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Cihatçı Gruplar Arasındaki İdeolojik ve Metodolojik Benzerlikler ve Farklılıklar: Taliban, El-Kaide ve İŞİD

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Abstract

The Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan has generally pleased jihadist groups around the world. The Islamic Emirate was re-established in Afghanistan by the Taliban after the end of the 20-year US occupation when the last US soldier left Kabul on August 30th, 2021. That was seen as a complete "victory" day for many Sunni Jihadist groups around the world. However, it is feared that the Taliban's success will usher in a new era of jihadism in the Middle East and Central Asia. It is feared that more radical organizations inspired by the Taliban will rise against the existing governments in these regions, overthrow them, and rule these countries in line with their ideology. It is also feared that jihadist groups will seek to come to the fore with large-scale global attacks, with al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates expected to pose the biggest threat in this regard. This is because while the Taliban has a regional influence as a structure with territorial sovereignty over Afghanistan and its surroundings, Al-Qaeda and ISIS have defined their sphere of influence on a global scale, and thus have defined their area of struggle as the whole world. However, other sub-jihadist organizations affiliated with these two organizations, which operate regionally, can act on a country and regional basis. Although these groups have weakened in recent years, they are still active. In general, what all three organizations have in common is that they adopt a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam. Accordingly, these organizations, which believe that Islam has moved away from its essence and principles of faith, want Islam to be lived as it was when it first emerged and to interpret Islamic rules purely without adapting them to today's conditions. In other words, they aim to implement a political, economic, and social order based on Islamic rules and principles and want pure Islam to be practiced in all areas of life. They claim that the salvation of humanity can only be achieved by making Islam dominant in all areas of life and that man-made ideologies cause inequality and injustice among people. For this reason, all three organizations believe that social and political life cannot be separated from religious issues and therefore justify using violence for the sake of faith. This is also an essential duty for "true Muslims". On the other hand, these organizations have a negative belief that those who do not fight for this purpose are "bad Muslims". In other words, all three organizations see taking over political life as necessary to achieve Islamic life or to make the rules of Islam prevail. On the other hand, these three organizations differ in terms of ideology and methodology to achieve this goal. This study systematically examines the ideological and methodological similarities and differences of these three jihadist organizations and how they differ from each other.

Keywords: Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Jihadist Groups, Ideology, Psychology of Radicalization, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Taliban.

