadow of State Power," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 3 (April 2015): 484–509.

[48] Victor Asal, Mitchell Brown, and Angela Dalton, "Why Split? Organizational Splits among Ethnopolitical Organizations in the Middle East," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (February 2012): 94–117.

[49] Paul Staniland, "Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia," *International Security* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 142–77.

[50] Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

constructs identity and authority through a fundamentally ahistorical and nostalgic abstract conception of an imagined global *ummah*. These are modern ideas that lack practical roots in local communities and even do violence to traditional systems of order and organization. Yet they capitalize on powerful social frames that have deep emotional and psychological meaning across ethnic and tribal divisions. They construct a prophetic metanarrative, which situates contemporary conflicts in the Muslim world between an idealized mythical past and an inevitable apocalyptic future. Global Islamism therefore creates a new pathway for insurgent recruitment, expansion, and cohesion, born of the collective imagination of its adherents.

Islamist Competition in Civil War Somalia

Although Somalia has been at war for over twenty-five years, Islamist militancy has surged only during the last decade of the conflict.[51] It began in 2004, when a group of local clan-based Islamic courts across Mogadishu decided to work together to increase security in their violence-affected communities.[52] The courts recruited and trained young boys to serve as foot soldiers for their neighborhoods, creating a disciplined military base that was principally loyal to Islam.[53] These young militiamen were incorporated into the courts' militant wing, which included the armed group affectionately named Al-Shabaab, or "the youth."[54] In January 2006, the courts' leadership merged into a unified political movement, called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU).[55] Together, the ICU and Al-Shabaab rapidly took control of the capital city, ousted the heavily entrenched clan warlords, and within six months brought the majority of the countryside under its authority.

[51] Al-Ittihaad al-Islami (AIAI) was an early clan-based Somali Islamist militia that had links to the al Qaeda network in the 1990s. At the peak of its activity, AIAI received funds from Osama bin Laden's emerging al Qaeda network and espoused a Salafi religious ideology. While AIAI operated exclusively in the Somali theater, Hassan Dahir Aweys' group cooperated with the perpetrators of the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In fact, the 1998 embassy attacks first brought bin Laden and his organization into the spotlight and raised concerns about Somalia's connection to transnational terrorist organizations. See Alexander De Waal, *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[52] For hundreds of years, Islamic courts have provided Somali communities with a mechanism to address conflicts within and sometimes between clans. Islamic courts were used in conjunction with traditional clan institutions to resolve disputes. Somali society has its own traditional legal system known as *xeer*, which provides a framework for dispute resolution. For further reading on this history, see Ioan M. Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland: Culture, History and Society* (London: Hurst and Company, 2008).

[53] Interviews with participants in the ICU movement by Aisha Ahmad, April 2007, October 2009, and February 2013.

[54] The most thorough empirical research on Al-Shabaab's organization and history is Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*.

[55] For details of the rise of the ICU movement, see Ahmad, "The Security Bazaar"; Harry Verhoeven, "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Failed States: Somalia, State Collapse and the Global War on Terror," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (October 2009): 405–25; Cedric Barnes, "The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 2007): 151–60.

Alarmed by their dramatic rise to power, the international community backed an Ethiopian invasion to oust the ICU and reinstall a loose alliance of tribal warlords. The result was an intense and unprecedented spike in Islamist insurgency. As the ICU's political leadership crumbled, Al-Shabaab assumed a new identity as the people's resistance to foreign invasion, using religion as a tool for building public order.[56] An influx of foreign fighters reinforced their ranks and gave the group a more global Islamist identity.[57] The intervention inadvertently perpetuated the creation of a radical and dangerous Islamist insurgency in Somalia.

By August 2008, Al-Shabaab and its allies held the majority of south and central Somalia, cornering the intervention into just a few neighborhoods in Mogadishu.[58] Their control over key trade routes and the lucrative port city of Kismayo provided Al-Shabaab with a steady source of income, worth tens of millions of dollars per year.[59] The leadership also developed a secret police, called Al-Amniyat, which brutally enforced loyalty within their ranks.[60] This enhanced intelligence capability helped build a powerful central command structure.[61]

Al-Shabaab's dominance over the insurgency, however, was also met with opposition from other competing Islamist groups. Conflict within the Islamist coalition quickly culminated in the creation of two competing Islamist groups. By January 2009, two dominant Islamist factions held the majority of the Somali countryside: Al-Shabaab, led by a battle-hardened field commander named Ahmed Godane; and Hizbul Islam, led by a longstanding symbolic Islamist leader named Hassan Dahir Aweys.[62] Under Godane's leadership, Al-Shabaab adopted a global identity, welcoming foreign fighters and building ties with al Qaeda. In contrast, Aweys organized Hizbul Islam as a coalition of local Somali tribal factions, putting clan politics before Islamist identity.

[56] In the early stages of the war, the Somali public galvanized their support behind Al-Shabaab as the vanguard of Somali independence. On Al-Shabaab's early popularity, see Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 49–51.

[57] The Ethiopian presence prompted a new wave of foreign fighters, including experienced commanders from Yemen, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. As more international fighters arrived in Somalia, they provided both leadership and technical support. Child soldier recruitment and ideological indoctrination also increased during this time, under the tutelage of foreign commanders. Author interview with the leader of the Mogadishu-based civil society organization in Toronto, Canada in 2008; follow-up field interviews in Nairobi, Kenya in 2012 and in Mogadishu, Somalia in 2013.

[58] Interviews with AMISOM staff and Somali policy analysts by Aisha Ahmad, Nairobi, Kenya, 2009.

[59] Matt Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategic Choice or Necessity?" *Center for Strategic International Studies*, February 2014.

[60] Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 83–84.

[61] For a discussion of how insurgent intelligence organizations function like Marxist-Leninist commissars, see Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion*.

[62] Aweys had been the head of the defunct AIAI in the 1990s.

At the beginning, Hizbul Islam cooperated with Al-Shabaab against intervention forces and the government. However, from 2009–10 Aweys' coalition more frequently battled against Al-Shabaab and fought internally. This inter-Islamist fighting constituted the primary fault line of conflict in Somalia and resulted in a decisive victory for Al-Shabaab over its rivals. A close examination of Al-Shabaab's success provides a unique window into violent competition between Somalia's Islamists, which may help to shed light on other cases of civil war in Africa and beyond.[63]

Hizbul Islam

Despite being a radical Islamist group, Hizbul Islam was clearly organized along clan lines, comprised of four distinct factions: (1) The Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS), predominantly from the Hawiye/Habr-Gidir/Ayr subclan; (2) Muaskar Anole from the Darod/Harti subclan; (3) Jabhatul Islamiya (JABISO) made up of an alliance of the Hawiye/Galje'el and other minor Hawiye subclans; and (4) Ras Kamboni of the Darod/Ogaden subclan. These four Hizbul Islam subgroups recruited within their respective clan bases, while the central leadership was structured as an umbrella organization.[64] As the leader of Hizbul Islam, Aweys exercised control over his fellow Ayr militiamen in the ARS faction and negotiated with the other clan-based commanders from Muaskar Anole, JABISO, and Ras Kamboni to coordinate their joint operations. Each group could enlist foot soldiers from those clans that it represented but could not draw support from clans outside their identities.[65] This made it easier for the Hizbul Islam factions to recruit deeply within their given clan communities but limited the scope of recruitment to these social divisions.

