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| Religion and Counter-Terrorism |
| The Islamist Case |
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*Religion and Counter-Terrorism: The Islamist Case*

Introduction

The role of religion in terrorism and counterterrorism has proven to be a difficult area of research. There is a great variation amongst those authors and scholars on what role religion plays, if any, in terrorism. Many international relations theorists maintain that religion motivations are a relic of the past.[[1]](#footnote-1) The arguments that are made by those on either side of the debate can become highly polemical due to the very nature of the topic being discussed. Despite these various traps and nuances, however, the discussions of the role that religion plays in terrorism, and thus in counter-terrorism, must be pushed forward. That is then what will be accomplished with this paper: to push the discussion of the role of religion beyond semantics into a definite discussion of how religion plays into terrorism. Where this paper will focus its analysis is in what has been labeled “Islamist” terrorism. This is not to say that other religions do not serve as inspiration for other terrorist groups, but the phenomena of “Islamist” terrorism has been an important topic of debate since the events of September 11, 2001. A deeper look must be taken at these groups’ motivations, and religion cannot be discounted as one without further empirical investigation.

The aim of this paper then, is to attempt an empirical investigation to understand what role religion plays in the motivations of Islamist groups. I use the cases of three of the most well known terrorist organizations as defined by the U.S. Department of State: Al Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah.[[2]](#footnote-2) Using Silberman’s “Meanings System Approach,” I will examine the published works of the organizations or some of their prominent figures for three variables: the address/appeal to the *umma,* calls to install *shari’a*, and an examination of how they use scripture to justify violence. By doing this, I hope to illuminate some of the ways in which religion can play a role in terrorism.

This paper does not seek to maintain that Islam is the only religion that plays any role in terrorism. It is instead meant to serve as an exploration of the particular phenomena of “Islamist terrorism.” This specific phenomenon has been, and will continue to be a source of scholarly focus in the future. In the following literature review, key terms will first be defined, and then the debate over the role of religion in terrorism will be highlighted. Following this will be the methods that will be used to conduct this study.

Literature Review

One of the first things that must be done is to define just what is meant by the term “terrorism.” Crenshaw notes the variety of meanings that terrorism can encapsulate, and gives a brief overview of the ways in which the term has changed over time.[[3]](#footnote-3) For the purposes of this paper, the definition that shall be used is: “terrorism is deliberate and systematic violence performed by small numbers of people.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

This paper also seeks to deal mainly with Islamist (and, thusly, Islamism) terrorism, so it is necessary to define what “Islamism” is. As with any other “-ism”, there are a number of different definitions of “Islamism.” Among these definitions are the idea that Islam is a system that controls all aspects of life, and that *shari’a* (traditional Islamic law) covers not only life but also all other areas of human life, from government to ethics.[[5]](#footnote-5) Liebl simply defines an Islamist as a “fundamentalist.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Ayoob offers a more nuanced definition when he says Islamism is “a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Ayoob furthers states that Islamists seek to answer societal problems with ideas from “Islamic tradition.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Ayoob’s definition is the one that shall be used in defining Islamism and Islamist for the purposes of describing this ideology.

Now that the terms for the study have been defined, we can continue on to the main debate about the role of religion in Islamist terrorism. In the literature, there seem to be two broad categories into which the authors fall. On one side, the authors fall on the side of religion not being the cause of Islamist terrorism, and instead the causes for violence are due to politics or societal problems (extreme poverty, hunger, etc.). On the other side, the authors find that religion is one of the main driving forces of terror.

