Introduction

This book aims to explain how and why jihadism wove its way into a Sunni social fabric in the throes of a leadership crisis. It shows how this new phenomenon is both exploiting and provoking a deep crisis of authority within Sunni Islam. The setting is the predominantly Sunni Muslim city of Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city, with a population of 350,000 inhabitants. Yet the story also encompasses other parts of North Lebanon, as well as western Syria, especially since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011.

When Lebanon's civil war ended in 1990, the country's north fell under the firm grip of the Syrian *imperium*. For the ensuing fifteen years it remained essentially marginalized from both national and regional politics. However, with the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and the subsequent end of the Syrian military occupation of Lebanon, the North has become an arena in which various forces struggle to impose hegemony over Sunni political and religious expression. This book's ambition is to show how, why, and under what circumstances North Lebanon has produced different kinds of jihadi militants over the last fifteen years.

Backed by the West and Saudi Arabia, Rafiq's son, Sa'ad al-Hariri, used his seat in Beirut to construct and lead a broad anti-Assad coalition and champion Lebanon's sovereignty. This bloc became the March 14th Movement, named after the date of a mass

demonstration against the Syrian regime that took place in downtown Beirut on that date in 2005 (a few yards away from the place where Rafiq al-Hariri had been assassinated one month before). His opponents were Bashar al-Assad's regime and its local allies, including the powerful pro-Iranian Hezbollah—named March 8th after the date of their earlier demonstration reaffirming Lebanese solidarity with the Syrian regime and the goal of "Resistance" against Israel.

But al-Hariri and his allies also confronted a number of amorphous Sunni religious networks that were vying to become the new leaders of Lebanon's Sunni community. The fact that all of these forces had ties with political power bases or religious hubs outside Lebanon—political bureaus in Riyad, Damascus, or Teheran; religious centers in Medina or Mecca; Iraqi militant networks in al-Anbar; charities in Doha; even cells meeting in mosque basements in Copenhagen or Sydney—turned North Lebanon into a cauldron in which competing and often irreconcilable regional and transnational interests clashed.

During this period, jihadism emerged and held the ground against a host of foes. At first it took the form of an underground network, then evolved into an armed movement that threatened to upset the internal equilibrium of the Sunni community. North Lebanon thus offers the first example of how jihadism, revolutionary by nature, contrived to seize control of the Sunni community by sidelining its political elite and frightening its middle classes. Each chapter of this book explores, in detail, the importance of interactions between local, regional, and transnational realities in the birth and development of this dynamic.

Since the outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011, thousands of Syrians have sought refuge in the northern Lebanese cities of Tripoli, Akkar, and Dinniyeh. Volunteers from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) also sought a safe haven, but quickly came to the realization that they would have to remain underground if they were to escape the reach of the Syrian regime's local allies. At the end of 2013, Islamist rebels from the Syrian "Islamic Front," as well as radical jihadis from Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Syria) and from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), followed the FSA fighters to North Lebanon. Hezbollah's massive intervention in the Syrian civil war starting from 2012, combined with the influx of Syrian

refugees in North Lebanon, rendered the border between Lebanon and Syria more and more irrelevant, which in turn facilitated the enrollment of young Sunni Lebanese into ISIS's so-called caliphate.

This book also aims to describe how sociocultural dynamics and the strategic objectives of various actors interact and together generate processes of political mobilization in the Levant. Understanding these sociocultural dynamics requires an exploration into the mechanisms fueling Islamist radicalism, including tools of socialization, living conditions, external influences, and regional and transnational solidarities. Strategic dynamics come into focus once we understand the modes of action in which local and regional powers engage—be they the Hariri family, Bashar al-Assad's regime, or the pro-Iranian Hezbollah—as they seek to co-opt and exploit this Islamist militancy, while at the same time shielding themselves from it.

