

# The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters

Thomas Hegghammer

## Islam and the Globalization of Jihad

A salient feature of armed conflict in the Muslim world since 1980 is the involvement of so-called foreign fighters, that is, unpaid combatants with no apparent link to the conflict other than religious affinity with the Muslim side. Since 1980 between 10,000 and 30,000 such fighters have inserted themselves into conflicts from Bosnia in the west to the Philippines in the east. Foreign fighters matter because they can affect the conflicts they join, as they did in post-2003 Iraq by promoting sectarian violence and indiscriminate tactics.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps more important, foreign fighter mobilizations empower transnational terrorist groups such as al-Qaida, because volunteering for war is the principal stepping-stone for individual involvement in more extreme forms of militancy. For example, when Muslims in the West radicalize, they usually do not plot attacks in their home country right away, but travel to a war zone such as Iraq or Afghanistan first. Indeed, a majority of al-Qaida operatives began their militant careers as war volunteers, and most transnational jihadi groups today are by-products of foreign fighter mobilizations.<sup>2</sup> Foreign fighters are therefore key to understanding transnational Islamist militancy.

Why did the Muslim foreign fighter phenomenon emerge when it did? Nowadays the presence of foreign fighters is almost taken for granted as a corollary of conflict in the Muslim world. Long-distance foreign fighter mobiliza-

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1. Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iraq's Evolving Insurgency," Working Draft (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 9, 2005), p. 129; and Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), p. 71.

2. See, for example, Mohammed M. Hafez, "Jihad after Iraq: Lessons from the Arab Afghans," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (February 2009), p. 77; and Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 133–138. I define jihadi as "violent Sunni Islamist" and Islamist as "Muslim religious activist."

tions, however, were rare before 1980.<sup>3</sup> This is puzzling, given that modern Islamism emerged in the late nineteenth century, that Islamist groups have used violence since the 1940s, and that armed conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims occurred throughout the twentieth century.

The existing literature provides few answers to the question of the rise of foreign fighters, because this type of activism remains notoriously understudied. There are descriptions of foreign fighter involvement in individual conflicts, but almost no cross-case analyses or theoretically informed attempts at explaining their appearance.<sup>4</sup> A rare exception is the work of David Malet, who notes that an established term for the phenomenon does not even exist in the political science literature.<sup>5</sup>

3. There were Muslim foreign combatants in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, but most were paid members of the Arab League-sponsored Army of Salvation (Jaysh al-Inqadh) and thus not private volunteers of the kind that proliferated later. See Haim Levenberg, *The Military Preparations of the Arab Community in Palestine, 1945–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp. 189–210; Joshua Landis, “Syria and the Palestine War: Fighting King ‘Abdullah’s ‘Greater Syria Plan,’” in Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 193; and Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 90.

4. On Afghanistan in the 1980s, see Anthony Davis, “Foreign Combatants in Afghanistan,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (1993), pp. 327–331; James Bruce, “Arab Veterans of the Afghan War,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1995), pp. 178–180; Barnett R. Rubin, “Arab Islamists in Afghanistan,” in John Esposito, ed., *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1997); and Vahid Brown, “Foreign Fighters in Historical Perspective: The Case of Afghanistan,” in Brian Fishman, ed., *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: Al-Qa’ida’s Road In and Out of Iraq* (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, 2008), chap. 1. On Bosnia, see Evan F. Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida’s Jihad in Europe: The Afghan-Bosnian Network* (London: Berg, 2004); and John R. Schindler, *Unholy Terror: Bosnia, al-Qa’ida, and the Rise of Global Jihad* (St. Paul, Minn.: MBI, 2007). On Chechnya, see Murad Batal al-Shishani, *Rise and Fall of Arab Fighters in Chechnya* (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2006); Lorenzo Vidino, “The Arab Foreign Fighters and the Sacralization of the Chechen Conflict,” *Al-Nakhlah*, Spring 2006; Brian Glyn Williams, “Allah’s Foot Soldiers: An Assessment of the Role of Foreign Fighters and Al-Qa’ida in the Chechen Insurgency,” in Moshe Gammer, ed., *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam, and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 156–178; and Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, “Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A Critical Assessment,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (May 2008), pp. 412–433. On Iraq, see Nawaf Obaid and Anthony Cordesman, “Saudi Militants in Iraq: Assessment and Kingdom’s Response” (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005); Reuven Paz, “Arab Volunteers Killed in Iraq: An Analysis,” *PRISM Papers*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (March 2005); Alan Krueger, “The National Origins of Foreign Fighters in Iraq,” annual meeting of the American Economic Association, Chicago, Illinois, January 5, 2007; Joseph Felner and Brian Fishman, “Al Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq” (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007); and Christopher Hewitt and Jessica Kelley-Moore, “Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A Cross-National Analysis of Jihadism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (April 2009), pp. 211–220. On Somalia, see Andrew Black, “Recruitment Drive: Can Somalia Attract Foreign Fighters?” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, Vol. 19, No. 6 (2007), pp. 12–17. On post-2001 Afghanistan, see Anne Stenersen, “Foreign Fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan after 9/11,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 17, 2009.

5. David Malet, “Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts,” Ph.D. dissertation,

The main reason for the absence of such a term is that foreign fighters constitute an intermediate actor category lost between local rebels, on the one hand, and international terrorists, on the other. The emerging civil war literature on transnationalism is really about rebels in exile or foreign state support for rebels, not independent global activists.<sup>6</sup> The social movement literature has paid more attention to the latter, but has so far focused on the nonviolent variety.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the study of foreign fighters has largely been confined to the subfield of terrorism studies, where, too often, they are conflated with al-Qaida<sup>8</sup> (even though most foreign fighters do not blow up planes, but use paramilitary tactics in confined theaters of war). They are insurgents in every respect but their passports.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this article is threefold: first, to establish foreign fighters as a discrete actor category distinct from insurgents and terrorists; second, to present new empirical information about Muslim foreign fighters; and third, to propose a plausible hypothesis about the origin of the phenomenon. The analysis is based on a new data set of foreign fighter mobilizations, a large collection of unexplored primary and secondary sources in Arabic, as well as personal interviews with former foreign fighters conducted in Britain, Jordan, Pakistan, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia.

The scope of the article has two important limitations. First, the conceptual focus is on movement formation, not on general mechanisms of foreign fighter

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George Washington University, 2009; and David Malet, "Why Foreign Fighters? Historical Perspectives and Solutions," *Orbis*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (January 2010), pp. 97–114. Other exceptions include Frank J. Ciluffo, Jeffrey B. Cozzens, and Magnus Ranstorp, "Foreign Fighters: Trends, Trajectories, and Conflict Zones" (Washington, D.C.: Homeland Security Policy Institute, October 1, 2010); and Stephanie Kaplan, "The Jihad Effect: How Wars Shape the Global Jihadist Movement," Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, forthcoming.

6. For rebels in exile, see, for example, Navin A. Bapat, "The Internationalization of Terrorist Campaigns," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (September 2007), pp. 265–280; Idean Salehyan, "Transnational Rebels: Neighboring States as Sanctuary for Rebel Groups," *World Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 217–242; and Lars-Erik Cederman, Luc Girardin, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Ethnonationalist Triads: Assessing the Influence of Kin Groups on Civil Wars," *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (July 2009), pp. 403–437. For outside state support, see, for example, Patrick M. Regan, *Civil Wars and Foreign Powers: Outside Intervention in Intrastate Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, and David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2001); and Stephen M. Saideman, *The Ties That Divide: Ethnic Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

7. See, for example, Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism: People, Passions, and Power* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); and Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

8. See, for example, Schindler, *Unholy Terror*.

9. For a definition of insurgency, see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (February 2003), p. 75.

mobilization. I do not formulate a universal theory of foreign fighters, predict rates of recruitment, or explain individual recruitment. Second, the empirical focus is on the Muslim world. A study of Muslim foreign fighters arguably has intrinsic value, because Muslim war volunteers are much more numerous and have affected many more conflicts than have foreign fighters of other ideological orientations. In addition, their involvement in major conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as their role in facilitating al-Qaida recruitment, make them a particularly significant challenge to contemporary international security.

I also stress that the article is not about Islamism, in general, but about a particular type of Islamist activism. Islamism is politically heterogeneous, in the sense that different Islamist actors specialize in qualitatively different political activities. Some oppose local regimes with nonviolent means; others try to topple regimes with terrorist tactics; and still others wage armed resistance to occupation by non-Muslim powers.<sup>10</sup> Different varieties of Islamist activism have appeared at different times in history, which suggests that they likely have somewhat different causes. This is why my analysis downplays several factors commonly emphasized in accounts of the “Islamic resurgence,” such as the Arab defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War, the decline of Arab nationalism, or the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Many of the factors that fueled the broader Islamist movement are insufficient for explaining the specific phenomenon of transnational war volunteering.<sup>11</sup>

My argument is that the foreign fighter phenomenon represents a violent offshoot of a qualitatively new subcurrent of Islamism—populist pan-Islamism—which emerged in the 1970s as a result of strategic action by marginalized elites employed in nonviolent international Islamic organizations. Seeking political relevance and increased budgets, these activists—who were mostly based in the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia—propagated an alarmist discourse emphasizing external threats to the Muslim nation. They also established a global network of charities for the provision of inter-Muslim aid. The norms and networks established by the Hijazi pan-Islamists then enabled Arab activists in 1980s Afghanistan to recruit foreign fighters in the name of

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10. See, for example, Thomas Hegghammer, “Jihadi Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism,” in Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 244–266.

11. On the general Islamic revival, see, for example, Yvonne Y. Haddad, John O. Voll, and John L. Esposito, *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood, 1991); and Philip W. Sutton and Stephen Vertigans, *Resurgent Islam: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

inter-Muslim solidarity. The “Arab Afghan” mobilization, in turn, produced a foreign fighter movement that still exists today, as a phenomenon partly distinct from al-Qaida.

The Hijazi pan-Islamist community itself owed its existence to two exogenous developments in the 1960s, namely, the repression and exile of Muslim Brotherhood activists in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, and the establishment of international Islamic organizations and several new universities in Saudi Arabia. The supply of exiles met a demand for educated manpower, resulting in the emergence of a large community of transnational activists in the Hijaz region in western Saudi Arabia. With limited prospects for domestic political influence and an opportunity to work internationally, these activists devoted themselves to transnational activism and vigorous promotion of populist pan-Islamism. In the 1970s, oil money, new technologies, and lack of government oversight made them ideologically very influential. Incumbent elites allowed, and periodically competed with, pan-Islamist propaganda for fear of being perceived as lacking sympathy with suffering Muslims abroad. At the heart of the story of the transnationalization of jihad is thus a process of elite competition.

The article proceeds in four stages. First, I define the term “foreign fighter,” present the historical record of mobilizations, and clarify the puzzle of foreign fighter activism. Next I evaluate five explanations for my case selections, emphasizing conflict structure, insurgent profile, government obstruction, communications technology, and the evolution of Islamism. Then I examine organizational and ideological links between successive foreign fighter contingents to show that most mobilizations were part of a new ideological movement that emerged in the 1980s. Finally, I use process tracing to examine the initial formation of the foreign fighter movement in 1980s Afghanistan.

### *The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon*

This three-part section defines the foreign fighter concept, presents data on foreign fighter mobilizations, and clarifies the puzzle addressed in this article.

#### DEFINITIONS

David Malet defines foreign fighters as “non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict.”<sup>12</sup> I build on this formulation and define a foreign fighter as an agent who (1) has joined, and operates within the confines

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12. Malet, “Foreign Fighters,” p. 9.

of, an insurgency, (2) lacks citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions, (3) lacks affiliation to an official military organization, and (4) is unpaid.

These four criteria set foreign fighters apart from other types of violent actors who cross borders. Criterion (4) excludes mercenaries, who are paid and follow the highest bidder. Criterion (3) excludes soldiers, who are usually salaried and go where their generals send them. Criterion (2) excludes returning diaspora members or exiled rebels, who have a preexisting stake in the conflict. This distinction, which disappears in Idean Salehyan's term "transnational insurgent" or John Mackinlay's "global insurgent," matters because ethnic or kinship links to insurgents presumably facilitate mobilization considerably.<sup>13</sup> Finally, criterion (1) distinguishes foreign fighters from international terrorists, who specialize in out-of-area violence against noncombatants. This distinction is rarely made; most works on militant Islamism use generic terms such as "jihadists" or "salafi jihadists" to describe any transnational violent Islamist, whether he or she undertakes suicide bombings in a Western capital or mortar attacks in a war zone.<sup>14</sup> In reality, most foreign fighters never engaged in out-of-area operations, but fought in one combat zone at the time.