Jackson reveals that he has many issues with ways in which the current literature speaks to the topic of “Islamic terrorism.”[[9]](#footnote-9) According to Jackson, the current body of literature exhibits a tendency to draw attention to inaccurate cultural stereotypes, especially regarding Islamic extremism.[[10]](#footnote-10) Mamdani states that it is not possible to read someone’s political outlook from their culture or religion.[[11]](#footnote-11) According to Mamdani, the only way to properly understand terrorism is by looking at broader historical and political perspectives.[[12]](#footnote-12) Ehrlich and Liu investigate the causes of terrorism from a mainly geo-political angle, regarding oil and history as terrorism’s more important factors.[[13]](#footnote-13) Frisch writes that Islam plays more of a “mobilizing and recruiting” role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but is not the source of ideological motivation.[[14]](#footnote-14) Mousseau writes that Islam has been manipulated by terrorists to protect privileged statuses by endorsing a sort of “anti-market” ideology.[[15]](#footnote-15) Shapiro and Fair note that in Pakistan, there is no evidence to connect personal religiosity and support for Islamic militancy.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Others believe that religion plays a significant role in motivation of Islamist terrorists. Crenshaw makes a psychological argument for her case, stating that group solidarity and ideological commitment are very important factors in terrorism.[[17]](#footnote-17) She also notes that newer styles of terrorism tend to be religiously motivated, and that these forms of terror are “more fanatical, deadly, and pervasive” then previous forms of terrorism.[[18]](#footnote-18) Likewise, Pearce notes that religious conflicts tend to be more intense than other forms of conflict.[[19]](#footnote-19) Silberman, Higgins, and Dweck note that religious terrorism has been the source of more intense violence and more deaths than from secular terrorist organizations.[[20]](#footnote-20) Silberman also notes that within Islam, the establishment of *shari’a* can be a method for world change.[[21]](#footnote-21) Cliteur simply states that Islamist terrorism is religious terrorism because the perpetrators present religious reasoning in order to justify their actions.[[22]](#footnote-22) Rid notes that Islamists’ ideology acts as a strong binding force among the leaders of terrorist organizations.[[23]](#footnote-23) Kruglanski and Fishman note that the use of terrorism requires a supporting belief system, and among the ideologies that can be used to support these beliefs is religion.[[24]](#footnote-24) Horowitz also notes that, in some cases, religion can play an important part in conflicts.[[25]](#footnote-25) He also notes that religion has the ability to infuse its adherents with a sense of purpose that can lead to longer and more costly conflicts than other forms of conflict.[[26]](#footnote-26)

All of these authors disagree about whether religion is the cause of terrorism. What these authors have not done is investigate the specific religious motivations involved in Islamist terrorism, and it is here that exists a research gap. By examining more specifically the religious motivations, what it is about Islamist version of Islam that draws recruits, we can better understand an important and understudied area of Islamist terrorism.

Methodologies and Hypotheses

To investigate the motive of Islamist terrorists, I will use Silberman’s “Meanings System Approach” to evaluate a number of different cases to look for specific variables that these authors have suggested. Silberman’s Meanings System Approach describes religion as a system that is similar to other value systems in their structure and function, but religion is unique in its ability to focus on what is sacred, as well as its ability to give its adherents meaning. The Meanings System Approach seeks to explain four things: The meaning of world change to a group and the methods they will use to achieve it, the differences amongst religious groups, the “complexity and malleability of religious systems”, and the means by which religious groups either promote the status quo or support peaceful/violent activism.[[27]](#footnote-27) For this project, the focus is on the meaning of world change to groups and their methods to achieve it. The methods by which groups either support peaceful/violent activism would be analyzed. Silberman has written extensively on the use of religion as a values system (for more information, see “Religion as a Meaning System: Implications for the New Millennium” in the *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 61.4 Dec. 2005). Using Silberman’s approach, I will be able to examine qualitatively what ways Islam contributes to the Islamist ideology.