The book thus tries to connect the micro and the macro, the local and the regional, the peripheral and the central, the sociological and the strategic. Only by addressing all of these essential dimensions of Middle Eastern politics—with the aid of exceptional sources and an intimate knowledge of the terrain—does it become possible to decipher, over a period of study of more than ten years, the nature of the profound changes at work in the region.

Analyzing the social and strategic logics that underlie the Sunni predicament in the region, this book reveals the difficulty—but not *impossibility*—of building a liberal Sunni constituency in this part of the Levant. By exploring these issues in their historical, social, and political contexts, this book also endeavors to identify conditions under which such a constituency might emerge, despite the challenges it faces as a result of being caught between, on the one hand, the propaganda of the Syrian regime and of its Iranian allies, who are intent on justifying the scale of their repression, and, on the other, charges of treason from jihadis and many Salafi clerics. As a privileged vantage point for observing the controversies and contradictions at the heart of Sunni Islam, the story of North Lebanon also presages the severe political and social fragmentation that the Syrian civil war has wrought across the region.

What makes North Lebanon such an interesting and troubling setting is what it lacks, or only weakly possesses. It is not an intellectual hub generating new political rhetoric and local innovation.

The region is instead a locus of hybridization, a crucible for multiple influences, and a cradle for mobilization—factors that give it exceptional relevance. The wealth of the region's external connections means that it is not a passive recipient of influences, for these connections run in both directions. The actors who occupy this space are not only at the receiving end of influence, but also themselves influence a range of external communities. To understand the importance of studying such a space, one must attempt to trace the richness of its connections by inductively following how the actors themselves move across these boundaries. By highlighting the paths they follow and the uses they make of various linkages, this book will construct a multidimensional map, depicting both the areas that act as catalysts of influence, and North Lebanon as a whole, as an arena in which a plethora of militant and political agendas intersect.

These regional and transnational influences melded with the preexisting structure of Lebanese politics. In Lebanon, community leaders depend on demographic cores dominated by their confessional group—such as Mount Lebanon, a traditional Christian stronghold, or South Lebanon, home of many Shi'ite Muslims—to exert influence on the national stage. For the Sunni elite, political control over their own community depends very much on the control of the northern Lebanese social and geographic space, where Sunni are more numerous than anywhere else in Lebanon. This book highlights the most significant episodes in this struggle for the control of a geographic and political space that has become the Sunni community's center of gravity in Lebanon. At stake is the ability of Sunni Islam in the Levant to create a unified civilian leadership in a highly fragmented political and religious environment. The region has been particularly important to the Sunni community since the end of the Lebanese civil war, when the influence of Sunni notables who had previously enjoyed local powerbases in the cities of Sidon, Beirut, and Tripoli precipitously declined. The confessional fabric of the area is more complex than Sunni Islamists would have us believe. The dominant demographic is Sunni, certainly, but this observation obscures more than it reveals. The governorate (*muhafaza*) of North Lebanon, whether we are speaking of its urban center, the city of Tripoli, or its rural and mountainous areas, the subdistricts (*cazas*) of Akkar and Dinniyeh, is

also a heterogeneous space: consider the many Christian villages in Akkar; the proximity of the Maronite town of Zghorta; and the existence of the Alawite minority neighborhood of Ba'al Mohsen. This relative confessional and political diversity results in an internal division of space, with militarization arising in mixed areas where invisible borders now separate Sunni villages controlled by Salafi militants from Alawite villages under the sway of militias backed by the Syrian regime.