Foreign fighter contingents differ from one another in two important respects, namely, their degree of state sponsorship and the reach of their international recruitment. Although foreign fighters are not soldiers, they often enjoy some form of state support. Several historical volunteer forces were effectively irregular armies created by states seeking operational flexibility or plausible deniability. For example, the 5,000-strong Army of Salvation in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War was created and funded by the Arab League (an intergovernmental organization), trained and led by Iraqi and Syrian military officers, and maintained in part through salaries.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the International Brigades in the

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13. Idean Salehyan, *Rebels without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009); and John Mackinlay, *Globalization and Insurgency*, Adelphi Papers, No. 352 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2002).

14. The conflation has been encouraged by the statements of international terrorist groups such as al-Qaida, which does not want to be distinguished from foreign fighters, lest its activities appear more controversial and less legitimate. Historically, al-Qaida has enjoyed an ambiguous relationship with the foreign fighter movement. On the one hand, al-Qaida relies on foreign fighter mobilizations for recruitment and has therefore always encouraged them; on the other, it has occasionally found itself in competition with the foreign fighter movement over resources. See Thomas Hegghammer, "'Classical' and 'Global' Jihadism in Saudi Arabia," in Bernard Haykel, Hegghammer, and Stéphane Lacroix, eds., *Complexity and Change in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

15. Levenberg, *The Military Preparations of the Arab Community in Palestine*, p. 190; and Landis, "Syria and the Palestine War," p. 191. Levenberg (p. 193) reports that Army of Salvation members received 18 Palestinian pounds (£P) per month—a substantial amount. Annual national income



Spanish Civil War may have been a volunteer force, but parts of it enjoyed considerable direct state support from the Soviet Union through the Comintern.<sup>16</sup> Although state support is a matter of degree, one can distinguish broadly between private and state-supported mobilizations. I define a mobilization as state supported if a government agency directly supplies the foreign fighters with material resources.

In addition, some foreign fighters are more foreign than others. The number of nationalities represented in a contingent and the distance traveled by its members vary considerably. Some conflicts attract volunteers from all over the world, whereas others draw people from only a handful of neighboring countries. The Jewish volunteers in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War are an example of an international contingent, with participants from four continents.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the anticolonial struggles in North Africa in the 1950s drew Muslims only from neighboring countries. Again, geographical reach is a matter of degree, but for the sake of simplicity, I distinguish between “global” and “regional” foreign fighter mobilizations. I define as “regional” a contingent whose members all come from countries bordering on the conflict zone. This article focuses on global and private foreign fighter mobilizations, because they involve higher constraints and thus constitute a more puzzling collective-action phenomenon. I am thus concerned with cases where Muslims from many countries traveled a long way without direct state support to fight alongside other Muslims.

#### THE RECORD

To assess the scale and distribution of the foreign fighter phenomenon, I gathered a list of all major insurgencies and interstate wars in the Muslim world from 1945 to 2009 and searched in relevant secondary and primary sources for evidence of foreign fighter involvement.<sup>18</sup> The full list of major conflicts was established by merging James Fearon and David Laitin’s list of insurgencies with Correlates of War Inter-State War Data (ver. 3.0), extracting all conflicts

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per capita in the region ranged from £P 15 (East Bank in 1948) to £P40 (Syria in 1950) to £P53 (Palestine in 1948). See Yusuf A. Sayigh, “Dispossession and Pauperisation: The Palestinian Economy under Occupation,” in George T. Abed, ed., *The Palestinian Economy: Studies in Development under Prolonged Occupation* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 274.

16. See, for example, R. Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982); and Massimo Mangilli-Climpson, *Men of Heart of Red, White, and Green: Italian Antifascists in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Vantage, 1985).

17. A. Joseph Heckelman, *American Volunteers and Israel’s War of Independence* (New York: Ktav, 1974).

18. I define the Muslim world as “all countries and all major subnational provinces whose population is at least 50 percent Muslim.”

that involved at least one Muslim-majority conflict party, and making a handful of updates and changes.<sup>19</sup> The above-mentioned data sets end in 2003 and 1996, respectively, so for later years I included conflicts whose characteristics, as reported in news media, met the same criteria as in the two established sets. The final list (see the appendix) does not capture all conflicts in the post-1945 Muslim world, but it is consistent with my definition of foreign fighters as actors who join major insurgencies.<sup>20</sup> There are few known cases of global foreign fighter mobilizations to conflicts that are not on this list.<sup>21</sup>

Of seventy armed conflicts in the post-1945 Muslim world, eighteen had a private global foreign fighter contingent (see table 1). Geographically, cases cover three continents, and most occurred on the periphery of the Muslim world. Sixteen contingents mobilized after 1980 (one in the 1980s, ten in the 1990s, and five in the 2000s). By contrast, only two small contingents mobilized before 1980, and none occurred before the late 1960s. Reliable numbers of participants do not exist, but the distribution of estimates is bimodal, with five cases of more than 1,000 fighters and thirteen of fewer than 300. Two cases (1980s Afghanistan and Iraq) included more than 4,000 fighters.<sup>22</sup> In every case, foreign fighters constituted a very small proportion of the total number of combatants; the conflict with the largest foreign contingent relative to the overall insurgency was probably Iraq, where at most 5 percent of insurgents were foreign.<sup>23</sup> The Arab world, in general, and Saudi Arabia, in particular, are strongly overrepresented among participants, except in 1980s Afghanistan when many Asians participated. There is a possible reporting bias given my reliance on Arabic sources, but the Muslim foreign fighter phenomenon is widely considered predominantly Arab.<sup>24</sup>

Two points regarding table 1 require further explanation because they defy conventional wisdom. First, I do not consider the Arab mobilization for the

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19. Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War"; and Meredith Reid Sarkees and Phil Shafer, "The Correlates of War Data on War: An Update to 1997," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (February 2000), pp. 123–144.

20. For the record, I do not include cases of foreign recruitment to terrorist groups that are not involved in a major local insurgency, such as al-Qaida in early-1990s Sudan or post-2006 Yemen.

21. A possible exception is the early-1970s Dhofar rebellion in Oman, which attracted leftists from the Gulf (although most stayed on the Yemeni side of the border and did not fight). John E. Peterson, personal correspondence with author, February 26, 2010. Third countries also sent regular military units to support the sultanate.

22. The estimates are mine, based on a reading of the available primary and secondary sources.

23. Cordesman, "Iraq's Evolving Insurgency," p. 129; and Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, p. 71.

24. Reuven Paz, "Middle East Islamism in the European Arena," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (September 2002), p. 70.



Table 1. Confirmed Cases of Private Global Foreign Fighter Mobilization in the Muslim World, 1945–2010

Location	Date	Local Conflict Parties (simplified)	Foreign Fighter Entry Date	Number of Foreign Fighters	Confirmed Nationalities
Israel	1967	Arab coalition vs. Israel	1968	< 100	Sudan, Syria, Egypt, Yemen
Lebanon	1975–90	PLO vs. Israel; Miscellaneous Factions	1978	< 50	Egypt, Syria, Jordan
Afghanistan	1978–92	Mujahideen vs. Soviet Union /Kabul	1980–92	5,000–20,000	Most Arab countries, Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, United States/Europe
Bosnia	1992–95	Bosnians vs. Serbs/Croats	1992–95	1,000–2,000	Most Arab countries, United States/Europe
Tajikistan	1992–97	Islamists vs. Communists	1992–94	100–200	Saudi Arabia, Yemen
Algeria	1991–	Islamists vs. Government	1994	< 10	Saudi Arabia
Chechnya	1994–	Chechens vs. Russia	1995–2001	200–300	Most Arab countries, Turkey, United States/Europe
Philippines	1968–	Moro National Liberation Front/Moro Islamic Liberation Front vs. Manila	1997–2000	20–100	Several Arab countries
Kashmir	1989–	Pakistan vs. India	1997–2000	20–100	Several Arab countries
Somalia	1991–05	Various militias	1992	< 50	Saudi Arabia, Egypt
Afghanistan	1992–2001	Masud vs. Hekmatyar, Taliban vs. Northern Alliance	1996–2001	1,000–1,500	Most Arab countries, United States/Europe, Central Asia, Pakistan, Turkey
Kosovo	1998–99	Albanians vs. Kosovars	1999	20–100	Several Arab countries, United States/Europe
Eritrea	1998–2000	Eritrea vs. Ethiopia	1998	< 10	Saudi Arabia
Palestine	2000–	Palestinians vs. Israel	2000–	< 10	Saudi Arabia
Afghanistan	2001–	Taliban vs. United States/NATO/Kabul	2001–	1,000–1,500	Most Arab countries, United States/Europe
Iraq	2003–	Sunnis vs. United States/Baghdad	2003–	4,000–5,000	Most Arab countries, United States/Europe, Turkey
Somalia	2006–	Shabab vs. Transitional Federal Government/Ethiopia	2006–	200–400	Several Arab countries, United States/Europe
Lebanon	2007	Fath al-Islam vs. Government	2007	< 50	Saudi Arabia

1948 Arab-Israeli War global and private, because most of the fighters were paid members of the state-supported Army of Salvation, while those who were not—namely, Egyptian Muslim Brothers—came from a single neighboring country.

Second, I consider the mobilization to 1980s Afghanistan as private. The foreign fighters enjoyed tacit, but not active, state support. The distinction matters greatly, because the latter is a sufficient cause of the mobilization, whereas the former is at most a necessary one. The view of the 1980s Arab Afghans as actively state supported is a widespread misconception that has given rise to the popular “blowback theory,” according to which the Arab Afghans (and by extension al-Qaida) were a U.S.-Saudi creation that later turned against its patrons.<sup>25</sup> The misunderstanding stems from a conflation of Afghan mujahideen, on the one hand, and foreign fighters, on the other; it is assumed that because states armed the Afghans, they also armed the Arabs.<sup>26</sup> The United States and Saudi Arabia did provide considerable financial, logistical, and military support to the Afghan mujahideen.<sup>27</sup> There is no evidence, however, of systematic and direct state support for the Arab Afghans.<sup>28</sup> Arab Gulf states and Western governments acquiesced to foreign fighter recruitment, but they did not organize it or pay for it. The foreign fighters were funded by private donors and the nongovernmental Islamic charitable sector. The closest the Saudis came to active state support was the state’s introduction of a subsidy on plane tickets from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, but this occurred only in the late 1980s and benefited aid workers as much as volunteer fighters.<sup>29</sup> Besides, it would not have made any sense for third states to create an

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25. See, for example, John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism*, 3d ed. (London: Pluto, 2002); and Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, 2d ed. (New York: Holt, 2004).

26. See, for example, Dale F. Eickelman, “Trans-State Islam and Security,” in Susanne H. Rudolph and James Piscatori, eds., *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997); and Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, pp. 126–127.

27. 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).

28. Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda’s Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 60–61. I have not seen or heard any such evidence, be it in the jihadi literature; in personal interviews with former CIA, MI6, and Saudi intelligence agents; in memoirs of former participants; or in declassified documents. There is evidence of sporadic logistical support from Saudi officials, but only for “dual use” equipment such as construction vehicles. See, for example, Basil Muhammad, *Al-Ansar al-Arab fi Afghanistan* [The Arab supporters in Afghanistan], 2d ed. (Riyadh: Lajnat al-Birr al-Islamiyya, 1991), p. 87.

29. Mark Huband, *Warriors of the Prophet: The Struggle for Islam* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999), p. 3.

international irregular fighting force, because the Afghan mujahideen lacked everything except manpower, and most of the Arab volunteers were inexperienced fighters.

#### THE PUZZLE

The Muslim foreign fighter phenomenon presents two puzzles: individual participation and chronological variation. I briefly address the former and concentrate on the latter.

This article does not focus on the supply side of recruitment, but a brief overview of the terms of individual involvement is necessary to appreciate the particularities of foreign fighter activism. Why would anyone want to fight someone else's war? One might argue that the cost of joining was not as high as it seems. In 1980s Afghanistan, the foreign fighter death rate was so low (between 2 and 6 percent<sup>30</sup>) and average tours so short that some referred to the late volunteers as jihad "tourists."<sup>31</sup> In most subsequent conflicts, however, death rates were higher; for example, only a minority of those who made it to Chechnya in the late 1990s returned alive.<sup>32</sup> Injuries were also common in all the war zones.