So working from this approach, I propose to look at several aspects of religious Islamism that would be looked at for their abilities to explain religious motivations for the terrorist activities of Islamist groups. The first variable that would be explored would be the groups’ appeals or addresses to the *umma* (variable 1). Shani defines the *umma* as “an association of Islamic societies that share the same …values and seek to integrate them into social and political life.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Crenshaw notes that shared ideologies and group solidarity are important to terrorist organizations[[29]](#footnote-29), and by appealing to the largest unit of Islamic solidarity, it is a method by which Islamist groups could seek to change the world. Another variable that would be examined is the desire to implement *shari’a* (variable 2)*.* This is one of the major platforms of Islamist discourse, and would be one of the main ways in which they would seek to shape the world. Cliteur also called for trying to discern whether there is evidence for violence in group’s religious tradition.[[30]](#footnote-30) If we examine how literally these groups take their scripture (examination of fundamentalist attitude) or if they invoke religious concepts supporting the use of violence (variable 3), we can see if this literalistic worldview is used to justify violence, making it another method by which Islamist groups seek to change the world.

I will test the cases of three terrorist groups and some of their main ideologues to see if these variables help explain their attitudes and methods towards world change. These will consist of three groups that are listed as foreign terrorist groups by the United States Department of State: Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah. These groups have been chosen since they appear to be at least outwardly religious and there is a significant amount of material about each group available to the public. The analysis of these groups will be taken from a crucial case study method. If these groups do not exhibit any of the variables mentioned above, then any role that religion may play in terrorism is minimal and can be largely dismissed. In this research, these groups represent a diverse group of organizations from across the Islamist spectrum. Al-Qaeda is a Sunni, transnational terrorist group. Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) and Hezbollah (Party of God) have more nationalist aims, but still claim an Islamic nature. As this paper is exploratory in nature, these groups will serve as good crucial test cases and should provide some interesting results.

The material that will be examined for each of these organizations will consist of foundational documents (charters, creeds,etc.) and ideological statements (statements of the groups’ beliefs). These documents will contain the overall goals and principles of an organization. The more of the variables present, then the more likely that this group will be seeking world change, and the more likely they will be to use violence to obtain it. There are several results that I expect to see as a result of this analysis. I will propose these as a series of hypotheses based on Silberman’s ideas and the variables I proposed above.

*Hypothesis 1:* the groups in question will view world change in a religious sense. Any way in which the world changes, the group will seek to fit it into the terms of “for” or “against” Islam.

*Hypothesis 2:* these groups will attempt to change the world in accordance with their specific religious beliefs. If the group exhibits an apparently fundamentalist mindset, they will seek to change the world in very specific way.

*Hypothesis 3:* If the group manifests a fundamentalist outlook, they will be more willing to use violence to achieve world change. This will be evident in their writings and speeches.

*Hypothesis 4:* Islamist terrorist groups will attempt to appeal to the *umma* in an attempt to change the world.

*Hypothesis 5:* There will be a correlation between groups that wish to enforce *shari’a* law and a fundamentalist worldview.

Occurrences of each variable will be examined after each entry. Support for Hypotheses 1-5 will be examined after each of the entries. The meanings of each of the findings will be discussed in the conclusions and implications section at the end of the paper.

Case 1: Al-Qaeda

This organization is one of the most famous terrorist organizations in the entire world. It leaders, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden are some of the most well know terrorist figures in the world today. The group was initially founded in 1989, and dedicated itself to fighting enemies of non-Islamic governments. What follows is an examination of some of Al-Qaeda’s primary ideological documents that exhibit some of their leaders’ opinions and beliefs.[[31]](#footnote-31)

*Al-Qaeda’s Creed and Path*

This document first appeared on a website, and has since been republished in several places.[[32]](#footnote-32) This document details a list of Al-Qaeda’s specific beliefs and goals. In this document, we can see evidence of variables 2 and 3. Variable 2, the calls for *shari’a,* is used at one point in the document. In point 19 of this creed, the author states that any ruler who does not rule according to the *shari’a* to be an infidel.[[33]](#footnote-33) There are however a fair number of occurrences of variable 3 throughout the document, however. In point five, the author lays out how the only authority that can be relied on for proper governance is God[[34]](#footnote-34), and in points 33-35, the author states that *jihad* is a completely legal and encouraged way to achieve the goals of al-Qaeda.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Hypothesis 1 is supported in this document in point 26, when the author states how they view the world as being divided into two distinct parts: the abode of Islam and the abode of the infidels,[[36]](#footnote-36) as well as when they discuss how Muslims who engage in politics are infidels, etc. It can be seen that any kind of world change is essentially viewed in the sense of religion. Hypothesis 2 is supported by the fact the evidence that al-Qaeda believes that *jihad* is the method by which to best affect world change. Hypothesis 3 finds support from the statements about *jihad* as well as from the occurrences of variable 3. We can also see evidence for Hypothesis 5 since there is evidence that the group supports the installation of *shari’a* and that it supports the use of *jihad* to change the world.