Furthermore, each of the composite subgroups of Hizbul Islam was primarily responsible for defending and controlling its own clan territory. That is, a Hizbul Islam commander only exercised control over the territory dominated by his own clan. Aweys's Ayr-dominated faction therefore had no

[63] For further reading on the emergence of Islamic extremism in Somalia, see Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012* (London: Hurst, 2013). Stig Jarle Hansen, Atle Mesoy, and Tuncay Kardas, *The Borders of Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Roland Marchal, "Islamic Political Dynamics After the Somali Civil War: Before and After September 11," in *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Alex de Waal (Indianapolis: Hurst, 2004); Ken Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia: Tragedy in Five Acts," *African Affairs*, 106, no. 424 (July 2007): 185–356.

[64] Interviews with civil society and humanitarian organizations by Aisha Ahmad, 2009–13. This clan-based organizational structure is also reported in the Claude Heller, "Letter dated 10 March 2010 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, 13–18, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/91.

[65] Interviews with Somali analysts by Aisha Ahmad, Nairobi, Kenya, October 2009; Interviews with Somali civil society actors from different clan backgrounds in Mogadishu, Somalia, February 2013.

TABLE 2 Hizbul Islam Subgroups

Hizbul Islam Subgroup	Leader	Clan Identity	In-Fighting and Fragmentation
ARS-Asmara	Hassan Dahir Aweys	Hawiye/ Habr-Gidir/ Ayr	Mar–May 2009: ARS group splits Ayr bloc; Indha Adde faction defects to government Oct–Nov 2009: ARS refuses to provide support to Ras Kamboni against Al-Shabaab Dec 2010: ARS is absorbed into Al-Shabaab
Ras Kamboni	Hassan Al-Turki	Darod/ Ogaden	Apr 2009: Ras Kamboni clashes with Anole over control over Abdalla Birole village; loses to Anole Aug–Oct 2009: Ras Kamboni split divides Ogaden clan into Ahmed Madobe and Al-Turki groups Oct–Nov 2009: Madobe's Ras Kamboni faction fights Al-Shabaab without support from the other three Hizbul Islam subgroups Feb 2010: Al-Turki faction merges with Al-Shabaab
Muaskar Anole	Mohamed Mire	Darod/ Harti	Apr 2009: Anole clashes with Ras Kamboni over control over Abdalla Birole village; wins village Oct–Nov 2009: Anole refuses to support Ras Kamboni's fight against Al-Shabaab
Jabhatul Islamiya (JABISO)	Mohamed Ibrahim Hayle	Hawiye/ Galjeel and minorities	Oct–Nov 2009: JABISO refuses to support Ras Kamboni against Al-Shabaab

authority over Ogadeni-dominated Ras Kamboni territory, and vice versa. As a result, Hizbul Islam emerged as a coalition of clan-based Islamists, wherein each subgroup retained the power of exit.[66]

As seen in Table 2, because each commander retained this control over a clan-based army, conflicts among Hizbul Islam's four composite groups resulted in poor cooperation and frequent clashes. For example, shortly after the group's inception, Aweys came into conflict with a fellow Hizbul Islam-ARS commander, Yusuf Mohamed Siyaad, better known as Indha Adde, who hailed from the same Ayr subclan as Aweys and controlled a sizable private army.[67] In late March 2009, Indha Adde disagreed with Aweys's choices about leadership and thus split his army from the ARS group and abandoned Hizbul Islam. The move divided the powerful Ayr subclan into two rival

[66] For a discussion on exit power, see David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (October 2006): 875–92; Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (October 1997): 5–53.

[67] Interviews with supporters of the Indha Adde group by Aisha Ahmad, Mogadishu, Somalia, February 2013.

factions.[68] In April 2009, two other groups within the Hizbul Islam family, Ras Kamboni of the Darod-Ogaden clan and Anole of the Darod-Harti clan, reportedly clashed over a village west of Kismayo.[69]

By September 2009, the Ras Kamboni faction also experienced a critical internal split, when commander Ahmed Madobe challenged Al-Shabaab for control of Kismayo. Al-Shabaab had refused to share equal power and revenues from the lucrative port city with its allied Islamist factions, culminating in a violent clash within the regional Islamist coalition. The clash also, however, revealed underlying tensions within the Hizbul Islam group; JABISO and ARS refused to come to the aid of its allies in Ras Kamboni, while Anole declared neutrality.[70] Furthermore, the conflict worsened a rift between Madobe and another Ras Kamboni leader named Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki. As Ras Kamboni struggled with its internal fissures, the more unified Al-Shabaab movement bested them on the battlefield.

By October 2009, Al-Shabaab decisively won and pushed out Madobe's faction, while al-Turki split from Madobe's group and eventually sided with and joined Al-Shabaab.[71] Both the Madobe and al-Turki factions within Ras Kamboni hailed from the same Darod-Ogaden clan. Accordingly, the split between al-Turki and Madobe divided and weakened Ogadeni influence in the Lower Jubba region enough for Al-Shabaab to make key advances. Godane's Al-Shabaab was able to absorb al-Turki's loyalists into the fold, push Madobe's group out of its territory, and continue to gain momentum on the battlefield in the southern provinces.

Al-Shabaab

In stark contrast, Al-Shabaab's more transnational Islamist identity allowed the group to build a broad base of support and retain far greater internal cohesion than its clan-based Islamist rivals. Unlike Aweys's model, Godane's group was not organized along tribal lines and therefore suffered minimal clan-based fragmentation. Al-Shabaab did strategically play clan politics when necessary, but the group's primarily global identity protected it from the devastating internal splits that Hizbul Islam suffered.[72] More than any other group in the history of the Somali civil war, Al-Shabaab limited the influence of clan politics in its organization; in fact, the leadership took concrete steps to strip the group of a clan identity.

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[68] Ibid. See also "Somalia: Discord among Hizbul Islam Faction," *Garowe Online*, 24 March 2009.

[69] "Somalia: Fighting between Islamist Factions Kill Four People," *Shabelle Media Network*, 21 April 2009.

[70] For details of this event, see Heller, "Letter dated 10 March 2010 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009)," 16.