Objective grievance related to the political or material repercussions of the conflict is an unlikely explanation for this behavior. Most foreign fighters were not remotely touched by events in the countries to which they traveled, and public goods offered by local insurgents would not benefit foreigners. In regional mobilizations (e.g., Pakistanis going to Afghanistan), objective grievance may have played a role, but not in global mobilizations (e.g., Saudis going to Chechnya). Grievances in the recruits' home countries constitute an equally unlikely explanation, because recruits came from many different countries and joined at many different times. Studies of foreign fighters, though not conclusive for lack of good data, have failed to identify economic predictors for recruitment.<sup>33</sup>

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30. Ahmad Zaidan estimated that 242 Arabs had been killed by mid-1989. See Jonathan Randal, *Osama: The Making of a Terrorist* (New York: Vintage, 2004), p. 76. Because fighting continued until 1992, a likely estimate is 300 dead out of an overall 5,000–20,000 volunteers.

31. See, for example, Mustafa Hamid, quoted in Wahid Brown, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in al-Qa'ida, 1989–2006* (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007), p. 7.

32. Reliable numbers do not exist, but Paul Tumelty noted that Arabs in Chechnya were "prone to death or capture," and very few Arab veterans from Chechnya appear in this author's sources. See Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Foreign Fighters in Chechnya," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (January 2006), p. 10.

33. See, for example, Felter and Fishman, "Al Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq"; and Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*.

Material selective incentives also constitute an unsatisfying solution. There is no evidence that volunteers were paid for their services.<sup>34</sup> Prospects for loot were dim, given that most wars occurred in poor countries where the local insurgents greatly outnumbered foreign fighters. Outsiders could not expect to receive positions of power in the case of victory. Protection was an incentive for a small number of active revolutionaries from Arab republics, but not for the majority, who were previously unmobilized and left peaceful countries. The pleasure of adventure was probably a factor, but it does not explain the choice of this particular activity.

To make sense of Muslim foreign fighter volunteering, one arguably has to assume the existence of subjective grievances linked to an expanded notion of nationhood or nonmaterial selective incentives (e.g., social status or afterlife rewards) or both; in other words, a belief or an ideology.<sup>35</sup> The ideological explanation, however, raises a second puzzle, which is the main concern here. If foreign fighter activism is facilitated by belief in the duty of intra-Muslim solidary action, how does one explain the near absence of long-distance foreign fighters before 1980? Curiously, no scholar has addressed this question in-depth before. Most of the literature considers Muslim foreign fighters a product of the 1980s Afghanistan war, without really asking why they went to Afghanistan in the first place.

Malet's theory of foreign fighters, perhaps the only such theory developed thus far, cannot explain this puzzle. Malet argues that transnational recruitment occurs when local insurgents attempt to broaden the scope of conflict so as to increase their resources and maximize their chances of victory.<sup>36</sup> He does not, however, adequately explain why some insurgents try to attract foreigners whereas others do not. Moreover, his basic assumption—that local insur-

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34. Al-Qaida paid salaries in the range of \$200–\$250 to some of its Arab associates in Pakistan and Sudan between 1992 and 1996 and in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. The recipients were arguably not foreign fighters, however, because they were not taking part in an insurgency. In the late 1990s in Afghanistan, salaries went to those involved in the running of the al-Qaida organization, not to the Arab foot soldiers fighting with the Taliban against the Northern Alliance. See, for example, Alan Cullison and Andrew Higgins, "Forgotten Computer Reveals Thinking behind Four Years of al Qaeda Doings," *Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 2001; *USA v Usama bin Laden et al.* (Southern District of New York, 2001), p. 251; and Harun al-Fadil, *Al-Harb ala al-Islam*, Vol. 1 [The war on Islam] (document posted on the jihadi internet forum *Ansar al-Mujahidin*, February 26, 2009), p. 248. I thank Nelly Lahoud for the last reference.

35. Following Martin Seliger, I define ideology loosely as a "set of ideas by which men posit, explain and justify ends and means of organized social action." Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976), p. 11. I understand doctrine to mean an ideology intended for a specific type of action. I define discourse as "a way of using language to convey norms or ideology."

36. Malet, "Foreign Fighters," p. vi.

gents initiate the mobilization—does not square with the evidence from Muslim foreign fighter mobilizations, most of which were exogenous to the local insurgency, in the sense that foreign fighter recruitment was initiated and handled by other foreigners, not locals. Insurgents often appealed to the international Muslim community for financial and political support, but they rarely called explicitly for fighters.<sup>37</sup> Foreign fighters came uninvited almost wherever they went.

### *Explanations*

In this section, I consider five explanations for the chronological distribution of cases. The first four focus on changes in constraints; the fifth posits a change in motivations. My strategy for testing them is to conduct simple sufficiency tests and to calculate basic probabilities where data are available. In most cases, data to conduct more elaborate tests are unavailable.

#### CONFLICT STRUCTURE

The first hypothesis holds that foreign fighters join only certain types of conflicts—for example, interreligious ones, very bloody ones, or blatant foreign invasions—and that such wars were more common after 1980.

A brief look at the most well known cases and the slogans of the volunteers suggests that religious difference between the warring parties was very important. An equally brief glance at the history of the post-1945 Muslim world, however, suggests that there were plenty of conflicts with religious difference before 1980, notably in Indonesia, Palestine, Kashmir, Malaysia, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Philippines, Ogaden, Sudan, and Cyprus. Moreover, on a few occasions subsequent foreign fighters deployed in conflicts without religious difference, notably in Tajikistan, Algeria, and 1990s Afghanistan. Religious difference probably affects the likelihood and eventual scale of foreign fighter mobilization, but it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause of foreign fighter involvement.

A second variant of this hypothesis suggests that conflict severity matters. This is hard to verify, however. War death data are patchy and notoriously disputed, and battle deaths do not reflect civilian suffering. Available data indi-

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37. Exceptions include Chechnya and Tajikistan, where locals reportedly invited the first foreign fighters. See Paul Tumelty, "The Rise and Fall of Arab Fighters in Chechnya," *Jamestown Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (January 2006). There is also evidence that some Afghan commanders appealed to the Arab press for "men" very early in the 1980s. Vahid Brown, personal correspondence with author, February 10, 2010.

Table 2. Foreign Fighter Mobilization Probabilities

P m (conflict with religious difference)	0.33
P m (conflict without religious difference)	0.18
P m (conflict with more than 10,000 battle deaths)	0.36
P m (conflict with fewer than 10,000 battle deaths)	0.23
P m (Islamist insurgent at outset)	0.71
P m (non-Islamist insurgent at outset)	0.13
P m (conflict post-1980)	0.43
P m (conflict pre-1980)	0.06

cate no clear correlation between battle deaths and foreign fighter involvement in general (see table 2).<sup>38</sup> The Algerian War of Independence (no mobilization) was bloodier than all the conflicts that attracted volunteers in the 1990s and 2000s. Nineteen eighties Afghanistan was indeed deadlier than most previous conflicts, but not as lethal as the concurrent Iran-Iraq War (no mobilization). One could argue that the casualties of Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq, and Lebanon combined served as a catalyst for the birth of a foreign fighter movement, given that the aggregate annual casualty figures of these three conflicts in the 1980s (165,000 in 1982 alone) were larger than those of previous decades by orders of magnitude. This is at best a necessary cause of the emergence of foreign fighters, however.

A third variant of the conflict structure hypothesis emphasizes the political status of the territory in which the conflict occurs. Most conflicts in the 1950s and 1960s Muslim world were decolonization struggles, whereas several later conflicts occurred in countries that were already independent. It may be that invasions of independent countries were seen by the broader Muslim public as more dramatic acts of aggression and thus more likely to attract foreign fighters. There may be something to this argument, given that 1980s Afghanistan was indeed the first independent Muslim state to be invaded by a non-Muslim country, and that the two other major country takeovers, namely, that of 2001 Afghanistan and 2003 Iraq, triggered the fourth- and second-largest mobilizations in my sample, respectively. A majority of mobilizations in the 1990s and 2000s, however, were for wars that cannot be described as

38. Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: A New Dataset of Battle Deaths," *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 21, Nos. 2-3 (May 2005), pp. 145-166. I used the Battle Deaths Dataset, ver. 3.0, updated through 2008, <http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/Battle-Deaths/>.



country takeovers. Instead, the conflicts in Bosnia, Tajikistan, Chechnya, and Kosovo arguably had structurally more in common with decolonization struggles than with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, it is not obvious why anticolonial struggles should not attract foreign fighters, given that these struggles were also fundamentally about liberation of Muslim territory, except that the initial occupation (colonization) had occurred much earlier in time. One might even argue that, on the contrary, the increase in the number of independent Muslim states after 1950 should have produced more local nationalist movements, not more transnational activism.

#### INSURGENT PROFILE

The second hypothesis suggests that foreign fighters join only conflicts where local insurgents possess certain qualities (e.g., an Islamist ideology) or resources (preexisting links with other countries). Given that so many of the insurgents with an Islamist profile attracted foreign fighters (see table 2), it is reasonable to assume that the increased role of religion in civil wars or the Islamization of nationalist struggles contributed to the growth in the foreign fighter phenomenon.<sup>39</sup> In several cases, however (late 1960s Palestine, late 1970s Lebanon, 1990s Somalia, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kosovo), foreign fighters joined insurgents who were not strictly speaking Islamist at the outset. More important, there are endogeneity concerns, because it is reasonable to assume that some insurgents may have adopted an Islamist profile to woo foreign Muslim supporters.<sup>40</sup> Finally, there may be a confounding variable behind both the Islamization of insurgencies and the rise of foreign fighters.

A more appealing variant of the insurgent profile hypothesis suggests that insurgents with many preexisting links to Islamist communities in the Arab world are more likely to see foreign fighter involvement. For example, several Afghan mujahideen leaders had studied in Islamic universities in Egypt in the 1960s, which likely facilitated the early Arab involvement in Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup> The lack of good data makes it difficult to rigorously test this hypothesis, but

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39. On the increasing role of religion in civil war, see, for example, Jonathan Fox, "The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945–2001," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 6 (November 2004), pp. 715–731. On the Islamization of nationalist struggles, see Meir Litvak, "The Islamization of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The Case of Hamas," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (January 1998), pp. 148–163; Yoginder Sikand, "The Changing Course of the Kashmiri Struggle: From National Liberation to Islamist Jihad?" *Muslim World*, Vol. 91, Nos. 1–2 (March 2001), pp. 229–256; and Julie Wilhelmsen, *When Separatists Become Islamists: The Case of Chechnya* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2004).

40. See Wilhelmsen, *When Separatists Become Islamists*.

41. Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

anecdotal evidence suggests that several prominent pre-1980 insurgents, such as the Moro National Liberation Front, had extensive links with religious communities in the Arab world without seeing foreign fighters, whereas several positive cases (e.g., 1990s Somalia, Tajikistan, Chechnya, Eritrea, and Kosovo) lacked such links.<sup>42</sup>

#### GOVERNMENT OBSTRUCTION

A third hypothesis proposes that people become involved in foreign conflicts only when governments allow them. The 1980s may have seen an opening in the opportunity structure for foreign fighter activism. As noted above, the Arab Afghans were not actively supported by governments, but they enjoyed a friction-free recruitment environment in the Gulf countries and in the West. Governments can undoubtedly affect the scale of foreign fighter mobilizations. There is no question, for example, that there would have been many more foreign fighters in Palestine in the 1990s and 2000s had Israel and its neighbors not made it extremely difficult to go there. States can probably not prevent the occurrence of small mobilizations, however, if the intent is strong enough. Most Arab governments' tolerance for open recruitment ended in the early 1990s, yet the phenomenon flourished, with some Saudi fighters even making it to Palestine. Given that later mobilizations were likely path-dependent on the first Afghan jihad, one might argue that the opportunity structure in the 1980s is the one that matters. For this to explain timing, however, one must prove that government obstacles really were higher before 1980, which is difficult to do, given the lack of evidence of government obstruction of foreign fighter recruitment to places other than Palestine. On balance, it seems likely that passive state support for the Arab Afghans was a necessary cause of the post-1980 proliferation of foreign fighters, but it was not sufficient.

#### COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

A fourth possibility is that global foreign fighter mobilizations require communications technology that was unavailable or too expensive before 1980. One variant of this hypothesis emphasizes transportation. This is an attractive idea, because travel costs directly affect the ability of individuals to join faraway conflicts. The cost of ocean freight, air transport, and telephone calls fell sharply between 1940 and 1980.<sup>43</sup> Scholars have linked these developments to

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42. On the links of the Moro National Liberation Front to the Arab world, see Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 143.