Methodology

This book is an augmented and updated version of my *Oumma en fragments* (A Fragmented Umma) published in French in 2011 by the Presses Universitaires de France. Two new chapters have been added, as well as other hitherto unpublished material. It is the result of many years of research. My first contact with North Lebanon was in the late 1990s. At the time, I was studying the development of a jihadi identity in the Ayn al-Helweh Palestinian refugee camp for my doctoral dissertation.[1] Relations between the camp sheikhs and religious figures in Tripoli later oriented me toward the unexplored field of Sunni religious circles in North Lebanon.[2] While teaching political science in French universities, I devoted the time between school sessions to investigating the various "Sunni worlds" from a most propitious vantage point—the city of Tripoli and its environs. On each subsequent trip, I tried to preserve the ties made in the previous years and to further broaden my circle of relations. I collected the first data at the beginning of the 2000s and completed the fieldwork in May 2014. This extended period of research was critical, for it enabled me to gain the trust of my various sources, and to familiarize myself with the factors shaping their particular social, political, and economic

[1] See Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam among Palestinians in Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[2] Only the anthropologist Michael Gilsenan had studied the relations between forms of violence and power among the feudal lords of Akkar in North Lebanon, in his fine book, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society* (London and New York: I. B.Tauris, 1995). For an in-depth look at Tripoli's religious and political history, see Tine Gade, "From Genesis to Deintegration: The Crisis of the Political-Religious Field in Tripoli, Lebanon (1967–2011)," PhD diss., Ecole Doctorale de Sciences Po, April 2015.

environments. Repeated trips to Tripoli made it possible to analyze shifts in the positions of different actors that took place as the regional situation evolved and to understand, from within, the constant negotiation between beliefs and opportunism, between strategy and tactics, and between risk taking and preservation. To account for the competition for influence that occurs between different levels of decision-making, I tried to consider individuals of different social backgrounds, searching out the mosque preacher and the former militant, the local notable and the petty criminal, the minister and the local security official.

Among my various institutional interlocutors, I met several times with Wissam al-Hassan, the former head of the Information Branch (*fara'al-ma'lumat*) of the Internal Security Forces (ISF). His able investigations played an important role in uncovering the murderous network behind the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri, making it possible for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to issue an indictment incriminating members of Hezbollah. Despite the numerous precautions he took, Wissam al-Hassan was himself assassinated in 2012 in the Christian neighborhood of Ashrafieh in East Beirut. There is no doubt that he tried to influence my analysis of regional events in general, and North Lebanon in particular—such is the nature of any interview between a researcher and a leading actor. It is part of the researcher's job to understand the factors that might lead such an actor to assume a particular stance in his account of events. Nonetheless, al-Hassan had no doubts as to the sincerity of the religious figures he came to deal with. When asked if he trusted the Salafi sheikhs of the North, his answer was "No!"—illustrating the complexity of power relations within the multifaceted and divided Sunni world that the contradictions of the North encapsulate. In his windowless office at the ISF, he continuously received phone calls soliciting a favor or an intervention, each time engaging his phenomenal memory so as to identify the possible plan and the beneficiary of such an intervention.

In addition to Wissam al-Hassan, many people gave me their trust (or part of it). Like al-Hassan, some were assassinated, Kamal Madhat, representative of Mahmud Abbas in Lebanon, among them. On the other side of the regional political spectrum is Sheikh Sa'ad al-Din al-Ghiyyeh, himself at the crossroads of Jihadi Islamism and collaboration with the Syrian intelligence services, who

was assassinated shortly before this book went to press. As I was recommended to him by Rif'at Eid, Ali's son and the new chief of the Alawite community in Ba'al Mohsen, Ghiyyeh welcomed me several times into his home in the Qubbeh neighborhood, and he provided increasingly dramatic revelations about his intersecting relationships with heads of Syrian intelligence and Syrian jihadi militants. As a combatant who had trained in Abu Nidal's group in the late 1980s, as a jihadi volunteer in Iraq with Zarqawi in 2003, and with close ties to the Alawite community of Ba'al Mohsen (his mother's denomination), the "sheikh" was clearly a man of action, but he was also a seasoned adventurer in the arena of politics. Fearing for his safety (and rightly so), he always carried a miniature revolver in the pocket of his three-piece suit. During one of our last meetings, he claimed that he wanted to submit for approval to his Syrian contacts a "made in the Iranian embassy in Damascus" plan that would make him the leader of Hezbollah in North Lebanon. In 2011, with no explanation, he abruptly put an end to our meetings. I never knew if he took this decision on his own, or if his superiors instructed him to stop talking to me out of fear of his volubility.