We find that there is support for hypotheses 1-4 in all of the entries in the al-Qaeda case. There is evidence from the different entries presented throughout the Al-Qaeda case to support Hypothesis five as well. In most of the previous entries, some mention has been made of a desire to implement *shari’a* law, and there has been ample evidence to support a use of religious concepts to support violence (fundamentalist outlook). It is fair to then say that the case of Al-Qaeda supports Hypothesis 5.

“*Osama bin Laden’s Oath to America”*

In this ideological document, bin Laden focuses his message on how the world views the death of Americans and Muslims differently, and that with the invasion of Afghanistan the West has gone to war with Islam. This interview originally aired on October 7, 2001, on Al-Jazeera after the first American airstrikes against the Taliban. [[37]](#footnote-37) We can see in this short tract, there are occurrences of both appeals/addresses to the *umma,* along with use religion to justify violence. Evidence for hypotheses 1, 3, and 4 were found as well.

Support for variable 1 can be found at the beginning of bin Laden’s oath when he claims that the *umma* has been embarrassed and tormented by the West for over 80 years.[[38]](#footnote-38) He attempts to appeal to the *umma* by claiming that the West has been oppressing and killing the entire community of Muslims. Bin Laden also later exhorts all Muslims to rise up in defense of their religion.[[39]](#footnote-39) Bin Laden also claims that “they” (the West) came to fight Islam and its people while claiming to “fight terrorism,” as well as enjoining all Muslims do what he can to “strengthen” his religion.[[40]](#footnote-40) Support for variable 3 can be seen in several places in this text as well. Bin Laden opens the text by appealing to Allah for support, and that it was Allah himself who was responsible for striking the Twin Towers. He also states that Allah allowed “the vanguard of Islam” to carry out this strike.[[41]](#footnote-41) Also, when bin Laden says that all Muslims should rise up and “hurry to the defense of their religion.”[[42]](#footnote-42)

Evidence for Hypothesis 1 can be seen when bin Laden states that the striking of the Twin Towers was the work of Allah. By saying this, bin Laden is viewing this world changing event in explicitly religious terms. Support for Hypothesis 3 can be seen when bin Laden, at the end of his oath, states that America will never know peace until American armies leave the “land of Muhammad” or the Palestinians know freedom. As we saw earlier, bin Laden states that it was both Allah and Allah’s direct support that allowed al-Qaeda to perpetrate 9/11. We can also see support for Hypothesis 4 when bin Laden makes his appeals to the worldwide community of Muslims to fight the West.

Case 2: Hamas

For those unfamiliar with the Hamas (an acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawamat al-Islamiyyah,* or “Islamic Resistance Movement”), the group has risen to prominence as “the largest and most influential Palestinian movement.” In January 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian Authority’s general elections. The Council on Foreign Relations states that Hamas’ ideology is a mixture of “Palestinian nationalism” and Islamic fundamentalism. [[43]](#footnote-43) To examine this case, we shall examine the Hamas Covenant and a recent ideological statement by the Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya.