43. Frances Cairncross showed that the sharpest decline in communication costs occurred from 1940 to 1950, followed by a steady decline from 1950 to 1980, after which prices stabilized. See

the significant increase in the number of annual pilgrims to Mecca in the same period.<sup>44</sup> It seems very likely that cheaper transportation facilitated global foreign fighter mobilizations, although it is not clear at which price threshold or by which particular technology such mobilizations become possible. Purely for anecdotal purposes, one may note that long-distance jihad volunteering occurred as early as the tenth century A.D., when fighters traveled from today's Iran to southern Turkey to defend the Abbasid caliphate against Byzantine invasion.<sup>45</sup>

A second variant of the technology hypothesis emphasizes new media. Communication and publishing technology affects the reach, speed, and impact of recruitment propaganda. Popular access to television and other news media is known to have increased markedly in the Arab world in this period, presumably bringing greater awareness of events involving Muslims abroad.<sup>46</sup> New media, however, is at best a necessary condition for the rise of foreign fighters. If media were sufficient, one would expect to see non-Muslim transnational war volunteering and other forms of transnational activism increase in the 1980s, which is not the case. Malet documents few non-Islamist foreign fighter mobilizations in this period, and social movement scholars date the most significant rise in transnational activism to the late 1990s.<sup>47</sup>

#### EVOLUTION OF ISLAM

The fifth explanation focuses on motivations and links the foreign fighter phenomenon to the evolution of the Islamist movement. Foreign fighters may have proliferated because the Islamist movement grew stronger. The problem here is twofold. First, there is a chronological disconnect between the rise of Islamism and the emergence of global foreign fighters. Islamism emerged as an ideology in the late nineteenth century and as an organized political phe-

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Cairncross, *The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), p. 214.

44. According to Robert R. Bianchi, the steepest increase in pilgrim numbers of any ten-year period in the twentieth century occurred between 1965 and 1975, when the number of pilgrims rose from 250,000 to 900,000 and the percentage of pilgrims traveling by air increased from 20 to 60 percent. See Bianchi, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 49–51.

45. Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 133.

46. In Saudi Arabia, for example, newspaper circulation increased from 10 per 1,000 in 1975 to 47 per 1,000 in 1984, while television reception increased from 14 receivers per 1,000 in 1976 to 262 per 1,000 in 1982. Matrook Alfaleh, "The Impact of the Processes of Modernization and Social Mobilization on the Social and Political Structures of the Arab Countries with Special Emphasis on Saudi Arabia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1987.

47. David Malet, "Foreign Fighter Observation Set Data," [http://www.davidmalet.com/uploads/observation-set\\_-\\_4-09.xls](http://www.davidmalet.com/uploads/observation-set_-_4-09.xls); and Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*.

nomenon in the late 1920s.<sup>48</sup> In the late 1940s, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had several hundred thousand members.<sup>49</sup> There was no lack of Islamists to join other Muslims' wars in the decades preceding the Afghan jihad. Second, there is a substantive disconnect between the political project of pre-1980 Islamists and the activity performed by the foreign fighters.<sup>50</sup> Most Islamist groups before the 1980s fought against their own regimes. Very little in the doctrines or activities of Islamists before 1980 logically predicted involvement in faraway wars of national liberation. The same problem arises with explanations that emphasize the role of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The substantive core of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's project was domestic revolution, not liberation of occupied Muslim territories. His success should logically have inspired more revolutionary activism—which it arguably did for a short while in early-1980s Egypt and Syria. There was no reason, however, why the Iranian Revolution should have fueled the foreign fighter movement, which effectively undermined existing Sunni revolutionary movements by diverting recruits to foreign conflicts.

Some prominent scholars have made the inverse claim, namely, that foreign fighters emerged because Islamism declined.<sup>51</sup> In this perspective, the transnationalization of Islamism in the 1980s and 1990s was a reaction to the weakness or moderation of mainstream Islamist parties, or both. This explanation is also unsatisfactory. The process whereby moderation of the mainstream leads to radicalization of the fringe is plausible and well known from other contexts, for example, in European leftist movements in the 1960s.<sup>52</sup> It is much less clear why moderation of the mainstream would lead to internationalization of the fringe. The exodus of Egyptian and Syrian revolutionaries to Afghanistan was a consequence, not a cause, of the Arab mobilization to Afghanistan, because these people were not among the first to arrive, and were not very active in international recruitment. (The main entrepreneurs were Muslim Brothers such as Abdallah Azzam.) Besides, the revolutionaries were never that numerous in Afghanistan; the majority of foreign fighters in the 1980s were previously un-

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48. Ali Rahnama, ed., *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (London: Zed, 1994).

49. Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 328.

50. For overviews of definitions of Islamism, see Mehdi Mozaffari, "What Is Islamism? History and Definition of a Concept," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2007), pp. 17–33; and International Crisis Group, "Understanding Islamism," *Middle East/North Africa Report*, No. 37 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2005).

51. Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2002).

52. See, for example, Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

mobilized.<sup>53</sup> As I show below, repression of domestic Islamists did play a role in the timing of the foreign fighter phenomenon, but in a more roundabout way than previously assumed.

It seems, then, that none of the five explanations reviewed so far—namely, conflict structure, insurgent profile, government obstruction, communications technology, and the evolution of Islamism—can individually account fully for the chronological variation in the occurrence of foreign fighter mobilizations. A final possibility is that a combination of two or more of these factors constitutes a sufficient cause. The problem here is that, apart from the difficulty of analyzing interaction effects between multiple variables with many missing values, no one combination of factors stands out as constituting a particularly plausible explanation. For example, the combination of improved communications technology with a strengthened Islamist movement needed not produce war volunteers; it might just as well have produced more mobile revolutionaries with larger international support networks. Similarly, the combination of a spectacular country takeover (the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) with temporarily high government tolerance for war volunteering hardly explains why people decades later insert themselves in muddled conflicts under heavy government constraints.

Many of the abovementioned factors likely constitute enabling conditions either for the likelihood of mobilization occurrence or for the eventual scale of the mobilization. The presence of Islamist insurgents and availability of low-cost travel seem to facilitate mobilization occurrence, whereas conflict type, government constraints, and travel cost all seem to affect scale. Whether alone or in combination, these factors do not, however, constitute sufficient causes of the series of foreign fighter mobilizations observed after 1980.

### *A New Ideological Movement*

This section presents a sixth explanation for the foreign fighter phenomenon. It posits a different type of motivational change, namely, the emergence of a qualitatively new ideological movement or subcurrent of Islamism that did not exist before the 1980s.<sup>54</sup> The hypothesis suggests that representatives of

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53. A majority of Arab Afghans were from Saudi Arabia, which had practically no Sunni revolutionaries in the 1980s. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 47.

54. Gilles Kepel and Bernard Rougier have argued that a new ideology called salafi jihadism emerged in the 1980s, but they have linked this ideology to a broad range of violent phenomena, including anti-regime militancy and international terrorism, not specifically to foreign fighter activism. See Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 219–222; and Rougier, “Le jihad en Afghanistan et l’émergence du

this movement joined most subsequent conflicts involving Muslims almost regardless of constraints. Two testable predictions emerge: first, one should expect to see ideological, social, and organizational links between most foreign fighter contingents after 1980. Second, one should expect to see substantial differences between the foreign fighter ideology and preceding Islamist ideologies.

The first prediction is not difficult to confirm, as there are numerous links among post-1980s foreign fighter contingents. Recruitment literature from early conflicts was used for later ones, and new propaganda is full of references to earlier conflicts. There was considerable overlap of personnel, with Arab veterans of 1980s Afghanistan acting as first movers in at least eight of the subsequent mobilizations.<sup>55</sup> Although no one organization linked the successive contingents, a number of people participated in more than one conflict, and some were involved in as many as five or six different wars.<sup>56</sup> Finally, many of the same logistics chains and funding sources (especially Islamic charities) were involved in several different mobilizations.<sup>57</sup>

Testing the second prediction is more complicated. To determine whether a distinct foreign fighter ideology emerged around 1980, I examined recruitment propaganda from 1980s Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Iraq and compared it with similar material from pre-1980 violent Islamist groups and with that of Islamist groups engaged in other forms of violent activism after 1980. I chose Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Iraq because they represent the largest mobilizations and because they are chronologically well distributed insofar as each occurred in a different decade.

Following John Wilson, I focused on three aspects of the recruitment messaging: diagnosis (what is wrong), prognosis (what needs to be done), and rationale (who should do it and why).<sup>58</sup> Given the large number of available documents, I relied on a sample of texts deemed by observers and participants as particularly influential at the time of the mobilization. For 1980s Afghanistan, this meant Abdallah Azzam and the magazines produced by

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salafisme-jihadisme" [Jihad in Afghanistan and the emergence of salafi jihadism], in Rougier, ed., *Qu'est-ce que le Salafisme?* [What is Salafism?] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008).

55. Arab Afghan first movers include Abd al-Rahman al-Dawsary and Anwar Shaban in Bosnia, Samir al-Suwaylim (Ibn Khattab) in Tajikistan and Chechnya, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin in Algeria, Osama bin Laden in pre- and post-2001 Afghanistan, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Yasin al-Bahr in Iraq. See Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Evan F. Kohlmann, "The Role of Islamic Charities in International Terrorist Recruitment and Financing," *DIIS Working Paper* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2006).

58. John Wilson, *Introduction to Social Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).



Arabs in Peshawar, given that Azzam was by far the most influential and prolific proponent of Arab involvement in Afghanistan and that Peshawar was the base of the Arab-Afghan community.<sup>59</sup> For Bosnia, I looked at the statements of Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Dawsary (“Barbaros”) and recruitment videos from the 1992–95 period. Al-Dawsary was neither as prolific nor as influential as Azzam had been in the 1980s, but he was arguably the principal first mover and the most visible spokesperson of the Arab contingent in Bosnia.<sup>60</sup> For Iraq, I examined texts by Abu Umar al-Sayf and internet recruitment videos issued in 2003 and 2004. The Chechnya-based al-Sayf was not personally involved in the Iraqi insurgency, but he was one of the most influential advocates of foreign fighter involvement in Iraq.<sup>61</sup>

#### CONTENT OF THE FOREIGN FIGHTER IDEOLOGY

In all three samples, the diagnosis is that the Muslim nation (*umma*) faces an existential external threat. The conflict for which volunteers are sought is but the latest and direst in a series of occupations of Muslim territory and massacres of Muslims. Documents typically contain vivid descriptions of the crimes allegedly being committed in the conflict in question: territory is occupied, women are raped, children and elderly are killed, mosques are desecrated and resources extracted. Documents also list other recent cases of non-Muslim repression of Muslims around the world.

The prognosis is that Muslims fight back militarily in the area in question. Two types of reasons are usually provided. The most important is that Islamic law commands it. Documents cite scripture and classical jurists at length to show that the criteria for military jihad are met. The second oft-provided reason is pragmatic, namely, that the situation is too dire and the enemy too wicked for any diplomatic solution to work.

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59. The prolific Azzam’s most influential tracts were *Signs of the Merciful in the Afghan Jihad*, *Defence of Muslim Lands*, and *Join the Caravan*. Biographical details follow later in this article. The Arab community in Peshawar published a wide range of magazines in the 1980s. See Ahmad Muaffaq Zaidan, *The “Afghan Arabs” Media at Jihad* (Islamabad: ABC Printers, 1999). I copied many of the magazines from public libraries in Saudi Arabia in 2004.

60. I rely on statements by al-Dawsary, quoted in Kohlmann, *Al-Qaida’s Jihad in Europe*; and “Interview with Sheikh al-Mujahideen Abu Abdel Aziz,” *Al-Sirat al-Mustaqeem*, No. 33 (1994). See these sources for biographical information on al-Dawsary. Numerous recruitment videos from Bosnia have been digitized and published online by activists since the early 2000s. I collected many of these from various websites from 2002 onward.

61. See especially Abu Umar al-Sayf, “Maqasid al-jihad wa anwauhu” [Objectives and types of jihad], 2003, <http://www.tawhed.ws>. For al-Sayf’s biography, see Murad al-Shishani, “Abu Omar al-Saif: His Life and after His Death,” *Jamestown Chechnya Weekly*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2006). I collected Iraqi recruitment videos from various jihadi websites from 2003 onward.

The rationale is that all able Muslim men worldwide join the fighting because Islamic law requires it. The responsibility for the defense of Muslim territory is shared by all Muslims and not limited to the residents of the contested area. Two types of arguments support the call for solidary action. The first emphasizes the unity of the Muslim nation. Victims are systematically referred to as “our brothers/sisters/mothers/children” as if they were blood relations of the prospective recruits. The second argument invokes Islamic law, declaring fighting an individual religious duty (*fard ayn*) for all Muslims.