I was immersed in work that would serve this book not only time-wise, but geographically as well. In Australia, I made new connections and studied transnational solidarity networks, without which my fieldwork in Lebanon would have been unintelligible. The material for this book encompasses a broad array of documentary sources—hundreds of interviews, sermons, flyers, and legal documents. Chapter 1 in particular is informed by legal documents supplied by lawyers acquainted with the "McDonald's network" affair—over one hundred handwritten pages recording the "confessions" of arrested persons. Likewise, for chapters 4 and 5, I had access to part of the report of the prosecutor in charge of investigating the Fatah al-Islam affair, as well as to the record of the interrogations led by the Popular Committee of the Baddawi camp in Tripoli, after the arrest of suspects in the camp previous to the establishment of the group.[3] Wissam al-Hassan had also

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[3] The posting online on July 20, 2012, of the full indictment, "Bill of Indictment in the Case of Fatah al-Islam," drafted by the judge for the Judicial Council (al-Majlis al-'Adli), Ghassan Munif 'Awaydat, has provided an additional source of valuable information on the founding and development of the jihadi group. See "Bill of Indictment in the Case of Fatah

overseen the writing of a memoir entitled "Fatah al-Islam: From the Cradle to the Grave" (*fatah al-islam: min al-mahad ila al-lahd*), a few pages of which he let me read during an interview in the summer of 2008. On the other side, I also received from Hamas militants testimonials by the families of the group's fighters, which underlined the presumed responsibility of those close to Hariri in North Lebanon. Thanks to the sum of knowledge accumulated patiently over the years, I was able to make both an external and internal critique of these various documents. As the French historian Antoine Prost writes, "One must first be a historian to make a critique of a document, since in essence, it means confronting that document with everything one already knows about the subject it deals with, the place and the time it concerns."[4]

Such a critique thus demanded a certain number of methodological precautions so as to take possible distortions into account: the data obtained may have been extracted under duress, with the result that the "testimonies" of the accused persons were *a priori* to be regarded with caution unless they were confirmed by other sources or, at least, proved consistent with the overall narrative framework that emerged from the questionings. Far from any normative judgment of one person or another's responsibility, I was above all concerned with trying to discern, in concrete terms, how a jihadi group had constituted itself, and gave priority to understanding the conditions that made possible the successive play of encounters between individuals from different backgrounds and professional pathways. The main preoccupation of the officials in charge of the inquiry, by contrast, was to establish the degree of responsibility of persons directly involved in carrying out terrorist acts. They had to gather a maximum number of names as well as practical information on the military materiel used (arms, explosives) in order to reconstitute channels and broaden investigations. For that purpose they employed the action semantics proper to their domain. My work as a researcher was to recreate a part of the social, political, and religious universe, so as to shed light on the circumstances underlying the creation of a

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al-Islam" (*al-qarar al-itihami fi qadiya fatah al-islam*), https://journalismnl.wordpress.com (accessed July 20, 2012).

⁴ See Antoine Prost, *Douze leçons sur l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 59.

terrorist network in North Lebanon, which required a very different vernacular.

It will be up to the reader to judge whether the interpretation given here reflects the respect for objective criteria that has always guided this research. Contrary to postmodern epistemology, the author of these lines believes that social reality *exists*, and that it is possible to objectively reconstruct the perceptions that actors have of it at diverse moments of their actions.

These documents, like the interviews with the lawyers of the accused, are nonetheless of exceptional value. They provide a wealth of information and detail, once one has calibrated the weight of the private code that saturates the text with its own "language game." Pieced together, these documents reveal a progression of events that enable one to follow, over roughly a decade, the evolution of the different categories of actors that "make" Middle Eastern politics today.