*“Hamas Covenant* (1988)*”*

By examining the Hamas Covenant, we find instances of all three variables occurring, as well as support for Hypotheses 1-4.[[44]](#footnote-44) Throughout the Covenant, the authors appeal to all Muslims. Article two of the Covenant states that Hamas is a wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is the both the largest Islamic movement of today as well as embracing all Islamic concepts. In Article Seven, the authors claim that members of the “Islamic Resistance” move all over the world, and because of this, the movement is a universal one. Article 14 calls upon all Muslims, saying that it is the individual duty of all Muslims to liberate Palestine. Article 15 also calls upon all Muslims to take up *jihad,* because it is every Muslims individual duty. There is, however, only one mention of variable 2 in the entirety of the Covenant. Article 11 is the only place in the document that mentions *shari’a*, but states that Palestine is a land governed by *shari’a* and any contradiction to *shari’a* is to be ignored. Variable 3, the literalistic/fundamentalist worldview and mentions of violence, can however be seen throughout the Covenant. In Article 1, the Covenant states that Hamas’ guidance is purely Islamic, and that all of its guidance comes from Islam. Article 3 states that Hamas consists of Muslims who have given their allegiance completely to Allah. Article 5 states that by adopting Islam as a way of life, they are connected back to the very beginnings of Islam. Article 16 shows states that it is necessary to continue to educate children in an Islamic manner to ensure that future generations remain Islamic. Article 27 states that Hamas will remain in conflict with the Palestinian Liberation Organization until it adopts a religious ideology.

*“Hamas PM Ismail Haniya: We Are a Nation of Jihad and Martyrdom”*

This television broadcast is much more recent than the Hamas Covenant. This speech was given on Al-Aqsa TV, the official television station of Hamas, on November 15, 2010. The speech was delivered by the senior Hamas leader and one of two Palestinian Authority Prime Ministers, Ismail Haniya.[[45]](#footnote-45) This clip concerned the ideology of Hamas, and in it we can see evidence for variables 1 and 3, and support for Hypotheses 1-4.

To begin with, there are several instances in which there are occurrences of variable 1. Haniya, states that the “nation” sacrifices their children for the lands of Islam and of Muslims. He also claims that the might of the “nation” is revealed in not only in Palestine, but also in “Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan.” There are several instances of variable 3 as well. Haniya begins the broadcast by stating that “we are a *mujahid* (someone involved in *jihad*) nation….a nation of *jihad.* Our cries are of *jihad*, for the sake of Allah.” Soon thereafter, Haniya claims “this is a nation of martyrdom and martyrdom-seeking, an action for the sake of Allah.”

Hypothesis one is supported when Haniya claims that “the might of *jihad* is revealed in the land of Palestine.” It indicates that Haniya may see the events that happen in the West Bank/Gaza, or the events of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in religious terms. Hypothesis 2 is supported by Haniya’s multiple claims of “for the sake of Allah” in the video. If the actions they perform are for the sake of Allah, then Hamas is attempting to change the world according to their religious belief. Hypothesis 3 is supported by the multiple claims that Haniya makes about the character of the “nation.” He claims that the nation is one of *jihad* as well as a *mujahid* nation. Hypothesis 4 is supported by the several statements that Haniya makes regarding the “might of the nation of *jihad*” as well as how the might of the *jihad* nation is revealed wherever there is a “confrontation with the enemies of Allah.”

As can be seen through the preceding analysis, there is support for Hypotheses 1-4 in the Hamas Covenant. Hypothesis 1 is supported by Article 12, which states that nationalism is viewed as a part of Hamas’ religious creed. Indeed, most of the conflict portrayed throughout the document portrays Hamas as adherents of Allah who are doing his work. Hypothesis 2 is supported throughout the document as well. Article 8, for instance indicates that the goal of Hamas is Allah, the Qur’an its constitution, and that *jihad* is the path by which they will achieve their goals. Hypothesis 3 is supported in the Covenant by the repeated calls Hamas makes throughout the document to fight their enemies, as well as the calls to *jihad.* Hypothesis four is also supported by the multiple statements that claim Hamas’ movement is a universal one, and the duty of *jihad* is an individual duty of all Muslims.

There is support in both of the entries for Hamas to support Hypotheses 1-4. Evidence also supports Hypothesis 5. There are fewer mentions of *shari’a* in the Hamas case, and they are all confined to the Hamas Covenant, but the Covenant indicates that the installation of *shari’a* is one of the organization’s goals. The previously examined evidence also supports a use of religious concepts to support violence (fundamentalist outlook).