It is clear from the available material that Abdallah Azzam is by far the most influential foreign fighter ideologue. Subsequent writers cite and praise him, and later recruitment videos include recordings from his speeches. His texts are emblematic of the foreign fighter doctrine and may thus be used as a basis for a comparison between the foreign fighter doctrine and other jihad doctrines.

#### DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE FOREIGN FIGHTER IDEOLOGY

At the time of its introduction in the mid-1980s, the foreign fighter doctrine differed from existing jihad doctrines in two important ways. First, it offered a diagnosis focusing on an outside enemy, whereas Islamist revolutionary doctrine focused on the enemy within. Prior to 1980, practically all militant Islamist groups fought for regime change in their respective countries.<sup>62</sup> For Islamist revolutionaries such as Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Faraj, jihad was primarily about eliminating corrupt rulers and revoking secular legislation, not repelling external military aggression.<sup>63</sup>

Second, Azzam’s doctrine differed from orthodox Islamic views on jihad by offering a rationale for privatized warfare, for example, divesting national governments of the power to prevent individuals to go abroad for war.<sup>64</sup> Most mainstream Islamic scholars in the twentieth century held that jihad may be declared in cases of clear aggression against Muslim countries by non-Muslim powers, but they stressed that the responsibility for fighting (the individual duty) lies primarily with the local population. For outsiders, fighting was a so-called collective duty (*fard kifaya*), one that is met by the community as a whole

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62. See, for example, Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

63. Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat’s Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986); and Albert J. Bergesen, ed., *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

64. Recognizing the uncodified nature of Islamic law, I define orthodoxy as “the majority view among trained Islamic jurists in the twentieth century.”

and thus not binding for the individual. Outsiders were allowed to fight, pending permission from parents, creditors, and political authority.<sup>65</sup> This last point helps explain why limited foreign fighter mobilizations occurred at all prior to 1980. Pan-Islamic solidarity norms existed long before Azzam, but private military participation was circumscribed by a larger set of theological restrictions.

It is also worth noting that Azzam's doctrine differs from al-Qaida's more recent global jihad doctrine by offering a different prognosis. Whereas Azzam advocated conventional military tactics in confined theaters of war, Osama bin Laden's famous 1998 declaration sanctioned all means in all places.<sup>66</sup>

A good indication that the foreign fighter doctrine represented something substantially new in the 1980s is the controversy sparked by its introduction. As Azzam himself later said, "Some were angry, some were pleased, some re-proved. Our brothers scolded us and sent a storm in our face, saying 'You are urging the youth to rebel against us.'"<sup>67</sup> Several prominent Islamist scholars, such as Salman al-Awda, Safar al-Hawali, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, disagreed with Azzam's individual duty argument, saying non-Afghans might be allowed or even encouraged to fight in Afghanistan, but they were not obliged to do so.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw ideological disagreement between revolutionaries and foreign fighters over whether to confront Muslim regimes or non-Muslim occupiers.<sup>69</sup> In the late 1990s and early 2000s, foreign fighters argued with al-Qaida over whether to wage a global terrorism campaign against the United States or fight conventionally in Chechnya and Iraq.<sup>70</sup>

Azzam's message resonated in part because all Islamic expressions of politics were on the ascendant in the 1980s. Arab nationalism had been on the decline since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and the 1979 Iranian Revolution had

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65. Rachel Scott, "An 'Official' Islamic Response to the Egyptian al-Jihād Movement," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (February 2003), p. 54.

66. Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (London: Verso, 2005).

67. Quoted in Muhammad, *Al-Ansar al-Arab fi Afghanistan*, p. 89.

68. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 28–29.

69. The prominent revolutionary Jordanian ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi notably discouraged his followers from going to Bosnia and Chechnya, on the grounds that it meant "vacating the fronts near us." Al-Maqdisi, "Hiwar ma al-Shaykh Abi Muhammad al-Maqdisi sanat 1423" [Conversation with Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in 2002], 2002, <http://www.tawhed.ws>.

70. "Qissat 'al-Afghan al-Arab' min al-dukhul ila Afghanistan ila al-khuraj ma Taliban (2)" [The story of the "Arab Afghans" from their entry into Afghanistan to their departure with the Taliban (2)], *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 9, 2004; and Muhammad al-Salim, "La tadhhabu ila al-Iraq!" [Do not go to Iraq!], *Sawt al-Jihad*, No. 7 (2003).

shown that the Islamic revolution was more than a utopia. Moreover, on the Islamist ideological market, the foreign fighter doctrine had the advantage of being closer to Islamic legal orthodoxy on jihad than most other militant Islamist ideologies. In fact, Azzam's ruling that jihad is an individual duty for all in case of outside invasion was arguably more similar to the classical medieval jihad conception than was the twentieth-century orthodoxy, which conceded veto power on the matter to the nation-state, a modern innovation. Azzam's doctrine was also much less controversial than Sayyid Qutb's revolutionary Islamism because the struggle Azzam envisaged—defense of Muslim territory from non-Muslim aggression—was the same as that assumed in orthodox jihad doctrines.<sup>71</sup> By contrast, revolutionaries proposed killing nominally Muslim rulers, a theologically much more problematic project. Moreover, the guerrilla tactics envisaged by the foreign fighter doctrine were much easier to reconcile with classical Islamic rules for warfare than were the terrorist tactics of many other militant Islamist groups.<sup>72</sup>

Why, then, did Azzam's doctrine not mobilize more people? One obvious reason is that it had to compete with other ideologies and forms of identification. Local, national, and regional political concerns still preoccupied most ordinary people. Moreover, Azzam's doctrine faced a very influential competing theological view on the issue of whether or not participation in foreign conflicts constitutes an individual duty for all. As indicated above, the vast majority of Islamic scholars considered participation in other Muslims' wars of national liberation a collective duty, one that was subject to authorization from the prospective recruit's government, parents, and creditors. From this point of view, going abroad for jihad without permission is a sin. Although there are reasons to be skeptical about the constraining power of ideology, this doctrinal point has an observable effect on recruitment, as documented by a recent study of parental consent to jihad participation in Pakistan.<sup>73</sup> The notion of collective duty thus provides significant obstacles to participation for the motivated and ample excuses for the not so motivated. The collective duty argument predominated because it was promoted by governments and religious establishments, which understandably did not wish to relinquish religious au-

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71. David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 122–123; and Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Marcus Wiener, 1996), pp. 104, 125.

72. John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 97–124.

73. Victor Asal, C. Christine Fair, and Stephen Shellman, "Consenting to a Child's Decision to Join a Jihad: Insights from a Survey of Militant Families in Pakistan," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 31, No. 11 (November 2008), pp. 973–994.

thority. Thus Azzam's doctrine was not uncontroversial, but it did provide a rationale for those who wished to act as foreign fighters.

Based on the above, I conclude that there exists a distinct Muslim foreign fighter doctrine that was articulated only in the 1980s. The post-1980 proliferation of foreign fighters was thus most likely linked to the emergence of a social movement that provided first movers and ideology for subsequent mobilizations. But where did the first movers and their ideas come from?

### *Origins of the Foreign Fighter Movement*

The question of the origin of first movers and their preferences is usually avoided by scholars of civil war.<sup>74</sup> Most studies focus not on first movers but on late joiners, for good reasons. First, probing the origin of ideologies involves the intangible world of ideas, where observable data are scarce and endogeneity concerns are rife, making it difficult to test arguments. Second, understanding late joiners is more important for explaining large-scale conflict. Third, in most civil wars the same types of ideological motivations recur, making the motivations of first movers relatively uninteresting. For foreign fighters, however, the role of first movers and ideology is so large it cannot be left unexplored. The difficulty of establishing causality should not stop scholars from proposing well-founded hypotheses.

In this section, I offer an explanation for the origin of the first movers and their ideas. Although not explicitly theorized, my explanation draws on the literature on social movements and the literature on nationalism, the two main academic traditions that address the question of movement formation. I share the assumption of many social movement scholars that movement initiation requires some combination of political opportunities, organizing structures, and cultural frames.<sup>75</sup> My core concern, however, is the specific origin of the organizing structures and cultural frames, topics that the social movement literature usually does not address in detail.<sup>76</sup> To explain the motivations of the

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74. David D. Laitin, "National Revivals and Violence," in John R. Bowen and Roger Petersen, eds., *Critical Comparisons in Politics and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 59.

75. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

76. Much of the social movement literature on movement emergence is really about movement early growth, not movement initiation in the strict sense. There has been limited theorizing on first movers and their motivations. See, for example, Doug McAdam, "'Initiator' and 'Spin-off' Movements: Diffusion Processes in Protest Cycles," in Mark Traugott, ed., *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995).

first movers and their particular choice of ideological discourse, I draw on the nationalism literature on elite competition and outbidding.<sup>77</sup>

It is important to note that this section seeks to explain not the mere occurrence of foreign fighter involvement in Afghanistan, but the emergence of a movement large enough to outlive the war. I also do not intend to explain all stages in the mobilization. I am concerned with the initial formation of the movement (i.e., the period between 1979 and 1985). Once a community of foreigners had been established in Peshawar and a recruitment discourse articulated, many factors other than Hijazi pan-Islamism shaped the pattern and scale of the mobilization.

#### THE HYPOTHESIS

My hypothesis is based on three observations. First, I note the substantive disconnect between foreign fighter ideology and the ideologies usually identified as its ancestors, such as Qutbism and Wahhabism. The Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) advocated revolution in Muslim states; he rarely mentioned conflicts with non-Muslims other than in Palestine, and at no point did he call on people to join other Muslims' wars of national liberation.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92) and his exegetes in the twentieth-century Saudi religious establishment wrote about doctrinal and moral purification of Muslims, not about international politics.<sup>79</sup> As late as 1950, Wahhabi clerics did not even consider non-Wahhabis as Muslims, much less as brothers in a united Muslim nation.<sup>80</sup> Contrary to widespread perceptions, official Saudi clerics never declared it an individual duty for all Muslims to fight in 1980s Afghanistan or any other subsequent conflict (though they, along with mainstream scholars in many other countries, usually declared it a duty to support Muslim insurgents).

Second, I note the existence of a body of writings from the 1970s and early 1980s whose content is reminiscent of the foreign fighter discourse. In this period, publications issued by international Islamic organizations (IIOs) were full of articles reporting the plight of Muslims around the world. These magazines

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77. See, for example, Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion, and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); and Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

78. See, for example, Bergesen, *The Sayyid Qutb Reader*; and Sayed Khatab, *The Power of Sovereignty: The Political and Ideological Philosophy of Sayyid Qutb* (London: Routledge, 2006).

79. David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

80. Reinhard Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus Im 20. Jahrhundert* [Islamic internationalism in the 20th century] (London: E.J. Brill, 1990), p. 123.



called for financial contributions in much the same way that the foreign fighter literature called for recruits.

Third, the same community that produced these publications also provided humanitarian support for Muslim victims of war or disaster around the world. Representatives of the Muslim World League and its affiliated charities were notably on the ground helping Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the early 1980s, long before the foreign fighters arrived in significant numbers. By contrast, representatives of the Wahhabi religious establishment were absent from Pakistan and Afghanistan until the end of the 1980s.

I thus posit the existence of a pan-Islamic identity movement that emerged in moderate form in the 1970s and produced a violent offshoot in the 1980s.<sup>81</sup> I further suspect that the pan-Islamist movement emerged through some of the same dynamics that brought about other identity movements, notably elite competition and outbidding. Given that IIOs in the 1970s were staffed by highly educated people, this may be a case of elite competition between transnational activists, on the one hand, and incumbent religious and political elites in Muslim countries, on the other. I hypothesize a simplified chain of events leading to the emergence of the first Arab Afghans and their ideology (figure 1). Below I elaborate on this chain of events and explain the mechanisms involved in each link.