[71] For a detailed account of these events in Kismayo, see Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia,* 107–8.

[72] Stig Jarle Hansen, "An In-Depth Look at Al-Shabaab's Internal Divisions," *CTC Sentinel*, 24 February 2014.

To start, Al-Shabaab publicly espoused a global brand of Islamism, pursued broad-based recruitment, and overtly rejected all nationalist and subnationalist identities. Al-Shabaab's video, audio, and print messages made open references to a wide range of prominent international jihadi figures, including al Qaeda leaders, and called upon Muslims around the world to join them as foreign fighters in Somalia.[73] In 2009, Al-Shabaab released a video entitled "We are at your service, O' Osama," which presented the Somali conflict through a decidedly global lens. Newly recruited foot soldiers received significant ideological training to emphasize Islam over any other identity.[74] Aggressive foreign recruitment also provided Al-Shabaab with ideologically dedicated foot soldiers and aspiring martyrs, whose interests were not tied to local politics.[75] In a striking public display, the group also rejected Somalia's national flag, upon which the five-pointed star represents the country's long-standing ethnic irredentist claim of Greater Somalia. Instead, they adopted a signature black flag as its rallying symbol, which is used by jihadist groups around the world to indicate their global identity.

Nevertheless, Al-Shabaab needed to demonstrate that unlike many other aspiring Islamist groups, including Hizbul Islam, its loyalty to Islam over ethnicity and clan was not just rhetorical and symbolic. Most significantly, to substantively prove its commitment to a universal Islamist identity, Al-Shabaab commanders were assigned to govern territories outside of their own clan communities, and foot soldiers were organized into multi-clan units. Unlike Hizbul Islam's policy of giving each composite clan group control over its respective territory, the majority of Al-Shabaab leaders were actively shuffled around so that these commanders did not retain a clan base. That is, Al-Shabaab deliberately and systematically undermined the pre-existing social networks of clan that every other insurgent commander in Somalia relied upon.

For example, in 2009 Al-Shabaab appointed Hassan Yaqub Ali of the Rahanweyn clan to the Kismayo region, which has a large Darod population.[76] Governorship of the south-central Hiran province was given to Mohamed

[73] As early as 2007, Al-Shabaab produced and released media statements and videos in Arabic that depicted martyrdom operations, called for foreign fighters, and praised Osama bin Laden. For a discussion of Al-Shabaab's evolving media strategies in recent years, see Christopher Anzalone, "Al-Shabaab's Tactical and Media Strategies in the Wake of its Battlefield Setbacks," *CTC Sentinel*, 27 March 2013, 12–14.

[74] Interviews with security analysts and medical personnel treating and rehabilitating former soldiers by Aisha Ahmad, Nairobi, Kenya 2009; Mogadishu, Somalia 2013.

[75] Many foreign recruits were disaffected young men from the Somali diaspora. Support also came from non-Somali supporters who were drawn to Al-Shabaab's Islamist identity. While foreign recruitment increased during the peak of Al-Shabaab's power, there is no consensus on the number of foreign fighters in Somalia, and these estimates are relatively low, around three hundred. For further reading, see David Shinn, "Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (January 2011): 203–15.

[76] See Heller, "Letter dated 10 March 2010 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009)," 14–15; "Somalia: Al-Shabaab–It Will Be a Long War," Africa Briefing No. 99, International Crisis Group, 26 June 2014.

Mire, who hails from the Darod-Majerteen clan that is largely concentrated in the northeast.[77] Mahad Omar Abdikarim, allegedly from a northern Isaaq subclan, was appointed governor of Bay-Bakool, a southwest region largely populated by the Digil-Mirifle.[78] Godane himself hailed from the northern Isaaq clan but commanded operations across southern Somalia. In this way, the leadership systematically shuffled its governors and commanders, placing individuals in districts in which they had no clear clan base. The results on the battlefield were striking. Not only did Al-Shabaab hold these diverse clan territories, but the group also gained more recruits and suffered less fragmentation than its rivals that had much stronger local ties.

Nonetheless, Al-Shabaab also experienced internal dissent within its ranks, as well as controversy among the wider community of Somali Islamists. Godane gained infamy for implementing a number of radical edicts, which alienated local populations.[79] As the group became increasingly oppressive and violent, it also grew unpopular among local communities. Godane's acceptance of foreign fighters, his enthusiasm for a transnational agenda, and his willingness to associate with terrorist networks caused significant concern. Because other Al-Shabaab commanders did not retain private clan-based armies, however, none were able to exert any hard influence over the trajectory of the organization. Behind the scenes, Al-Amniyat kept the ranks loyal.

From 2009–10, Al-Shabaab's most direct confrontation with other Islamists was therefore against Hizbul Islam. While Al-Shabaab maintained a relatively cohesive group identity, the four composite groups of Hizbul Islam clashed with each other almost as often as they fought against foreign forces and Al-Shabaab. This chronic infighting had a heavy toll on Hizbul Islam's competitiveness.[80] Meanwhile, Godane's faction surged.

After the October 2009 victory over Hizbul Islam at Kismayo, Al-Shabaab enjoyed sustained success over their fledging Islamist rivals. By December 2010, Al-Shabaab defeated Hizbul Islam on the battlefield and Godane announced a "merger." Aweys's group was forced to unconditionally surrender and its soldiers were absorbed into Al-Shabaab's larger and more powerful ranks. Aweys was given a symbolic role in the new leadership, in an effort to appease his powerful Ayr subclan. Yet Hizbul Islam "failed to achieve any

[77] "Somalia: Al-Shabaab–It Will Be a Long War," 11.

[78] Ibid. Note that Mahad Omar Abdikarim's clan identity was not clearly known. This hiding of clan identity is a striking fact, given Somalia's deeply tribal society. Nonetheless, Abdikarim was widely considered an outsider to the Bay-Bakool area. Digil-Mirifle, Darod, and Hawiye populations have claims over this territory, which is located far away from any large Isaaq communities.

[79] At one point, the leadership banned women from wearing brassieres and subjected women to humiliating physical searches, declaring that brassieres were un-Islamic and "misleading" to men. Interviews with civilians living in Al-Shabaab territory by Aisha Ahmad, 2009, 2012, and 2013.