Case 3: Hezbollah

Hezbollah is a Shiite organization that is very active in Lebanese politics, holding a number of seats in Lebanon’s parliament. Hezbollah provides a number of social services in Lebanon, and also includes a military wing. The group was founded in 1982, largely as a resistance movement to fight the invading Israelis. The group is considered a foreign terrorist organization by the United States.[[46]](#footnote-46) The group’s name translates to “Party of God.”

*“An Open Letter: The Hizballah Program”*

This letter appeared in the February 15, 1985 edition of the Beirut, Lebanon newspaper *al-Safir*. This letter was later reproduced and addressed to “all the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World.”[[47]](#footnote-47) In this letter there are instances of all three variables, along with evidence to support hypotheses 1-5.

Throughout the entirety of this letter, there are repeated occurrences of the first variable, appeals to the *umma*. The *umma* is looked to for both support and calls to join. The letter even opens with the author pronouncing that the members of Hezbollah are “sons of the *umma*.” The second paragraph of the letter states that they are part of the worldwide Muslim community, and that they are linked together by religious connections. Later, in the “Our Fight” section of the document, the author claims that the members of Hezbollah “declare openly and loudly that we are an *umma* which fears Allah only.” There is only one instance of variable two (calls for shari’a) which occurs in the document, and it is found in the “To the Christians” section of the document, which is aimed largely at the Lebanese Christian community which had been at odds with Lebanese Shi’a at different times throughout Lebanese history. In this section, the author says that Allah had made it “intolerable” for Muslims to live in a country that did not live according to the tenets of Islam or the *shari’a.* There are several instances of variable three (literalistic interpretation of scripture) in this document as well. The primary instance is when the author states that their culture is based on “the holy Qur’an, the Sunna, and the faqih.”

In this document, there is also support for the hypotheses mentioned earlier. Hypothesis 1 finds support throughout the document, as the authors state that they fight on behalf of the *umma.* Hypothesis 2 is supported in the “Our Objectives” segment of the document, which states that the only kind of government that can guarantee justice is an Islamic government. By changing from a secular government to a religious one, the members of Hezbollah seek to change the world according to religious views. Hypothesis 3 is supported as well. The document states that Hezbollah is based on the Qur’an and other Islamic sources, and that each member is willing to engage in “holy war” to protect it. Hypothesis 4 is supported as the group appeals to the *umma* throughout the document, as early as the second sentence of the document. Hezbollah, as seen above, also uses scripture to justify their actions, as well as stating that Muslims must live in a country governed by *shari’a.* This can be seen as support for Hypothesis 5.

*2009 New Political Document*

This document was issued on Nov. 30, 2009, by Hezbollah secretary-general Hasan Nasrallah. It was approved at the Hezbollah general conference, and the full-text English version appeared at the Syrian News Station.[[48]](#footnote-48) According to the statement from Nasrallah at the beginning of this document, it was published in order to establish the political positions of Hezbollah during an “exceptional time filled with transformations.”

In this document, there are no explicit occurrences of any of the variables. Nasrallah, in the introduction, does state that the “Resistance” has changed from a Lebanese “value” into one of that is an “Arabic and Islamic” value, which may indicate an appeal to the *umma*. This is as close as there is in this document to an occurrence of any of the variables. Several news organizations made reference to the fact that it seems that Hezbollah, with the issuance of this document, has begun to moderate its Islamist stance.[[49]](#footnote-49) Other scholars have noted that in recent years, along with publication of this document, that Hezbollah has at least moderated their demands for an Islamist state, but have urged caution in believing that Hezbollah has completely abandoned their Islamist stance.[[50]](#footnote-50)

It can be seen, then, that Hezbollah at first exhibited all of the variables (calls to the *umma,* wish to install *shari’a*, and a very literalistic view of scripture), and that their Open Letter provided support for all of the hypotheses. According to Hezbollah’s New Political Document, it appears that Hezbollah has at the very least moderated its Islamist ideals, or have maybe abandoned them all together. Specific analysis of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper, but several points can be concluded from this. It can be concluded that initially, the rhetoric of Hezbollah viewed world change in very much a religious sense. It is also possible to see that in its early stages, Hezbollah was willing to use violence in order to affect world change. While it appears that Hezbollah has moderated its rhetoric and changed its worldview, at its founding the group defiantly viewed the world in religious terms.