#### THE RISE OF THE PAN-ISLAMIST MOVEMENT

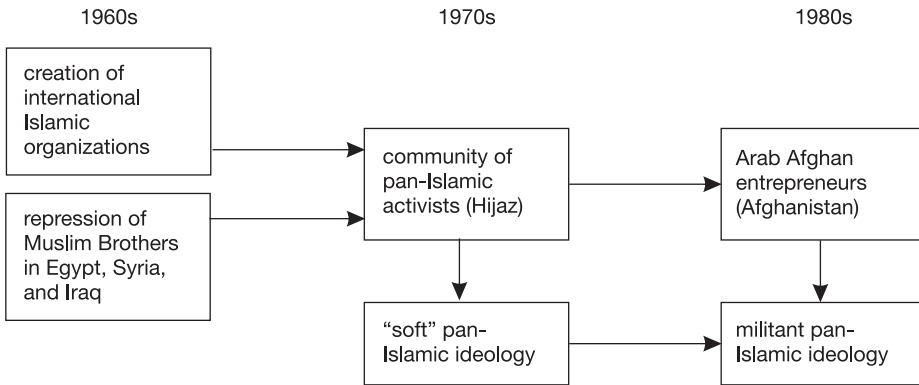
The idea that all Muslims are one people is as old as Islam, and since the nineteenth century, political actors have harnessed the notion of the *umma* for a variety of purposes.<sup>82</sup> The pan-Islamist movement described here must therefore be distinguished from earlier manifestations of pan-Islamism, especially the early-twentieth-century attempts by Islamists to restore the Caliphate and the 1960s foreign policy doctrine of Saudi King Faisal. Caliphists sought a formal political union of Muslim countries; King Faisal sought foreign policy coordination among Muslim governments. The pan-Islamist movement of the

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81. On identity movements, see Simon Langlois, "Identity Movements," in Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, eds., *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (New York: Elsevier, 2001). On supranational identity movements, see Louis L. Snyder, *Macro-Nationalisms: A History of the Pan Movements* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1984).

82. See *Quran* 3:110; T. Cuyler Young, "Pan-Islamism in the Modern World: Solidarity and Conflict among Muslim Countries," in J. Harris Proctor, ed., *Islam and International Relations* (London: Pall Mall, 1965); Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (Oxford: University Press, 1990); and James Piscatori, "Imagining Pan-Islam," in Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri, eds., *Islam and Political Violence: Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 27–38.

Figure 1. Origin of First Moves and Ideology of the Foreign Fighter Movement



1970s sought neither; its aim was to foster popular awareness about Muslims’ standing in the world and cooperation between Muslims worldwide. This being said, King Faisal’s foreign policy doctrine and Hijazi pan-Islamism were related insofar as the former laid the institutional foundations for the latter.

The movement emerged in the late 1960s in a cluster of religious institutions based in the western Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia. These institutions had been set up in the 1960s for a variety of reasons. The Muslim World League was created in Mecca in 1962 by entrepreneurial remnants of the caliphist movement.<sup>83</sup> In 1969 King Faisal’s anti-Nasserist diplomatic efforts led to the foundation of the Organization for the Islamic Conference (headquartered in Jidda).<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, the rapidly expanding Saudi education sector brought large universities to the region, notably the International Islamic University of Medina, founded in 1961. The year 1967 saw the foundation of King Abd al-Aziz University in Jidda and its incorporation of the College of Sharia in Mecca (later Umm al-Qura University). By 1970 the Mecca-Medina-Jidda triangle was home to the world’s largest concentration of Islamic religious institutions. So many, in fact, that Saudi Arabia did not have the human resources to staff them.

Fortunately for Saudi Arabia, the expansion of the Hijazi religious sector was shortly preceded by the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab republics, which led thousands of Islamists to seek refuge in the kingdom.<sup>85</sup> A first wave of immigration occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s following

83. For more on this body, see Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus Im 20. Jahrhundert*.

84. For more on the organization, see Naveed S. Sheikh, *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

85. Stéphane Lacroix, “Les champs de la discorde: Une sociologie politique de l’islamisme en

crackdowns on the Brotherhood in Egypt (1954 onward), Iraq (1958 onward), and Syria (1958 onward). A trickle of immigrants continued throughout the 1960s, until a second major wave of Egyptians arrived in the early 1970s following newly instated Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat's 1971 release of Egyptian Islamists from prison. These well-educated men found employment in Saudi schools and universities and formed the backbone of the kingdom's education system in the 1960s and 1970s. Exiled Muslim Brothers notably filled most teaching positions at the King Abd al-Aziz University in Jidda and its Mecca annex, and they were strongly represented in the International Islamic University of Medina.<sup>86</sup> They would also make up a significant portion of the staff in the international Islamic organizations. The Hijaz, already relatively cosmopolitan as a result of the annual Mecca pilgrimage and maritime trade through the Jidda seaport, became an enormous melting pot of international Islamists.

Most of these highly educated activists had limited prospects of influence in any domestic political arena. The exiled Muslim Brothers were unwelcome in their home countries. Even the Saudis who worked in the IIOs or the Hijazi universities were to some extent politically peripheral to a system where consequential decisions were taken by royals in Riyadh, and the highest religious prestige was reserved for the Wahhabi aristocracy in the central Najd region. The Hijaz-based Islamists thus constituted a marginalized elite. They did, however, have the opportunity to work internationally. The IIOs offered a platform for the exportation of ideas and personnel, and Saudi leniency toward Islamists allowed them to receive visitors from abroad.

Out of this dual opportunity emerged a pan-Islamist social movement with two partially overlapping organizational components. The first and most institutionalized was the IIOs, in particular, the Muslim World League and its numerous daughter institutions. The Muslim World League was mandated with the global promotion of Muslim solidarity and enjoyed a generous budget for this purpose, especially after the 1973 oil crisis.<sup>87</sup> The second structure was the Muslim Brotherhood's so-called International Organization (al-Tanzim al-Duwali), which crystallized in late-1970s Hijaz and was formally established in 1982.<sup>88</sup> This secretive body was set up to coordinate among the various na-

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Arabie Saoudite (1954–2005)" [Fields of discord: A political sociology of Islamism in Saudi Arabia (1954–2005)], Ph.D. dissertation, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, 2007, pp. 193–195.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 203; and Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus Im 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 158.

87. Kepel, *Jihad*, p. 72.

88. Husam Tammam, "Al-Tanzim al-Duwali lil-Ikhwan . . . al-wad wal-masira wal-mal" [The Brotherhood's International Organization . . . the promise, the course, and the result], *Jadal*, 2006, <http://www.jadal.org/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=160>.

tional branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and to expand the Brotherhood's international influence. It became the core in a wider international network of Muslim Brothers preoccupied by international as opposed to domestic politics.

Aside from Reinhard Schulze, few scholars have paid attention to the Hijazi pan-Islamist community, and even fewer have viewed it as having interests and preferences partly distinct from those of the Saudi government or the Wahhabi religious establishment.<sup>89</sup> Practically all of the literature speaks of a generic "Saudi support" for the Afghan jihad as if all the money and people who left Saudi Arabia was dispatched and controlled by the Saudi government or some Wahhabi Comintern—a perception owing much to the fact that the kingdom remained virtually inaccessible to foreign social scientists until 2002. Since then, field research has shown that the Saudi religious sector is considerably more decentralized, and government bureaucracy more segmented, than previously assumed.<sup>90</sup> Although the IIOs were located in and partly funded by Saudi Arabia, they exercised considerable autonomy so long as their activities remained international. This would have been especially true for mid- and low-level IIO employees, not least abroad. Writing about the Muslim World League in early-1980s Peshawar, Afghanistan expert Gilles Dorronsoro noted that "Saudi Arabia, the most important donor, did not appear to control the use of its funds closely, and local employees were generally identified with the Muslim Brotherhood. Additionally, the Saudi Red Crescent was funded directly by the Saudi government, but here too the personnel often belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood tendency."<sup>91</sup> This is not to say that Saudi authorities played no role in, or bear no responsibility for, the Arab mobilization to Afghanistan, only that the degree of centralized government supervision was lower than suggested by the existing literature.

The Hijazi activists had a strong interest in increasing public awareness of global Muslim affairs. The higher the importance attached to pan-Islamic issues by the public and by incumbent elites, the larger the budgets and political role of the IIOs. The Muslim Brotherhood also stood to gain domestically in some countries from a surge in popular pan-Islamism, given that the foreign policy of incumbent regimes was constrained by realpolitik. This was not least the case in Egypt, where the Sadat regime had initiated an unpopular peace process with Israel in 1978.

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89. Schulze, *Islamischer Internationalismus Im 20. Jahrhundert*.

90. See especially Lacroix, "Les champs de la discorde"; and Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010).

91. Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 133.

To increase awareness of global Muslim affairs, these activists constructed a pan-Islamic identity discourse emphasizing the unity of the Muslim nation and highlighting outside threats.<sup>92</sup> Like many other identity discourses, it was alarmist, self-victimizing, conspiratorial, and xenophobic. It was a victim narrative that highlighted cases of Muslim suffering around the world, paying particular attention to what Samuel Huntington called “fault line conflicts.”<sup>93</sup> No one ideologue can be credited with articulating the discourse; rather it developed gradually through incremental rhetorical escalation. Many of its themes echoed those of earlier pan-Islamists and anticolonial activists, but the Hijazi pan-Islamist discourse was more alarmist and more global in outlook than any of its predecessors. The following extract from a speech by Muslim World League Secretary-General Muhammad Ali Harakan from April 1980 is representative: “Jihad is the key to Muslims’ success and felicity, especially when their sacred shrines are under the Zionist occupation in Palestine, when millions of Muslims are suffering suppression, oppression, injustices, torture and even facing death and extermination campaigns in Burma, Philippines, Patani, USSR, Cambodia, Vietnam, Cyprus, Afghanistan, etc. This responsibility becomes even more binding and pressing when we consider the malicious campaigns being waged against Islam and Muslims by Zionism, Communism, Free Masonry, Qadianism, Bahaism and Christian Missionaries.”<sup>94</sup>

This message was spread through a massive propaganda effort whose centerpiece was a range of magazines with a global distribution. Most important was the Muslim World League weekly *News of the Muslim World* and the monthly *Journal of the Muslim World League*, published in both Arabic and English (for Asian and African audiences), but many other IIOs had their own magazines. Both the quality and distribution of these magazines increased markedly in the late 1970s as a result of increased budgets and new technologies. By the early 1980s, they were printed on glossy paper and were full of close-up color photographs of wounded Muslim women and children, something that presumably increased their impact. Every magazine contained calls for charitable donations to the causes covered. The Muslim Brotherhood also stepped up publishing in the 1970s with its two flagship magazines *al-Mujtama*, published in Kuwait from 1969, and *al-Dawa*, produced in Egypt

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92. William Ochsenwald, “Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Revival,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (August 1981), p. 281.

93. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 207.

94. Muhammad Ali Harakan, “Duty of Implementing the Resolutions,” *Journal of the Muslim World League*, No. 6 (1980), pp. 48–49.

from 1976. Faultline wars and Muslim solidarity appeals constituted a large proportion of the coverage in the late 1970s and early 1980s, though unlike the IIO magazines, these publications (and especially the less-censored *al-Mujtama*) also covered domestic Muslim politics.

Governments tolerated the diffusion of pan-Islamist propaganda because it vilified primarily non-Muslim powers, not Muslim governments. For Muslim politicians, there was little to gain and much to lose by trying to stem populist pan-Islamism. Instead, allowing or encouraging it had the benefit of diverting attention from domestic political problems. As a result, some governments, especially Saudi Arabia, were periodically caught in bidding games with the pan-Islamist community over declared concern for the well-being of the Muslim nation.<sup>95</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that the international political developments of the late 1970s and early 1980s gave the pan-Islamist message empirical credibility and thus a wider popular reception. This period saw new conflicts such as Lebanon and Afghanistan with unprecedented levels of objective Muslim suffering measured in war deaths. It also saw continued tension on the highly symbolic Arab-Israeli front, with Israeli incursions into Lebanon in 1978 and 1982. Although firm indicators are hard to come by, there is much to suggest that the above-mentioned propaganda efforts helped spread pan-Islamist norms to a broad Arab and Muslim public in the 1970s and 1980s. In Saudi Arabia, for example, charitable donations to foreign Muslim causes increased dramatically in this period, often at a higher rate than gross domestic product.<sup>96</sup>

The pan-Islamists also sought to practice pan-Islamic solidarity by providing aid to Muslims in need around the world. The 1970s and early 1980s saw the growth of a vast network of Islamic charities, most of which were administered by IIOs.<sup>97</sup> Much like secular Western charities, these organizations monitored the humanitarian situation around the Muslim world and were prepared to rapidly deploy to any area in the event of a crisis. Such a crisis

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95. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 16.

96. Abd al-Rahim Mahmud Jamus, *Al-lijan al-shabiyya li-musaadat mujahidiy Filastin fil-Mamlaka al-Arabiyya al-Saudiyya* [The popular committees for the support of Palestine's mujahideen in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] (Riyadh: Darat al-Malik Abd al-Aziz, 2001), p. 56.