[80] Austin Long makes an important distinction between in-fighting and fragmentation. In the example here, both concepts apply. Long, "Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace? Institutionalization and Leadership Targeting in Iraq and Afghanistan," *Security Studies* 23, no. 3 (July–September 2014): 481.

positions in the executive shura, and had to accept Harakat Al-Shabaab as its name," explains Hansen, who describes the Hizbul Islam merger as being "swallowed whole by Al-Shabaab."[81]

The conflict dynamics within and between Hizbul Islam and Al-Shabaab from 2009 to 2010 reveal an important distinction in how these two groups were organized. First, because Hizbul Islam was structured along clan lines, each of the four groups recruited support from within their own respective clan networks and exercised authority over their own clan's territory. Consequently, these Islamists groups proved highly vulnerable to fragmentation, as each commander within Hizbul Islam retained a powerful exit option. On the other hand, Al-Shabaab systematically undermined clan-based organization. The leadership shuffled commanders out of their own communities, so they could not retain ties to local militias. Foot soldiers were also organized into multi-clan units, and new recruits were subject to ideological indoctrination that emphasized a global Islamist identity over clan, or any other form of nationalism, making Al-Shabaab much more cohesive and competitive than its rivals.

Micro-level Case Study: Afgooye Corridor 2009–12

I offer a micro-level case study to better highlight these dynamics. I present evidence from interviews and field observations at the Dr. Hawa Abdi hospital in Lafoole, located outside of Mogadishu in the strategic Afgooye corridor.[82] Hizbul Islam controlled the Afgooye corridor from 2009 to 2010, and Al-Shabaab then held this territory from 2011 to 2012. Throughout this time period, Dr. Hawa's humanitarian operation provided free emergency services to tens of thousands of internally displaced persons in the region.[83] As a result, the hospital staff had regular, daily interactions with both of Hizbul Islam and Al-Shabaab militants that intensively patrolled the area. The details presented here are based on two years of almost daily communication with the hospital team. This micro-level case study provides a unique window into the ground-level organizational dynamics of both of these Islamist groups.[84]

From 2009–10, the Afgooye corridor fell under Hizbul Islam control, and militias from Aweys's faction regularly trespassed on hospital property.

[81] Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia,* 108–9.

[82] The Afgooye corridor is a key trade route connecting Mogadishu to other important cities and inland markets, making it a strategic stronghold for armed groups. Control over the corridor provides an important source of revenue generation through taxation of local business and smuggling activities.

[83] Dr. Hawa Abdi is an internationally distinguished humanitarian whose hospital has provided free medical care to internally displaced persons from all clan backgrounds in Somalia for over two decades, regardless of which rebel groups control the surrounding areas. Dr. Hawa's humanitarian operation includes a hospital, elementary school, women's education center, and free drinking water and provided free services for ninety thousand IDPs during the height of the civil war.

[84] Interviews with hospital staff in Lafoole, Somalia, by author, December 2011 and January 2012.

During Hizbul Islam's rein over the Lafoole region, the militiamen who patrolled the hospital and surrounding areas clearly hailed from the Ayr subclan. Hizbul Islam overtly espoused an Islamist ideology, but its individual militia units were decidedly homogeneous and their leadership structure was clan-based.

Throughout this period, the hospital was subjected to violent incursions by Hizbul Islam militias, which eventually culminated in a direct attack. Declaring it un-Islamic for a woman to be in a position of authority, in May 2010 several hundred Hizbul Islam fighters stormed the hospital and took Dr. Hawa hostage. Despite heavy damage to the hospital, the staff quickly determined the specific subclan identities of these fighters and identified their commanders. The staff reached out to elders from the Ayr clan to directly connect with top-level commanders from Aweys's group. Through these existing clan-based social networks, they made contact with the leaders of the offending militia. The social pressure from these traditional clan networks proved effective in securing Dr. Hawa's release and pushing Hizbul Islam forces off hospital property. These Hizbul Islam commanders relied on clan identities for their survival; as a result, they were also beholden to the intervention of clan leaders.

By late 2010, however, Al-Shabaab had defeated Hizbul Islam and absorbed these foot soldiers into their ranks, and expanded their influence across southern Somalia. Hizbul Islam was routed from its clan-based strongholds, and Al-Shabaab fundamentally began restructuring command over operations in the region. As a result, the entire Afgooye corridor, including Dr. Hawa's hospital, now fell into Al-Shabaab's sphere of influence. Upon taking control of large swaths of the Lower Shabelle region in 2011, Al-Shabaab militias began patrolling the hospital grounds and harassing staff. By January 2012, the foot soldiers started rounding up the medical staff for weekly "Islamic education" sessions held in the hospital's main conference room, which were perceived by the doctors and nurses as acts of intimidation and aggression.

Faced with this coercion, the hospital staff attempted to find possible channels to lobby for the safety of workers and patients. This time, however, the team was unable to identify the clans of the militia and commanders. Multiple staff meetings were held to try to ascertain any pre-existing social networks that could be used as a mechanism for communicating with Al-Shabaab to ensure the protection of humanitarian workers. None could be found. The composition of militia units was highly mixed, with no clear clan basis. The soldiers were young boys from a wide range of clan backgrounds, all serving in the same unit. During their daily patrols, these Al-Shabaab militiamen did not espouse any individual clan affiliation and declared their loyalty only to Islam. In fact, when the hospital staff tried to use clan elders to try to mediate Al-Shabaab's activities, the young foot soldiers forcefully

rejected these interventions. They charged that traditional religious figures were "corrupted old men."[85]

Clan elders have historically held a tremendously important role in Somali society. This rejection of clan identity and clan elders signified an unprecedented denunciation of pre-existing forms of social organization that have ordered Somali life for centuries. By adopting a fundamentally global identity, Al-Shabaab had dramatically stripped its foot soldiers of reliance on prior social networks, making it a powerful local presence that was not beholden to parallel sources of order and influence. This abjuration of clan politics not only allowed Al-Shabaab to recruit broadly across deep social divisions, but it also made the group impervious to interventions by traditional leaders.

Looking Ahead and Beyond

In February 2012, a group of Al-Shabaab militiamen arrived at Dr. Hawa's doorstep. They went directly into the elementary school adjacent to the hospital and forcibly loaded all of the male schoolchildren onto four buses.[86] The boys, aged five to fourteen, were taken to the nearby city of Baidoa for the day to participate in the celebrations of the official merger of Al-Shabaab and al Qaeda. Still in school uniforms, these schoolboys can be seen sitting despondently in a row at the 15:50 minute mark of Al-Shabaab's official al Qaeda merger film entitled, "The Year of Unity 1433."[87]

The al Qaeda merger constituted a red line for the international community, and the African Union (AU) prepared to push Al-Shabaab out of Lower Shabelle. Backed by American cash and military hardware, AU forces staged a forceful military offensive against key Al-Shabaab strongholds over the summer. By August 2012, the Islamists had been routed from the strategically significant Afgooye corridor, a key trade route to inland markets. By October, Kismayo, along with its extraordinary revenues, was also lost. Al-Shabaab's withdrawal from Afgooye and Kismayo fundamentally weakened the group's capabilities, as the leadership declared a tactical retreat and called for guerrilla war.[88] Global

[85] There is an ongoing conflict between the traditional *ulema* from elite institutions like Al-Azhar University and the multitude of jihadist commanders in the field, over who has the authority and legitimacy to interpret and make law. This conflict has also led to a revival in the practice of violent excommunication, or *takfir*, among many ultra-extremist groups. For a discussion of the historical evolution of takfiri thought in the global jihadi tradition, beginning with the Kharijite movement, see Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[86] Interviews with hospital staff by Aisha Ahmad, February 2012.