Summary

Chapter 1: North Lebanon in *Bilad al-Sham*

The first chapter retraces the main events in the political history of Tripoli, from the period of the French mandate (1920–1943) to after the civil war (1990).[5] Severed from its Syrian hinterland with the advent of modern Lebanon, the city long dwelled in nostalgia for its bygone grandeur until it joined Lebanese political life under the leadership of the al-Karami family. The subsequent civil war put an end to the "politics of the notables," replacing it with the

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[5] *Bilad al-Sham* is a geographic term that denotes what is now Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. Etymologically, the expression means "the left-hand region." It goes back to an ancient usage in central Arabia, where Arabs, standing in front of the rising sun, saw Syria on their left and Yemen on their right. See C. E, Bosworth et al., "al-Shām, al-Sha'm," in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2015, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-sham-al-sham-COM_1031 (accessed April 18, 2015).

According to historian Jean-Paul Pascual, "Before the twentieth century, the expression refers to the geographic area stretching from the Taurus Mountains to the north, the Sinai Peninsula to the south, the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and the Syrian desert to the east." J.-P. Pascual "La Syrie à l'époque ottoman," in *La Syrie d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1980). For ideological uses of this notion, from King Abdallah of Transjordan to Hafez al-Assad of Syria, see Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

hard politics of street militias. One of the latter even dreamed of establishing an Islamic republic in Tripoli, until the Syrian army crushed it in 1985. This historical detour helps us gauge the weight of the massacres in local memory and understand the peculiar relationship that the city has with the Syrian authorities, who view it as an extension of their own society. It is also important to understand that different spheres of authority coexisted, represented by various types of figures: government officials (members of parliament, ministers), street leaders, and sheikhs in the mosques. The concomitance of these spheres of activity persisted into the 1990s, when Sunni businessmen with close ties to the Syrian government became involved in politics, while a new generation of sheikhs attracted a segment of the youth into religious institutes financed by the Gulf countries and the Lebanese diaspora in the West.

Chapter 2: Defending an Imagined Umma: The Path to Terrorism

North Lebanon under Syrian tutelage served as prime territory for the establishment of a transnational jihadi movement, run by expatriate Lebanese communities in Europe (particularly in Denmark) and Australia. With reference to previously unpublished documents, this chapter describes how a jihadi network was established in Tripoli after September 11, 2001. In a restrictive, Syrian-controlled political context rife with ideological agitation, young, restive militants were provided with a motive—defending an imagined Islamic community (umma)—to justify their attacking symbols of Western presence in the city. The formula of "regional domination + political repression" that the Syrian regime concocted to prevent the emergence of a Sunni leadership also facilitated a type of transnational religious identification conducive to terrorism. This chapter highlights and explores this dynamic by illustrating how the local jihadi network managed to increase its destructive power by establishing a relationship with al-Qaeda.

Chapter 3: The Anti-Syrian Movement: Rebuilding a Political Scene

The second chapter describes North Lebanon's transformation after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and the April 2005 withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

This chapter turns to al-Hariri's party (the Future Movement), which, though once banned from the "northern capital" of Lebanon, tried to take back Tripoli with the help of the militant networks that had defended the city against Syrian occupation in the 1980s. Thus, a collective memory of militancy that once saw Yasser Arafat's Fatah, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and Saudi Arabia unite in opposition to Hafez al-Assad was reactivated. With Sunni political and religious expression freed from Syrian chains, Tripoli once again became an open threat to the regime in Damascus.

Chapter 4: The Syrian Regime Reacts: Building Up a Jihadi Network

This chapter analyzes the Syrian regime's reactions to what it considered a threatening and unacceptable situation: the presence of an extremely polarized, Sunni-dominated territory at its borders, one that hosted political and religious networks highly critical of its rule. The chapter uses material gathered from exclusive interviews (some of which were conducted with clerics very close to the Syrian security apparatus) to draw a detailed picture of Syrian dealings with religious actors, as well as with smaller militant groups that had proved their worth in Iraq before arriving in Lebanon in the summer of 2005. It also describes, based on previously unpublished information, how the Syrian regime pressured its proxies to ensure an obedience indispensable to the implementation of the regime's regional policies. Saydnaya prison, on the outskirts of Damascus, played a particularly important role in the recruitment of "volunteers" to serve the regime. This chapter also seeks to clarify how the Syrian regime functions, both inside and outside its borders.