97. See Abdel-Rahman Ghandour, *Jihad humanitaire: Enquête sur les ONG Islamiques* [Humanitarian jihad: Inquiry into the Islamic ONG] (Paris: Flammarion, 2002); Jonathan Benthall and Jérôme Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); and J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).



emerged after the April 1978 communist coup in Afghanistan and the Soviet invasion in late December 1979.

#### THE FIRST ARAB AFGHANS

The popular Muslim narrative of Arab involvement in the 1980s Afghan jihad speaks of an immediate and spontaneous rise of the Muslim nation in response to the Soviet invasion.<sup>98</sup> The historical evidence tells a different story. The foreign fighter mobilization occurred in the second half of the 1980s; only a few tens of Arabs came to fight between 1980 and 1984.<sup>99</sup>

The first Arab Afghans were not fighters, but humanitarian workers dispatched by the Hijaz-based Islamic charities. Between 1980 and 1984, a few hundred such workers arrived in Peshawar to assist Afghan refugees. A number of delegations from the Muslim World League and from the International Islamic University of Medina would also come to assess the situation.<sup>100</sup> Organizations from a few other countries were also involved, but the majority of charity workers in the first four years came from the Hijazi pan-Islamist community.<sup>101</sup> Incidentally, the Hijaz would provide most of the Saudi fighters known to have gone to Afghanistan before 1987.<sup>102</sup>

The principal first mover of the fighter mobilization was by all accounts the above-mentioned Abdallah Azzam.<sup>103</sup> The Palestinian preacher, who moved to Pakistan in November 1981, was not the first Arab to take an interest in the

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98. Author interviews with various Saudi Islamists, Riyadh, 2004–06.

99. Abdallah Azzam, *Ayat al-Rahman fi jihad al-Afghan* [Signs of the Merciful in the Afghan jihad] (Maktabat al-Risala al-Haditha, 1986), p. 185; Muhammad, *Al-Ansar al-Arab fi Afghanistan*, p. 79; Abdallah Anas, *Wiladat al-Afghan al-Arab* [The birth of the Afghan Arabs] (London: Saqi, 2002), p. 31; and Abu Musab al-Suri, *Dawat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya al-alamiyya* [The global Islamic resistance call] (Islamist websites, 2004), p. 716.

100. See, for example, Muhammad al-Majdhub, *Ma al-mujahidin wal-muhajirin fi Bakistan* [With the mujahidin and the emigrants in Pakistan], 1st ed. (Medina: Nadi al-Madina al-Munawwara al-Adabi, 1984).

101. Muhammad ‘Amir Rānā and Mubasher Bukhari, *Arabs in Afghan Jihad* (Lahore: Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2007), p. 79.

102. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 59–60.

103. For a brief English-language biography of Azzam, see John C.M. Calvert, “The Striving Shaykh: Abdullah Azzam and the Revival of Jihad,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, Supplement No. 2 (2007), pp. 83–102. My article presents new biographical information from interviews with close Azzam family members and aides, and from previously unexploited documents in Arabic, notably Bashir Abu Rumman and Abdallah Said, *Al-alim wal-mujahid wal-shahid al-Shaykh Abdallah Azzam* [The scholar, mujahid, martyr Sheikh Abdallah Azzam] (Amman: Dar al-Bashir, 1990); Husni Adham Jarar, *Al-Shahid Abdallah Azzam: Rajul dawa wa-madrasat jihad* [The martyr Abdallah Azzam: Man of Dawaa and school of jihad] (Amman: Dar al-Diyya, 1990); Muhammad Abdallah Amir, *Al-Shaykh al-Mujahid Abdallah Azzam: Al-Rajul alladhi tarjama al-aqwal ila afal* [The mujahid Sheikh Abdallah Azzam: The man who translated words into deeds], 1st ed. (Kuwait: Maktabat Dar al-Bayan, 1990); Abu Mujahid, *Al-Shahid Abdallah Azzam bayna al-milad wal-istishhad* [The martyr Abdallah Azzam from birth to martyrdom] (Peshawar: Markaz al-Shahid Azzam al-Ilami,

military (as opposed to humanitarian) dimension of the Afghan jihad, but he was by far the most effective entrepreneur in the crucial early phase.<sup>104</sup> Azzam is known in the Islamist community as the spiritual father of the Arab Afghans, and the contemporary historical evidence supports this reputation. He arrived in Pakistan in 1981, produced recruitment literature from 1982 onward, gave talks about Afghanistan in the Arab world from 1983 onward, and established the foreign fighter logistics office known as the Services Bureau in Peshawar in late 1984. The significance of these initiatives is evidenced by the fact that most of the fighters who went to Peshawar before 1986 seem to have been inspired by Azzam's writings or helped by the Services Bureau, or both.<sup>105</sup>

Although there is some evidence of earlier or parallel attempts by others to mobilize foreign fighters, no other person or network seems to have had nearly the same success at long-distance mobilization in the pre-1985 phase.<sup>106</sup> Azzam's influence was amplified by two factors: first, his status as a religious scholar and, second, his links with the pan-Islamist community. The former gave his writings an impact that lay entrepreneurs, however articulate, could not achieve. The latter gave him access to resources and recruitment arenas that less well connected individuals did not have.

Azzam's own involvement in the Afghan cause illustrates the role of the international Muslim Brotherhood and the Muslim World League in the early mobilization. Azzam was a West Bank Palestinian who fled to Jordan during the 1967 war. Although Azzam spent most of the 1970s in Amman, he had strong links to the Hijazi pan-Islamists. He worked briefly in Saudi Arabia as a

1991); and Adnan Ali al-Nahawi, *Abdallah Azzam: Ahdath wa mawaqif* [Abdallah Azzam: Events and positions] (Riyadh: Dar al-Nahawi, 1994).

104. In addition to Kamal al-Sananiri mentioned below, Azzam was preceded by the Egyptian Islamist journalist Mustafa Hamid Abu al-Walid, who reportedly made contact with the Afghan commander Jalaluddin Haqqani in mid-1979 and worked to spread Arab awareness of Afghanistan through his articles in the Abu Dhabi-based *al-Ittihad* newspaper. See Vahid Brown, *Abul-Walid al-Masri: A Biographical Sketch* (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007).

105. Muhammad, *Al-Ansar al-Arab fi Afghanistan*.

106. As mentioned earlier, Jalaluddin Haqqani had a small network of contacts in the Gulf in the very early 1980s, but this network drew no more than a handful of people. Maria A. Ressa wrote that Hashim Salamat, founder of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, sent 1,000 Filipino Bangsamoros to Afghanistan in 1980. See Ressa, *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al-Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia* (New York: Free Press, 2003), p. 126. Although I do not question the existence of an early Filipino recruitment structure, I consider this number highly implausible given the absence of contemporary reports from Pakistan or Afghanistan on Filipino arrivals. There is also evidence of Pakistani recruitment for the Afghan jihad as early as 1979, although this constituted short-distance mobilization. See Mohammed Amir Rana, *A to Z of Jehadi Organizations in Pakistan* (Lahore: Mashal Publishing, 2005). I thank Vahid Brown for these references.

teacher in 1968; he frequented Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood circles during his studies in Cairo from 1970 to 1972; and he participated in international Muslim Brotherhood meetings in the late 1970s.<sup>107</sup> In early 1981, he was forced to resign from the University of Jordan and encouraged to leave Jordan because of his political activism. He emigrated to Saudi Arabia, where his Muslim Brotherhood contacts secured him a job at King Abd al-Aziz University in Jidda. By Azzam's own account, the inspiration to move to Pakistan came from a chance meeting in Mecca in September 1981 with Kamal al-Sananiri, a senior Egyptian Muslim Brother who had just returned from an information-gathering trip to Pakistan on behalf of the Brotherhood.<sup>108</sup> Al-Sananiri intended to move to Pakistan a few months later and convinced Azzam, whom he knew from Brotherhood meetings in the 1970s, to join him. Al-Sananiri never made it to Islamabad because he was arrested and killed by Egyptian police as he returned to Cairo to pick up his family.<sup>109</sup> Azzam, now determined to move to Pakistan, obtained a teaching position at the newly established International Islamic University of Islamabad, whose foreign faculty were paid directly by the Muslim World League.<sup>110</sup> Thus, from his arrival in Pakistan in December 1981 until his permanent move to Peshawar in 1986, the leader of the Arab Afghans subsisted on a Muslim World League salary.

It is unclear what made Azzam call for the involvement of foreign fighters as opposed to just more financial support for Afghanistan. He may have genuinely believed that the twentieth-century Islamic legal orthodoxy on jihad—which gave nation-states a veto on their citizens' foreign military activities—was wrong. After all, the classical legal tradition did not mention nation-states. Moreover, as a stateless individual twice forcibly displaced, and as a native of an occupied territory that neighboring governments had failed spectacularly to liberate, he had few reasons to entrust states with the defense of the Muslim nation. He may also have had a more instrumentalist motive, namely, to encourage the creation of a transnational fighting force that could eventually support other Muslims under occupation, such as those in his native Palestine. Azzam had spent a year among the Palestinian fedayeen

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107. Little is known about Azzam's 1968 stay in Saudi Arabia, which is only reported in Abu Rumman and Said, *Al-Alim wal-mujahid wal-shahid al-Shaykh Abdallah Azzam*, pp. 150–151; and Amir, *Al-Shaykh al-Mujahid Abdallah Azzam*, p. 55.

108. Interviews by author with Azzam family members, Amman, 2006.

109. Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Fursan taht rayat al-Nabi" [The knights under the Prophet's banner], *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 3, 2001.

110. Interview by author with former Azzam aide, Islamabad, 2008. Azzam's obituary described him as an "MWL [Muslim World League] education adviser" at the time of his death. Rumman and Said, *Al-Alim wal-mujahid wal-shahid al-Shaykh Abdallah Azzam*, p. 137.

fighters on the Jordanian-Israeli border in 1969 and was deeply committed to armed struggle against Israel.<sup>111</sup> In fact, he always viewed Palestine as a more important battlefield than Afghanistan, though as an inaccessible one.<sup>112</sup>

A key reason why Azzam's recruitment message resonated in the 1980s was that it echoed the soft pan-Islamic discourse to which large numbers of people had been exposed for a decade. For someone who believed that Muslims were threatened and should help one another, it was not such a big cognitive leap to think that the help might include military assistance. After all, that was what Muslim states were doing by supplying billions of dollars' worth of arms to the Afghan mujahideen.

To judge the significance of Azzam and the Hijazi pan-Islamists, one might consider a counterfactual scenario in which they are absent.<sup>113</sup> State support for the Afghans would have remained the same, but foreign fighters would have been much less numerous, and the foreign fighter doctrine much less influential. Egyptian and Syrian revolutionaries would have arrived in search of a safe haven, but their pariah status would have prevented them from traveling and fundraising internationally in the way Azzam did. One of them might have articulated a doctrine similar to Azzam's, but it would have been a layperson with limited religious authority. (Azzam was the only Arab cleric actively recruiting for Afghanistan.) In sum, the foreign fighter community would have consisted primarily of premobilized revolutionaries along with a few adventurous souls. A small transnational network of militants would have outlived the war, but most likely not as the broad movement that exists today.

How inevitable was the emergence of the Muslim foreign fighter movement? On the one hand, the foreign fighter doctrine was a natural extension of pan-Islamism, whose rise was based on a broad set of factors, many of which were structural. The only truly contingent external event affecting the growth of pan-Islamism was arguably the 1973 oil crisis, which gave the Hijazi IIOs access to vast financial resources. On the other hand, the foreign fighter phenomenon would likely not have taken the proportions it did without contingent factors such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the presence of

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111. Abdallah Azzam, *Hamas . . . al-judhur al-tarikhiyya wal-mithaq* [Hamas . . . Historical roots and charter] (Amman: unknown publisher, 1990).

112. Even his most famous fatwa on jihad in Afghanistan explicitly stated that "any Arab able to fight in Palestine must start there." Abdallah Azzam, *Al-difa an aradi al-muslimin: Ahamm furud al-ayan* [The defense of Muslim lands: The most important of individual duties] (Alexandria: Maktabat al-Iman, 1987).

113. On counterfactual hypothesis-testing, see James D. Fearon, "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (January 1991), pp. 169–196.

Abdallah Azzam the individual. In sum, then, the emergence of a foreign fighter phenomenon was overdetermined, but its scale was not.