[87] Although the children were returned, fears of child soldier abductions skyrocketed. The staff closed the school and organized the evacuation of tens of thousands of IDPs from Afgooye to Mogadishu. This account is based on field reports and author interviews, February 2012.

[88] For details on the revenues from Kismayo, see Kim Sook, "Letter dated 12 July 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning

Islamism may have helped Al-Shabaab outcompete Hizbul Islam, but it also precipitated a serious international confrontation that weakened the Islamists.

Under this financial and military strain, Al-Shabaab became somewhat more involved in clan politics.[89] Interestingly, the wholesale absorption of Hizbul Islam in 2010 may have actually increased tribalism within Al-Shabaab's organization, as the powerful Ayr subclan retained its latent organizational independence.[90] Despite widespread expectations that the group would disintegrate, however, only the Ayr-dominated Hizbul Islam faction allegedly declared a split from the group in 2012.[91] Because all other key field commanders had been stripped of control over their clan-based militias, no other leaders has had the military clout to split from Al-Shabaab with a large standing army. The increasingly important role of foreign fighters, especially from neighboring states, also kept the group from splitting despite the intense international pressure.[92] Even though the group suffered increased desertions, the threat from the powerful intelligence wing Al-Amniyat kept Al-Shabaab surprisingly cohesive.[93]

With this coercive capacity, Godane moved against his critics and initiated a purge of the ranks.[94] In 2013, Al-Shabaab executed nearly two hundred dissenters, including Godane's long-standing associate and advisor Ibrahim al-Afghani and charismatic preacher and commander Moalim Burhan. Both Al-Afghani and Burhan had been founding members of Al-Shabaab who had grown critical of Godane's leadership style.[95] Godane also moved against long-standing commander and Al-Shabaab spokesman Mukhtar Robow, who went into hiding in his native Rahanweyn clan territory. As the symbolic leader of Hizbul Islam, Aweys was also specifically targeted; in response, Aweys surrendered himself to the government and was placed under house arrest for over a year.[96] Godane even targeted foreign fighters who questioned his leadership, including popular American jihadist

Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, 439–84, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/413.

[89] Al-Shabaab continued to shuffle its governors and commanders, in an effort to undermine these local power bases, but increasingly found itself embroiled in clan politics. For example, in 2012 Hassan Yaqub Ali was shuffled from Kismayo to the Galguduud region, in an effort to appease local clans.

[90] Interviews with civilians in predominantly Ayr communities by Aisha Ahmad, 2013.

[91] The declaration to split was allegedly made by Hizbul Islam spokesperson Mohamed Moalim to BBC Somalia. However, Al-Shabaab immediately denied the split. See "Kenyan Amisom Soldier Kills Six Somali Civilians," *BBC News*, 24 September 2012, accessed 23 March 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-19698348.

[92] David Shinn, "Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2011).

[93] For further discussion on this topic, see Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab"; Ken Menkhaus, "Al-Shabaab's Capabilities Post-Westgate," *CTC Sentinel*, 24 February 2014.

[94] For a detailed analysis of Godane's purge, see Christopher Anzalone, "The Rise and Decline of Al-Shabab in Somalia" in *Turkish Review* 4, no. 4 (July 2014): 386–95.

[95] For further reading, see Menkhaus, "Al-Shabaab's Capabilities."

[96] Bryden, "Reinvention of Al-Shabaab."

Omar Hammami.[97] Yet despite Godane's extremist policies and aggression against other leading commanders, the group did not splinter into multiple factions. Rather, Al-Shabaab investigated, targeted, and then eliminated its challengers from within, keeping the central command intact.

The purge left Godane as the sole commander of a smaller but more dangerous Islamist insurgency. The United States responded by directly targeting the Al-Shabaab leadership. In September 2014, Godane was killed by an American air and drone strike, leading to even further speculation that the group was certainly destined to break apart.[98] Immediately after the strike, however, Al-Shabaab's media wing announced Ahmed Umar, also known as Abu Ubaida, as its new leader and recommitted its affiliation with al Qaeda. Despite a number of high-level defections in early 2015, including leading figures from Al-Amniyat, the Al-Shabaab leadership still did not fracture along these internal divisions. Early reports suggest that Al-Shabaab is also successfully blocking aggressive attempts at infiltration and cooption by IS operatives, as Al-Amniyat vigorously defends its al Qaeda brand in Somalia. Analysts have been harbingering Al-Shabaab's split for years, but the facts on the ground defy these claims.[99] At the time of writing, Al-Shabaab remains intact.

Given the sheer intensity of clan divisions in Somalia, the fact that Al-Shabaab's central command structure has not as yet broken into competing groups, despite serious internal and external challenges, is significant. Somalia is arguably one of the most divided societies in the world, with an established record of extreme levels of insurgent group fragmentation. And yet, Al-Shabaab has proven surprisingly resilient in the face of violent purges and leadership change.[100] Even if Al-Shabaab suffers a future split, the group has demonstrated a remarkable degree of cohesion for well over seven years. The case therefore provides important insights on the dynamics of inter-Islamist competition, which may help to generate hypotheses for future

[97] Hammami was active on social media. Before his death, he publicly commented on his falling out with Ahmed Abdi Godane and Al-Shabaab, including addressing the threats to his life.

[98] Christopher Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane," *CTC Sentinel*, 29 September 2014.

[99] For commentary on the fallacy of these types of claims about Al-Shabaab, by a number of leading analysts, see Jeffrey Gettleman, "Shabab Militants Learning to Kill on a Shoestring," *New York Times*, 6 April 2015.

[100] Tracking the impact of Godane's death on Al-Shabaab's organizational strength will be of critical importance to scholars investigating the impact of leadership decapitation strategies on insurgent group cohesion. Austin Long finds that leadership decapitation is effective against poorly institutionalized groups but has little effect on well-institutionalized insurgencies. If true, then Godane's death may not have a profound impact on Al-Shabaab's durability and cohesion. Long, "Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?" 471–512. There is a significant debate on the efficacy of leadership decapitation on insurgent group strength. See Bryan C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (April 2012): 9–46; Patrick B. Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (April 2012): 47–79.

testing. In the following subsections, I extend this analysis to Iraq and Syria, Pakistan, and Mali, in order to examine the effects of local versus global Islamist identities on insurgent recruitment and cohesion in these civil war theaters.