Conclusions and Implications

In each of the previously examined entries (except for Hezbollah’s 2009 New Political Document), we can see that each exhibits at least two of the three variables mentioned at the beginning of the paper (appeals/address to the *umma*, calls for the installation of *shari’a*, and the use of religious concepts as calls to violence). The two variables which seemed to come up most often throughout these sources were appeals to the *umma,* and the use of religious concepts as calls to violence. Variable 2 was present during each of the cases, but there were only a few instances of this variable per entry.

The calls to *umma* by terrorist groups are any obvious indication of how the groups examined here understand the world. When groups address or appeal to the *umma*, they are making a statement to what they view as the world-wide community of Muslims. By attempting to appeal to the world-wide religious community, rather than the community of a specific nation or ethnicity, the group is explicitly appealing to religion. By appealing to this world wide community of believers, Islamist groups hope to use religious motivation to encourage their co-religionists to change the world according to religious belief.

The calls to instill *shari’a* are another indication of how the previously examined groups understand the world. They view the current Western-styles of government that dominate the Middle East to have failed, and in their view, the only way to fix the problem is to instate a religious law. By insisting that a state of religious law be instated, we can see that the previously examined Islamists believe that religion is the only way to change the world for the better.

The use of religious concepts to justify violence is also another way indication of how these groups understand the world. These Islamists view the violent acts they commit as being condoned by the Qur’anic concept of *jihad.* *Jihad,* in the Islamists view, is the way in which they will shape the world, to instill the kind of values that they believe it necessary that the world adopt.

As we have previously seen as well, all five of the proposed hypotheses have support from the examined Islamist groups. As we have previously examined, these Islamist groups view the world, and world change, in terms of religion (Hypothesis 1). These Islamist groups also want to change the world according to their religious beliefs (Hypothesis 2). We have also seen that these groups are more than willing to use violence in order to achieve their desired goals (Hypothesis 3). These Islamist groups also appealed to the *umma* in an attempt to change the world as well (Hypothesis 4). These groups were also willing to use violence in order to impose *shari’a* law (Hypothesis 5).

From these findings, it is possible to see that religion does indeed play some kind of role in the motivation of these Islamist groups. As far as crucial cases are concerned, these cases show that religion is a part of their rhetoric, their ideology, and their motivation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to be able to say exactly how big of a role religion plays in the motivations of these groups. It is now possible to say that at the very least, the ideology of Al-Qaeda and Hamas support viewing world change in religious terms, and that they also support the use of violence as a means to accomplish these tasks. It is possible also to say that at one point in their history, Hezbollah advocated for these same things.

These findings, then, have some implications on counter-terrorism strategy moving forward. We can now see that there is definitely a religious component to the ideologies of these Islamist groups. Counter-terrorism strategies must, therefore, take into account these religious factors. As noted in the literature review, ideological terrorism is more dangerous than previous forms of terrorism have been. Strategies that fail to take into account these ideological factors will never succeed in completely combating terrorism. It is also worth noting that I am not claiming here that these groups are completely motivated by religion, or that is even the most important part of their ideology, but it is but one more important component of counter-terrorism that must be examined.

This paper serves to lay the ground for some very interesting studies in the future. A possible avenue to take this research would be to apply these variables and hypotheses to see if these groups exhibited the same traits or not. Expansion and refinement of this methodology, variables, and hypotheses are also very possible. An interesting case study would be to compare Hamas and the Palestinian Liberation Organization and examine each of them for these variables.

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