### *Conclusion*

This article revises the causal story about the rise of transnational jihadism. Past accounts placed great emphasis on the ideas of Sayyid Qutb, on Wahhabism, and on state support for the Afghan jihad, explanations that, as I have shown, are insufficient. Instead, I trace the origin of the foreign fighter phenomenon to a pan-Islamist identity movement that arose in 1970s Hijaz through a process of elite competition.

This finding arguably affects scholars' understanding of the very nature of transnational Islamist militancy. It notably allows us to transcend the debate over the relative importance of religion and politics in fueling jihadism, a debate that, at its most polarized, opposes those who view al-Qaida as an obscure cult of violence and those who see it as a natural response to Western policies in the Muslim world. Transnational militancy is obviously ideology driven, but the ideology in question—extreme pan-Islamism—arguably has more in common with nationalisms than with utopian religious constructions. Conversely, certain Western policies in the 1990s and 2000s have likely fueled transnational militancy, but only because there existed an extreme sensitivity to such policies in the first place. Besides, the actions of non-Western, non-Muslim armies—such as the Russians in Afghanistan and Chechnya, Israelis in Palestine, and Serbs in Bosnia—have arguably done at least as much as U.S. foreign policy to nourish the pan-Islamist victim narrative.

By analytically isolating foreign fighters as an actor category, the article also introduces much-needed conceptual nuance to the study of transnational militancy. The distinction between foreign fighters and international terrorists notably allows scholars to show that, although foreign fighters and al-Qaida hail from the same pan-Islamist mother movement, they do not have exactly the same political preferences. Crucially, the two communities have often competed over resources, usually to the detriment of the latter.<sup>114</sup> It also reveals that foreign fighters consistently enjoy higher levels of popular support across the Muslim world, and thus recruit and fundraise more easily than al-Qaida.<sup>115</sup> The existence of links and movement of individuals between the two

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114. Hegghammer, "'Classical' and 'Global' Jihadism in Saudi Arabia."

115. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, pp. 133–138, 223–225.

categories does not reduce the value of the analytical distinction; if anything, it calls for more research into the nature of those links.

At least two important policy implications emerge from these findings. First, those seeking to prevent foreign fighter recruitment need to recognize that the recruitment message relies not primarily on complex theological arguments, but on simple, visceral appeals to people's sense of solidarity and altruism. Western governments should therefore worry less about the spread of ultra-conservative Salafism than about populist anti-Western reporting by the television network al-Jazeera and the rapid spread of audiovisual propaganda on the internet. Moreover, a long-term policy to stem foreign fighter recruitment must include strategies to undermine pan-Islamism, for example, by spreading awareness of factual errors in the pan-Islamist victim narrative and by promoting state nationalisms and other local forms of identification. Second, Western policymakers would be well advised to adjust their public diplomacy to the reality that the majority of Muslims view foreign fighters and international terrorists differently. The Western tendency to conflate the two has been a major source of communication problems between the West and the Muslim world since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. At the same time, both Western and Muslim governments must continue to prevent foreign fighter activism, because most al-Qaida operatives begin their careers as war volunteers.

Although the aim of the article was not primarily theoretical, it may have identified the contours of a future theory of foreign fighters. Two key components seem crucial for the occurrence of large-scale global foreign fighter mobilizations: first, an ideology stressing solidarity within an imagined transnational community; second, a strong cadre of transnational activists. The first is relatively common, but the second is not, because states rarely allow such cadres to form. There are arguably only two non-Muslim cases of large-scale, global and private foreign fighter mobilizations in the twentieth century, namely, the International Brigades in the 1930s Spanish Civil War and the Jewish volunteers in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. In both cases, the mobilization was driven by strong cadres of transnational activists, in the form of the Comintern and the Jewish Agency, respectively. Like the Hijazi pan-Islamists, these organizations enjoyed partial autonomy from states, while having access to state-like resources and privileges. All three cadres emerged in rather exceptional circumstances: the Comintern in 1919 just after the Russian Revolution, the Jewish Agency in the 1930s against a backdrop of Nazi persecution, and the Hijazi pan-Islamists in the 1970s in a young and rapidly expanding Saudi state. For other transnational identities to generate new foreign fighter phe-

nomena in the future, they would need similarly well-organized, well-funded, and autonomous cadres.

Meanwhile, the Muslim foreign fighter movement faces mixed prospects. On the one hand, increased government repression, notably in Saudi Arabia (following the 2003 terrorism campaign in the kingdom), makes large-scale mobilizations somewhat less likely in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the internet makes foreign fighter propaganda increasingly widely available, and the cost of travel remains low. Thus the next time a major conflict erupts in the Muslim world, expect to see foreign fighters again.



Appendix. Insurgencies and Wars in the Muslim World 1945–2010

Location	Dates	Opponents	Religious Difference	Islamist Insurgents at Outset	Dead	Global Foreign Fighters	Regional Foreign Fighters	Origin
Indonesia 1	1945–46	Indonesia vs. Netherlands	yes	—	n/a	—	—	
Yemen 1	1948	Imam Yahya vs. Opposition	—	—	4,000	—	—	
Kashmir 1*	1948	Pakistan vs. India	yes	—	7,500	—	—	
Palestine 1*	1948	Arab coalition vs. Israel	yes	—	20,000	—	yes	Egyptians (Syrians, Jordanians)
Indonesia 2	1950	Indonesia vs. South Moluccas	—	—	n/a	—	—	
Tunisia	1952–54	Tunisia vs. France	yes	—	2,000	—	—	
Morocco 1	1953–56	Morocco vs. France	yes	—	n/a	—	—	
Indonesia 3	1953	Indonesia vs. Darul Islam	—	yes	n/a	—	—	
Algeria 1	1954–61	Algeria vs. France	yes	—	182,500	—	yes	Tunisians
Suez*	1956	Egypt vs. Britain/France/Israel	yes	—	2,100	—	—	
Indonesia 4	1958–60	Indonesia vs. Darul Islam et al.	—	—	33,400	—	—	
Lebanon 1	1958	Nasserites vs. Chamoun	—	—	1,400	—	—	
Iraq 1	1959	Iraq vs. Shammar tribe	—	—	2,000	—	—	
Iraq 2	1961–74	Iraq vs. Kurds	—	—	n/a	—	yes	Kurds
Algeria 2	1962–63	Algeria vs. Kabylia	—	—	500	—	—	
Yemen 2	1962–69	Socialists vs. Royalists	—	—	n/a	—	—	
Sudan 1	1963–72	Sudan vs. Anya Nya	yes	—	n/a	—	—	
Indonesia 5	1965–	Indonesia vs. West Papuans	—	—	n/a	—	—	
Kashmir 2*	1965	Pakistan vs. India	yes	—	5,000	—	—	
Chad 1	1965–	Chad vs. National Liberation Front of Chad et al.	—	—	35,600	—	yes	Islamic Legion
Palestine 2*	1967	Arab coalition vs. Israel	yes	—	5,400	yes	—	
Philippines	1968–	Moro National Liberation Front/Moro Islamic Liberation Front vs. Manila	yes	partly	n/a	yes (90s)	—	
Jordan	1970	Fedayeen vs. Jordan	—	—	n/a*	—	—	
Kashmir 3	1971	Pakistan vs. India	yes	—	11,200	—	—	
Pakistan 1	1971	East vs. West Pakistan	—	—	n/a	—	—	
Palestine 3*	1973	Arab coalition vs. Israel	yes	—	11,100	—	—	
Pakistan 2	1973–77	Pakistan vs. Baluch	—	—	8,600	—	—	

Cyprus*	1974	Turkish vs. Greek Cypriots	yes			n/a	—	—
Morocco 2	1975–88	Morocco vs. Polisario	—			13,000	—	—
Lebanon 2	1975–90	Various militias	—		Shiite	144,000	yes	—
Indonesia 6	1975–99	Indonesia vs. East Timor	yes			75,000	—	—
Bangladesh	1976–97	Bangladesh vs. Shanti Bahini	—			1,200	—	—
Ogaden 1*	1977–78	Somalia vs. Ethiopia	yes			45,000	—	—
Turkey 1	1977–80	Leftist vs. Rightist Militias	—			n/a*	—	—
Iran 1	1978–79	Islamists vs. Shah	—		Shiite	n/a*	—	—
Iran 2	1979–93	Iran vs. Kurds	—			n/a	—	—
Afghanistan 1	1978–92	Mujahideen vs. Soviet Union/Kabul	yes		yes	495,000	yes	—
Iran-Iraq*	1980–88	Iran vs. Iraq	—			644,500	—	—
Somalia 1	1981–91	Mogadishu vs. Clans	—			n/a	—	—
Lebanon 3*	1982	Lebanon vs. Israel	yes			n/a*	—	—
Sudan	1983–	Khartoum vs. Sudan People's Liberation Army	yes			58,200	—	—
Turkey	1984–99	Turkey vs. Kurds	—			34,300	—	—
Yemen	1986–87	Socialist militias	—			n/a	—	—
Palestine 4**	1987–93	Palestinians vs. Israel	yes		yes	1,600	—	—
Kashmir 4	1989–	Pakistan vs. India	yes		yes	n/a	yes	(90s)
Senegal	1989–	Senegal vs. Casamance	—			1,300	—	—
Gulf War*	1990–91	Iraq vs. International Coalition	partly			29,000	—	—
Xinjiang	1991–	China vs. East Turkestan	yes		yes	n/a*	—	—
Indonesia 7	1991–	Indonesia vs. Free Aceh Movement	—			4,500	—	—
Sierra Leone	1991–	Various militias	—			14,200	—	—
Somalia 2**	1991–2005	Various militias	—			n/a	yes	—
Afghanistan 2**	1992–2001	Masud vs. Hekmatyar, Taliban vs. Northern Alliance	—		yes	n/a	yes	—
Azerbaijan	1992–94	Baku vs. Nagorno Karabakh	yes			n/a	—	—
Bosnia	1992–95	Bosnians vs. Serbs/Croats	yes			44,800	yes	—
Tajikistan	1992–97	Islamists vs. Government	—		yes	30,200	yes	—
Algeria	1991–	Islamists vs. Government	—		yes	n/a	yes	—
Djibouti	1993–94	Djibouti vs. Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy	—			700	—	—
Pakistan 3	1993–99	Sindh vs. Mohajirs	—			n/a	—	—
Yemen 3	1994	North vs. South Yemen	—			n/a	—	—
Chechnya **	1994–	Chechens vs. Russia	yes			92,100	yes	—
Chad 2	1994–98	Chad vs. Southern Rebels	—			n/a	—	—

Appendix (Continued)

Location	Dates	Opponents	Religious Difference	Islamist Insurgents at Outset	Dead	Global Foreign Fighters	Regional Foreign Fighters	Origin
Kosovo	1998–99	Kosovo Liberation Army vs. Serbs	yes	—	4,000	yes	—	
Eritrea	1998–2000	Eritrea-Ethiopia	partly	—	50,000	yes	—	
Palestine 5 **	2000–	Palestinians vs. Israel	yes	—	6,400	yes	—	
Afghanistan 3 **	2001–	Taliban vs. United States/NATO/Kabul	yes	yes	19,800	yes	—	
Iraq **	2003–	Sunnis vs. United States/Baghdad	yes	yes	13,500	yes	—	
Darfur **	2003–	Sudan Liberation Movement/Justice and Equality Movement vs. Khartoum	—	—	n/a	—	—	
Somalia 3 **	2006–	Shabab vs. Transitional Federal Government/Ethiopia	partly	yes	3,600	yes	—	
Lebanon 4 **	2006	Hezbollah vs. Israel	yes	Shiite	1,300	—	—	
Lebanon 5 **	2007	Fath al-Islam vs. Government	—	yes	n/a	yes	—	

NOTES: I added Iraq, Darfur, 2006 Lebanon, and post-2006 Somalia, which erupted after the Correlates of War and Fearon and Laitin stopped counting. At the risk of sampling on the dependent variable, I added the two Palestinian intifadas (1987–93 and 2000–ongoing) and 2007 Lebanon, which did not meet Fearon and Laitin’s criteria for insurgency, but were widely perceived in the Muslim world as major conflicts. I counted Chechnya as one conflict instead of as two, because it was widely perceived as such in the Muslim world.

No asterisk: insurgencies (Fearon and Laitin); \* interstate wars (Correlates of War); \*\* added or adjusted by author

Deaths: Sum of yearly best estimates of battle deaths in PRIO Battle Deaths Dataset 1946–2008, rounded to nearest 100. Where conflict length differed between Fearon and Laitin and PRIO, I used the latter.  
n/a - no best estimate exists; n/a \* - not in PRIO data set