Chapter 5: Jihad and Resistance in North Lebanon: The History of Fatah al-Islam

Chapter 4 looks at the consequences of Syrian policy in North Lebanon through the story of the establishment of Fatah al-Islam, a jihadi group in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared, north of Tripoli. Here we attempt to explain the contradictions and frictions this group raised, both within its own ranks and within local Islamic circles. These conflicts help explain how local dynamics influence the way in which actors fighting for their survival

read and interpret the religious corpus. While some Sunni religious leaders hoped to use this jihadi organization as part of a negotiating process with the Hariri family, in reality the organization represented a grave threat to the March 14 anti-Syrian coalition. The group's true aim was to shatter the Sunni, anti-Syrian confessional movement from within by turning its own militants against the Hariri family—accused of betraying Islam by allying itself with the West. The chapter concludes with a description of the different phases that marked the vicious war between the jihadi militia and the Lebanese army.

CHAPTER 6: THE FAILURE TO CREATE A LASTING SUPPORT BASE FOR THE SYRIAN INSURRECTION

Chapter 5 showed how Sa'ad al-Hariri, with the support of Saudi Arabia, aided the Syrian revolt in the hope of toppling the Assad regime. Sunni networks close to the former prime minister set up a supply line from Tripoli to Akkar, making it possible for the city of Homs—consecrated by some as the "capital of the Syrian revolt"—to resist in face of the soldiers of Bashar al-Assad and the Shi'ite militiamen of the Lebanese Hezbollah. However, by the end of 2013, Syrian pressure on the Lebanese state apparatus succeeded in cutting Homs off from its support base in North Lebanon, thus enabling the Assad regime to take over the city in May 2014. Sa'ad al-Hariri, isolated and faced with the combined tactics of the Lebanese army and Hezbollah, was compelled to abandon his policy of supporting the Syrian revolt. The impossibility of exercising Sunni leadership in Lebanon thus opened the door to a plethora of religious networks avid to proclaim themselves the "defenders of Sunni Islam" in the region.

The Use of Weberian Ideal Types to Better Understand Mobilizations

Rather than impose the very broad and imprecise category of "Islamism" on the communal and regional divisions within North Lebanon, we have forged three Weberian-inspired ideal types—the *muqatil* (local combatant), the *muqawim* (resistance fighter), and the *mujahid* (jihadi)—that enable us to get a better grasp of the situation.

The 1978 Iranian revolution promoted the *muqawim* as a representative of revolutionary, third-worldist Islam aiming to oust Western influence in the region. The *muqawim* built a power system linking Tehran to the eastern Mediterranean, taking as his Lebanese representatives the pro-Iranian Lebanese Hezbollah. In concert with the Pasdaran (the Iranian Revolutionary Guard), Hezbollah has been fighting in Syria since January 2012 in defense of the Assad regime.

The *mujahid* emerged from the Afghan jihad of the 1980s that attempted to build a power base in Greater Syria. Through informal networks, he claims to defend the whole Islamic community (umma) against the West and against secular Muslims. Beyond the al-Qaeda organization, the *mujahid* is currently exploiting the Syrian civil war to build an underground organization and base of power.

Finally, the *muqatil* symbolizes an attitude of local defiance toward external aggression. He lacks a sophisticated ideology, drawing his identity instead from his concrete environment and conceptualizing his fight as against an alien intruder. While the *muqawim* and the *mujahid* attempt to impose their reading of religion on other Muslims by force, thus defining themselves as Islamic militants, the fighter assumes an Islamist or non-Islamist outlook depending on his political socialization and preferences.