Iraq and Syria

Arguably, the most serious case of inter-Islamist violence in the world today is underway in Iraq and Syria. Not only has this conflict destabilized the Middle East region, but it has also sparked a new wave of inter-Islamist competition across the Muslim world, reaching as far as North Africa and South Asia. Understanding the fault lines of Islamist conflict in Iraq and Syria therefore has significant global implications.

In Iraq, the ultra-extremist Islamic State (IS) has declared its creation of a so-called caliphate spanning Iraq and Syria, appointing ex-al Qaeda leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi as caliph of the Muslim world. By making this contentious declaration, IS thus claimed the highest possible legitimacy and authority in global jihad. IS has monopolized the insurgency in the north and west of Iraq, while government forces dominate the south, and Kurdish rebels control the far north. Across the border, IS holds large swaths of territory in northern and eastern Syria, and has recently made inroads into Damascus. On the western Syrian battlefield, there are an array of competing militant factions, including the nationalist Free Syrian Army (FSA), the al Qaeda affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra (JN),[101] and a large number of smaller factions that have coalesced into an umbrella network called the Islamic Front (IF).

Inspired by the success of IS, some Islamist groups in Libya, Egypt, Pakistan, and Nigeria have pledged allegiance to the new caliphate and declared themselves "provinces" of the state. IS has also, however, sparked condemnation from rival Islamists in the immediate war theater and around the world, including from JN, al Qaeda Central, and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which rejected Al-Baghdadi and declared the caliphate void. Since January 2014, the conflict between JN and IS in eastern and northern Syria has become a critical battleground in the ongoing civil war.[102]

Notably, both JN and IS espouse a violent and global Islamist ideology and have recruited thousands of foreign fighters to fill their ranks. These groups are also, however, deeply embedded in the local tribal politics of

[101] JN is part of a new Islamist rebel umbrella group, *Jaysh al-Fath*.

[102] Cooperation with al Qaeda affiliated groups is equally problematic. The leader of the comparatively moderate Syrian Revolutionary Front, Jamal Maarouf, stated that the fight against al Qaeda is "not our problem" and affirmed that his group cooperates with Jabhat al-Nusra. See Isabel Hunter, "I am Not Fighting Against Al-Qaeda ... It's Not Our Problem, Says West's Last Hope In Syria," *Independent*, 2 April 2014. In June 2014 IS took over the city of Abu Kamal, previously held by Jabhat al-Nusra, to gain control of its tremendous oil reserves, only to be pushed back by local tribal militias.

their conquered territories. While there is certainly a dearth of information on the internal organizational dynamics of both JN and IS, Reinoud Leenders and Steven Heydemann have found that Syrian rebels have largely drawn upon these existing tribal structures to organize and recruit support.[103] The Sunni tribes on both sides of Iraqi-Syrian border have reportedly mobilized support behind different Islamist groups at various stages of the conflict, switching sides when the tide of battle has shifted in any group's favor.[104] In Iraq, other Sunni tribes have sided with the central government.[105]

As IS has expanded its reach into northern Iraq and pushed JN out of eastern Syria, it both absorbed and repressed the many Sunni tribal communities that held power in these territories. When local communities have resisted, IS has engaged in extreme violence and collective punishment, such as the grisly murders of hundreds of civilians from the Shueitat tribe in Syria and from the Albu Nimr tribe in Anbar province of Iraq. In other cases, IS has allegedly used economic incentives to secure the loyalty of Sunni tribes, particularly those that feel threatened by Shi'i dominance in the Iraqi government. The relationship between IS and these many tribal communities is rooted in both violent coercion and co-option of local grievance.

Over the past year, IS has absorbed a plethora of tribal communities from both Iraq and Syria into its fold, accepting pledges of loyalty from local leaders to the caliphate. This wholesale absorption of local communities might indicate a more heavily tribal organization within IS, especially in the periphery. Importantly, the large Sunni Arab tribes in this region are composed of many smaller subclans, which like the Somalia case break down into even smaller factions that can be pitted against each other. Nevertheless, the IS leadership has also taken concrete steps to undermine the power of these pre-existing social networks. Most significantly, IS has developed an intelligence wing, similar to Al-Shabaab's Amniyat, which investigates potential opponents among the Sunni tribes that might pose a threat to the caliphate. This intelligence wing identifies tribal leaders that have previously cooperated with the government or opposed the caliphate, and then executes or assassinates them.[106] These tactics may not have yet succeeded in

[103] Reinoud Leenders and Steven Heydemann, "Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers," *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 139–59.

[104] For further reading, see Nicholas Hears and Carole O'Leary, "The Tribal Factor in Syria's Rebellion: A Survey of Armed Tribal Groups in Syria," *Jamestown Foundation*, 27 June 2013.

[105] For a journalistic report on this, see Nour Malas and Ghassan Adnan, "Sunni Tribes in Iraq Divided Over Battle Against Islamic State," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 May 2015, http://www.wsj.com/articles/sunni-tribes-in-iraq-divided-over-battle-against-islamic-state-1432251747.

[106] John Batchelor, "ISIL Is More than Just a Police State," *Al Jazeera America*, 27 April 2015, http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/4/isil-is-more-than-just-a-police-state.html. See also journalistic work by Christoph Reuter, "Secret Papers Reveal Islamic State's Structure," *NPR.org*, 23 April 2015, http://www.npr.org/2015/04/23/401655832/secret-papers-reveal-islamic-states-structure.

fully disempowering the Sunni tribes in the region, but it is clear that the leadership has adopted a strategy of dividing the tribes and purging their ranks of dissenters. If IS succeeds in undermining the latent power and independence of the Sunni tribes, the group should prove resilient to internal fragmentation, even under pressure.

Pakistan

Pakistan is an important, albeit unique, case to examine these processes. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is the dominant Islamist umbrella organization in Pakistan's restive Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), fighting on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. As early as the 1990s, al Qaeda forged a relationship with the Afghan Taliban and established strong ties to local commanders, in order to use this region as a base of operations.[107] The TTP was born amid this complex thirty-year war, and many of its leading commanders therefore have deep roots with al Qaeda.[108]

Despite these global links, however, TTP is fundamentally organized along tribal lines, in much the same way that Hizbul Islam was arranged in Somalia. From its inception in the mid-2000s, TTP has brought together tribal commanders and armies from each district in the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.[109] The head of the organization traditionally hailed from the dominant Mehsud tribe, but all major tribal commanders have been part of the leadership council that directs the overall insurgency. Each major TTP commander exercises control over only his tribal base, but not other tribal communities; for example, a Wazir deputy commander simply could not be assigned to govern a predominantly Mehsud community or vice versa.[110] Deputy and other lower-ranked commanders in each of these districts are local strongmen with the ability to raise a tribal army, or *lashkar*, from their own clan.[111] This private military strength affords legitimacy, influence, and exit power to each commander within the council. Functionally, the group is therefore best understood as an umbrella alliance of Islamist tribal armies. Despite the fact that TTP was born in the epicentre of al Qaeda activity and operations, its fundamentally local tribal identity has had a powerful impact on recruitment, expansion, and cohesion over the course of the civil war.