These categories are only meant to function as an aid in understanding the political reality of the Arab Middle East. Obviously, they do not correspond to the more complex reality on the ground, where individuals and groups may even pass from one form to another as shifting circumstances dictate.

Journalists and observers have noted the spillover of the Syrian crisis into Lebanon. This observation works in reverse as well, for the conflicts that underlie the civil war in Syria were already present in Lebanon in the 2000s. During the Independence Intifada of 2005, segments of the population staged a peaceful demonstration to express their desire for emancipation from Lebanese leaders organically tied to the regime in Damascus and the Syrian-Iranian alliance. This dual aspiration for national sovereignty and political liberalism was stalled in Lebanon by the Hezbollah's countermobilization, as it would be also in Syria by the same organization beginning in late 2011, a few months after the start of the first peaceful demonstrations.

In 2006 a jihadi movement, Fatah al-Islam (FAI), began at a decisive moment to undermine the dynamics of emancipation from Assad from within the Sunni community itself. In 2012 and 2013, Jabhat al-Nusra, and then the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in turn came to blur the message of opponents to the Bashar al-Assad dictatorship. The resemblance between these two forms of Sunni jihadism goes further, however, than the mere fact of being exploited by the Syrian regime. Through its territorialization of North Lebanon in 2007, jihadism, which until then had preferred underground operations, foreshadowed a strategic transformation that would be confirmed, ultimately, by the declaration of an Islamic caliphate in April 2013.

The two movements also display internal similarities. Each at its core is made up of former members of secular organizations who were won over by radical Islam—volunteers from Palestinian factions in one case, and former soldiers of Saddam Hussein in the other. In the religious bodies of the two movements one remarks a high proportion of youths from the Gulf, an instance being the role played by the Bahraini Turki al-Benali in ISIS's religious structure.[6] A resemblance is also apparent in the internal structure of Fatah al-Islam and ISIS, both having an extremely hierarchical and bureaucratized *modus operandi* based on a multitude of committees—a religious committee, a security committee, a military committee, a coordination committee, and so on.

These points of convergence did not come about by chance. FAI was the Lebanese-Syrian branch of a tree planted by Zarqawi in Iraqi soil. FAI leaders were former companions of the founder of al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, established by proclamation (and with Osama bin Laden's benediction) in October 2004. Some of them fought the American army in Iraq, in one of many jihadi groups reunited within a Mujahidin Advisory Council (Majlis

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[6] A Bahraini born in September 1984, Turki al-Binali is considered ISIS's main religious ideologue. Early in the first decade of the 2000s, he studied for a year and a half at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Dubai until his arrest and expulsion from Bahrain. He continued his religious studies in Lebanon at the small Imam al-Awzai Institute in Beirut, from which he graduated. He rounded out his education at the Bahrain Legal Studies Institute. Biographies available on the Internet say that he studied with Saudi Sheikh Abdallah bin Jibrin and the jihadi Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. See Cole Bunzel, "The Caliphate's Scholar-in-Arms," *Jihadica*, http://www.jihadica.com/the-caliphate%E2%80%99s-scholar-in-arms/ (accessed July 23, 2014).

Shura al-Mujahidin) set up in late 2005. After al-Zarqawi's violent death on June 7, 2006, in an American air raid, the Egyptian Abu Hamza al-Muhajir—whose name will recur throughout this book—came to replace him. In October 15, 2006, the council announced the creation of the Islamic State in Iraq, with al-Qaeda as its main component. This was the first attempt by jihadis in the Arab world to govern a territory—at that time, the Islamic State's dream map included the main Sunni Iraqi provinces, as well as less homogeneous territories such as Diyala and Baghdad, but it did not extend beyond the Sykes-Picot border. In 2007, perhaps bowing to council pressure, al-Muhajir swore allegiance to Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, "emir" of the Islamic State in Iraq.[7] This move was approved neither by Bin Laden, nor by his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, signifying a divorce between jihadism in the region and the "historic" or central al-Qaeda organization.[8] Abu Umar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir were killed in April 2010, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became the new emir. On April 9, 2013, al-Baghdadi declared himself the caliph of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria—a clear sign that the Jabhat al-Nusra that appeared in Syria a year before was a mere emanation of the Iraqi matrix.[9]