[107] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

[108] For further reading on this, see Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

[109] Interviews with high-ranking military and intelligence officials by Aisha Ahmad, Islamabad, Pakistan, 2009.

[110] Interviews with journalists based in North Waziristan by Aisha Ahmad, Peshawar, Pakistan, 2009.

[111] Interviews and field observations by Aisha Ahmad, Peshawar, Pakistan 2006, 2009.

My analysis would predict that, much like Hizbul Islam in Somalia, because these Islamists are primarily organized along local tribal lines, the TTP would be more naturally prone to internal splits in the long term. The evidence supports this hypothesis. In late 2013, after the death of leader Hakimullah Mehsud via drone strike, a secession dispute within the TTP gave control of the insurgency to a commander from the Swat valley named Mullah Fazlullah.[112] Fazlullah was the first non-Mehsud commander to take the reins of the TTP organization and was not even from the FATA. Nonetheless, the powerful commander from Swat pushed out the leading contender from the Mehsud tribe, Khalid Said Sajna, and claimed authority over the insurgency. Fighting soon broke out within the Mehsud tribe between TTP loyalists who accepted Fazlullah and Mehsud tribesmen who preferred Sajna. By May 2014, the powerful Mehsud tribe had split from the TTP and appointed Sajna as its commander. The Sajna faction assumed control over the whole of South Waziristan, while Fazlullah's weakened TTP positioned itself along both sides of the porous Afghan border.

Over the next year, subsequent splits within the TTP leadership led to the emergence of multiple insurgent groups, each claiming to be the real Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan. In September 2014, TTP militants from the Mohmand district of FATA also temporarily broke away from Fazlullah's group and formed their own group called TTP-Jamaat ul-Ahrar.[113] Under the leadership of Omar Khalid Khorasani, the Mohmand tribal group signaled its support for the Islamic State and at one point even offered to help broker a truce between IS and JN in Syria.[114] In January 2015, former TTP commander Hafiz Said Khan from the Orakzai district pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, creating a new faction that identifies as the Khorasan Province of IS.[115] A plethora of smaller tribal insurgent groups also retain independent military power in the volatile FATA, each with spoiler capability.

Because the TTP is organized along tribal lines, these composite subgroups have engaged in extensive infighting. This fragmentation adds an element of uncertainty to the war theater, with new alliances and breakaway groups frequently forming along tribal lines. Given the volatility of these

[112] Hakimullah Mehsud's obvious successor, Wali-ur-Rahman Mehsud, was also killed in a subsequent drone strike in May 2013, which precipitated the leadership dispute within the organization.

[113] In March 2015, TTP-Jamaat ul-Ahrar recommitted to the TTP umbrella organization, but the group retains all of its organizational independence and strength. This reunion is more of an alliance than merger.

[114] With progress being made in negotiations, the Khorasani group signalled its desire to rejoin the TTP network. However, it is critical to note that all of these groups retain independent military capability. That is, whether they officially rejoin the network or not, they remain capable of exit.

[115] See Animesh Roul, "'Wilayat Khurasan': Islamic State Consolidates Position in AfPak Region," Jamestown Foundation, *Terrorism Monitor*, 13, no. 7, 3 April 2015.

armed groups, and their emergent relationships with the IS leadership, further research on the relationship between tribal and global identities and insurgent group organization is essential to developing more effective strategies for dealing with these complex and networked Islamists insurgencies in Pakistan and its regional neighborhood.[116]

Mali

The Malian case provides a particularly valuable opportunity to explore the intersection of tribal and Islamist interests in a civil war competition. The 2012 Islamist insurgency in Mali was a product of long-standing ethnic grievances among the Tuareg populations in the north, triggered by an acute period of domestic unrest following a coup d'état in the capital city of Bamako. Presented with the opportunity to gain power in the north, in April 2012 a group of loosely allied Tuareg ethnic rebels and Islamists joined forces to take over the northern region. The rebellion was comprised of three main insurgent groups: the secular National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), the Islamist group called Ansar Dine that allegedly had links to al Qaeda, and the al Qaeda affiliated militant faction called the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA).

Despite hailing from the same Tuareg ethnic group, this rebellion was deeply fragmented along tribal lines. Ansar Dine received its support from the Ifoghas tribe, whereas the Taghat Melet and Idnane tribes backed the MNLA.[117] Notably, MUJWA did not appear to have had any distinct clan base, and the group appears to have been more tribally diverse than other Islamist factions. The MNLA, Ansar Dine, and MUJWA all cooperated and competed with each other during the early stages of the conflict; however, MUJWA's relationship with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) created significant strain within the rebel alliance.[118] In fact, it was MUJWA's relationship with AQIM that helped legitimate the 2013 French-led international intervention against the Tuareg rebellion, causing the MNLA and Ansar Dine to lose their strongholds.

The intervention therefore created two fault lines of conflict: one against the international forces and another within the rebel alliance. In January 2013, Ansar Dine split into two groups, as a breakaway faction calling itself the

[116] For a discussion on these insurgencies, see Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion*; Shapiro and Fair, "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan"; Rasul Bakhsh Rais, *Recovering the Frontier State: War, Ethnicity, and the State in Afghanistan* (Karachi, Pakistan; New York: Lexington Books, 2009).

[117] See Angelia Sanders and Maya Moseley, "A Political, Security and Humanitarian Crisis: Northern Mali," *Civil-Military Fusion Centre*, July 2012; Sinno, *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond*.

[118] The MNLA and Ansar Dine have both tried to distance themselves from MUJWA's agenda, though Ansar Dine continued to cooperate with MUJWA on the battlefield.

Islamic Movement for Azawad (MIA) established itself in the Kidal region.[119] Although MIA and Ansar Dine both hail from the Ifoghas tribe, MIA openly rejected both AQIM and MUJWA and also declared that it would fight its former comrades and kin from Ansar Dine.[120] The MNLA also fought against Ansar Dine and MUJWA, switching sides to support the government against the Islamists in the north. Over the course of the next two years, the rebellion continued to fracture into multiple independent factions along both ethnic and tribal lines, with new groups emerging, such as the High Council for the Unity of Azawad and the Arab Movement of the Azawad.[121]

Meanwhile, MUJWA progressively developed its global Islamist identity. To start, the group merged with an al Qaeda-affiliated group led by a blacklisted terrorist named Mokhtar Belmokhtar. In August 2013, MUJWA announced "their union and fusion in one movement called Al-Murabitoun to unify the ranks of Muslims around the same goal, from the Nile to the Atlantic."[122] Despite being an al Qaeda franchise, however, Belmokhtar's group had deep ties to local tribes in Mali. Using a series of intermarriages and business links with clandestine criminal organizations, Belmokhtar built his strength through networked relationships with these local communities.

Nonetheless, the merger allowed Al-Murabitoun to progressively develop their influence in the Sahel region. Yet they took their global agenda even further. In May 2015, Al-Mourabitoun spokesman Adnand Abu Waleed announced a pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, thereby declaring the group's loyalty to the IS caliphate. In response, Belmokhar rejected the declaration as illegitimate and restated his fidelity to the al Qaeda leadership.

These events may signal a serious new rift between these competing Islamists across North Africa, not unlike the surging conflict between JN and IS in Syria. Al-Murabitoun has thus far been able to survive the intervention, expand its regional influence across North Africa, and pursue a global Islamist agenda. Given the surge in transnational terrorist networks in Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Mali, further investigation on how local tribal politics has affected recruitment and cohesion of these competing Islamists in the Maghreb and Sahel regions is warranted.

[119] "Mali's Ansar Dine Islamists 'split and want talks,"' *BBC News*, 24 January 2013; Lydia Polgreen, "Faction Splits From Ansar Dine in Northern Mali," *New York Times*, 24 January 2013.

[120] The MIA leader has been very vocal with the media, offering interviews about his group's political positions and alliances. For example, see "Mali: des membres d'Ansar Dine font sécession et créent leur propre mouvement," *Radio France International* (*RFI*), 24 January 2013, accessed 28 March 2015.

[121] Alex Thurston, "UN Strikes Back as Conflict Escalates in Mali," *IPI Global Observatory*, 16 January 2015, accessed 28 March 2015, http://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/01/un-strikes-conflict-escalation-mali/.

[122] "Belmokhtar's Militants Merge with Mali's Mujao," *BBC News*, 22 August 2013.

Implications for Policy

This paper has put forward two propositions for future exploration. First, that global Islamists are better able to generate recruit support broadly, whereas those that are primarily defined by ethnic or tribal identities draw upon narrower bases of support. Second, global Islamists are able to maintain greater group cohesion than Islamists with ethnic or tribal identities, by consolidating control, and purging their ranks of dissenters. Despite these advantages, however, this does not mean that going global is advantageous in the long run. Al-Shabaab's transnational adventuring clearly provoked a fierce international response that precipitated the group's decline. Yet on the domestic battlefield, global Islamism did help Al-Shabaab to outcompete their rivals, consolidate their power, and purge their ranks of opponents. In an inter-Islamist conflict, having a global identity can help increase insurgent recruitment, cohesion, and competitiveness.

These preliminary findings have important implications for both research and policy. To start, the case evidence suggests that Islamist groups with a fundamentally global identity may be more resilient to fragmentation than groups rooted in local ethnic or tribal networks. Counterinsurgency strategies, such as leadership decapitation, are therefore unlikely to result in the same outcomes across cases.[123] For example, targeting the top leaders of the tribally organized TTP insurgency helped to propel group fragmentation in Pakistan, whereas leadership decapitation has yet to produce a clear split within Al-Shabaab's command structure in Somalia. Importantly, it is not clear that splitting an Islamist group is a desirable counterinsurgency goal, as the more armed factions there are on the battlefield, the greater the number of viable spoilers to a potential peace.[124] All insurgent groups are susceptible to internal power struggles. The results of this study, however, suggest that Islamists that are primarily defined by local ethnic or tribal identities may be more likely to split under such pressure, resulting in a proliferation of spoilers in a civil war theater.

Furthermore, the fact that global Islamists actively work to erode preexisting ethnic and tribal networks will have a significant impact on the trajectory of these conflicts, as well as the viability of a post-conflict peace agreement. Consider, for example, that the Al-Shabaab foot soldiers who patrolled Dr. Hawa's hospital in 2012 were not only organized in mixed units but that these boys also appeared to have a weak sense of their individual clan identities. Many of these militiamen entered Al-Shabaab's ranks at a very

[123] Long, "Whack-a-Mole or Coup de Grace?" 471–512; Bryan C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (April 2012): 9–46. See also Daniel Byman, "Fighting Salafi-Jihadist Insurgencies: How Much Does Religion Really Matter?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 5 (April 2013): 353–71.

[124] Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration"; Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes."

young age, when personal identity is still in formation. In those cases where their local identities have been permanently eroded, significant effort will therefore be needed to reintegrate ex-combatants into Somali society. Given that transnational Islamist groups in Somalia, Iraq, and Syria have aggressively pursued a strategy of co-opting and then disintegrating pre-existing social networks, understanding the legacy of this identity reconstruction will be critical for effective post-conflict peacebuilding.

Moving toward future testing, researchers face difficult conditions in conducting field research with these subjects.[125] Despite these challenges, however, investigating the dynamics of Islamist competition is of critical importance to international security. Given the prevalence of inter-Islamist violence across the Muslim world, intimate knowledge of the diverse ideological and organizational nature of rival Islamist groups is necessary for the development of effective policy in these complex conflicts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is especially grateful to outstanding colleagues in Kenya and Somalia, including Jabril Abdulle, Sahal Abdulle, Dr. Ibrahim Farah, Dr. Yahya Amir Ibrahim, and Dr. Deqo Mohamed, as well as excellent research support in Pakistan at the University of Peshawar and the Institute for Policy Studies in Islamabad. The author also thanks Theodore McLauchlan, Stephen Saideman, colleagues at the University of Toronto, and the anonymous reviewers for *Security Studies* for comments on earlier drafts, as well as seminar participants at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Ajmal Burhanzoi, Vanessa van den Boogaard, Christopher Anzalone, Andrew Wells, and Craig Damian Smith provided research assistance.

FUNDING

This study was carried out with generous support from the Research Council of Norway and the International Development Research Centre, Canada.

[125] Because of the extreme security conditions in these theaters, there is a dearth of fieldwork-based studies on the internal dynamics of Islamist insurgent groups in contemporary civil wars. While there is an abundant literature on al Qaeda operations in various war theaters, there has been far less empirical research on the internal organizational dynamics and ideological evolution of domestic Islamist insurgencies in complex civil wars. For an important discussion of the relationship between domestic Islamists and al Qaeda in Pakistan, see C. Christine Fair, "Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: Implications for Al Qaeda and Other Organizations," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 6 (November 2004): 489–504. For a detailed exposition on the relationship between the Afghan Taliban and al Qaeda, see Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban-Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan* (Oxford University Press, 2012).