Two significant differences, however, distinguish the two experiences. In 2007, institutional and political Sunnism in Lebanon counterbalanced jihadism, preventing contagion from spreading from North Lebanon to the rest of the country. Discredited by the events of May 7, 2008, when Hezbollah attacked the offices of the

[7] In an online audio recording, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, who succeeded Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi as head of al-Qaeda in Iraq, swore allegiance to Abu Umar al-Baghdadi in 2006. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WG7l03tgcA. (accessed in 2006).

[8] In a video recording one year later, in 2007, Ayman al-Zawahiri admitted that al-Qaeda no longer existed as such in Iraq and that the Islamic State group was henceforth independent. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwzvUQtTNoo (accessed May 2007).

[9] The Jabhat al-Nusra (Salvation Front) leader, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, refused to swear allegiance to the new "caliph" of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. According to jihadi groups specialist Romain Caillet, "The Nusra Front leader, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, did not respond favorably as he was anxious to maintain his leadership of the organization. He admitted that he had . . . benefited from funds, weapons, and fighters sent by ISI. He also sought to preserve the jihadi identity of the Nusra Front, ending his statement with a 'renewal of allegiance' to Ayman al-Zawahiri" (who supported al-Julani against al-Baghdadi's claim). See R. Caillet, "The Islamic State: Leaving al-Qaeda Behind," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=54017, December 27, 2013.

Future Movement in the capital, institutional Sunnism would be hard put to do the same Lebanon today.

The second distinction, internal to the jihadi sphere, has to do with the definition of the enemy. Faithful to Zarqawi's teaching, ISIS espoused a hatred of Shi'as just as ardent as the enmity it directed against Westerners and secular Muslims, whereas the leader of Fatah al-Islam did not dare to take the same stand in Lebanon, for reasons explained in this volume.[10] His Lebanese and Syrian successors in North Lebanon have jettisoned this reticence, leaving us fearing the worst for the future of the country and the region.

A Note on the Transcription of Arabic

An attempt has been made to follow a simplified version of the guidelines used by the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. For ease of reading no 'ayn is used at the beginning of Arabic given names (thus Abdallah, *not* 'Abdallah). For proper names already familiar in English, current usage has been followed (e.g., Frangieh, *not* Farandjiyya; Absi, *not* 'Absi). Similarly, for place names ending in the Arabic *ta-marbuta*, an "h" has been added better to reflect the pronunciation of the Syrian-Lebanese dialect (as in the cases of Ayn al-Helweh and Dinniyeh).

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[10] Prior to the first legislative elections in Iraq, Zarqawi broadcast a speech in January 2005, in which he not only stated his principled opposition to democracy, but went on to warn the Sunnis of the risk of Shi'a hegemony: "You should be aware of the plan carried out by the enemy by installing a so-called democracy in your country. He wants it so as to deprive you of what you hold dearest. He is setting up like a fatal trap to install the Rafida [Shi'as] in power. Four million Rafida have come from Iran to take part in the elections. They will thus take the majority of seats in the pagan parliament (*al-majlis al-wuthni*) and will be able to form a powerful government that will control the state's primary strategic, economic and security sectors. This will all be done on the pretext of 'preserving the homeland and citizens' and 'advancing the democratic process,' and 'liquidating the cadres and symbols of the bygone (*al-ba'id*) Ba'ath Party, Saddam's fedayin and terrorists.' This is how the Rafida will settle their sectarian score to liquidate Sunni cadres, be they *'ulama'*, preachers or elites in general." See the jihadi site www.tawhed.ws/r?i=oz6rva5q (accessed January 2005)