Öz

Taliban'ın Afganistan'da yönetimi ele geçirmesi genel olarak dünyanın dört bir yanındaki cihatçı grupları memnun etmiştir. Son ABD askerinin 30 Ağustos 2021'de Kabil'i terk etmesiyle 20 yıllık ABD işgalinin resmen sona ermesinin ardından Taliban tarafından Afganistan'da yeniden kurulan İslam Emirliği, dünya çapındaki pek çok Sünni Cihatçı grup için tam bir "zafer" günü olarak görülmüştür. Ancak Taliban'ın bu başarısının ardından Orta Doğu ve Orta Asya'da yeni bir cihatçılık döneminin başlamasından korkulmaktadır. Çünkü Taliban'dan ilham alan daha radikal örgütlerin bu bölgelerdeki mevcut hükümetlere karşı ayaklanmasından, bu hükümetleri devirmesinden ve bu ülkeleri kendi ideolojileri doğrultusunda yönetmesinden korkulmaktadır. Ayrıca cihatçı grupların büyük çaplı küresel eylemlerle gündeme gelmek istemesinden korkulurken, bu konuda en büyük tehdidin el-Kaide ve IŞİD'e bağlı gruplardan gelmesi beklenmektedir. Zira Taliban genel olarak Afganistan ve çevresi ile sınırlı olarak bir egemenlik ve nüfuz oluştururken bir başka ifadeyle bu bölge üzerinde alan hakimiyetine sahip bir yapı olarak bölgesel bir etkiye sahip olurken el-Kaide ve IŞİD nüfuz alanını küresel ölçek olarak belirlediklerinden mücadele alanlarını tüm dünya olarak belirlemişlerdir. Ancak söz konusu bu iki örgüte bağlı bölgesel anlamda faaliyet gösteren diğer alt cihatçı örgütler sayesinde ülke ve bölge temelinde eylem kapasitesine sahip olabilmektedirler. Söz konusu gruplar son yıllarda zayıflamış olsalar da hâlâ faaliyet gösterebilmektedirler. Genel olarak her üç örgütün de ortak noktası Sünni İslam'ın katı bir yorumunu benimsemeleridir. Buna göre İslam'ın özünden ve itikat esaslarından uzaklaştığını düşünen bu örgütler, İslam'ın ilk ortaya çıktığı dönemdeki gibi yaşanmasını ve İslamî kuralların günümüz şartlarına uyarlanmadan saf bir şekilde yorumlanmasını istemektedir. Bir başka deyişle İslamî kural ve kaidelerin esas alınarak siyasal, ekonomik ve sosyal bir düzenin hayata geçirilmesini amaç edinerek hayatın her alanında saf İslam'ın uygulanmasını istemektedirler. İnsanlığın kurtuluşunun ancak İslam'ın hayatın tüm alanına hakim kılınmasıyla elde edilebileceğini insan eliyle üretilen ideolojilerin insanlar arasında eşitsizliğe ve adaletsizliğe sebep olduğunu insanlığın bu düzenden kurtulabilmesi için özü bozulmamış İslam'ın tüm dünyada hakim kılınmasını iddia etmektedirler. Bu nedenle her üç örgüt de sosyal ve siyasal hayatın dini konulardan ayrı tutulamayacağına bu nedenle inanç uğruna şiddet kullanmayı meşru görmektedirler. Bu aynı zamanda "gerçek Müslümanlar" için asli bir görevdir. Diğer taraftan söz konusu örgütlerde bu amaç için savaşmayanların "kötü Müslümanlar" olduğuna dair olumsuz bir inanç bulunmaktadır. Yani her üç örgüt; İslami hayata ulaşmak ya da İslam'ın kurallarını hâkim kılmak için siyasal hayatı ele geçirmeyi bir gereklilik olarak görmektedirler. Öte yandan bu üç örgütün bu amaca ulaşmak için ideoloji ve metodoloji açısından birbirlerinden farklılaştığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, söz konusu bu üç cihatçı örgütün ideolojik ve metodolojik benzerliklerini ve farklılıklarını ortaya koyarken hangi konularda birbirlerinden ayrıştıklarını sistematik olarak incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Sosyolojisi, Din Psikolojisi, Cihatçı Gruplar, İdeoloji, Radikalleşme Psikolojisi, El - Kaide, IŞİD, Taliban.

Introduction

The Taliban's unexpected takeover of the capital Kabul, on 30th August 2021, after 11 days of resistance establishing dominance throughout the country, and then the exemplary images of the USA and its allies leaving the country brought this jihadist organization to the agenda of the whole world once again. The similarities and differences between this organization and other jihadist organizations, which managed to defeat the USA and its Western allies in its struggle, became a matter of curiosity. The similarities and differences between this organization and other jihadist organizations, which managed to defeat the USA and its Western allies in its struggle, became a matter of curiosity. The 20-year occupation process started after the USA did not hand over the Al-Qaeda members, cooperated in 2001, emerged after the division of Al-Qaeda members within itself in 2011, and ISIS emerged as three jihadist organizations with a similar worldview. On the other hand, although these organizations adopt similar approaches, it is seen that they differ from each other on some points in terms of ideology and method. Although they radically interpret Sunni Islam, they argue that Islam should not be construed according to today's conditions but should be interpreted purely and purely as it was when Islam first emerged and that Islam should be lived accordingly. In addition, they want Islamic rules to be valid in political life and the social system to function according to the laws of Sharia. In addition, they see Jihad as a duty by expressing that it is necessary to use violence for Islam to prevail and that this is a legitimate way. However, these organizations see Islam as an indispensable condition of daily life and political life. Therefore, they differ in terms of ideology and the methods they use. Although the Taliban still has links with Al-Qaeda under current circumstances, it has committed not to harbor extremist groups that intend to attack targets in the West due to the agreement with the USA. So, it is seen that they do not have a common point of view with Al-Qaeda.

On the other hand, ISIS may have a more radical line than both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. So, the suicide attack carried out by the group called ISIS-K on August 26th 2021, clearly showed that the organization differed from both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The jihadist movement constitutes a vast field with many actors pursuing overlapping and sometimes contradictory goals and strategies. To the extent that a nationalist/transnational divide currently prevails, the Taliban and ISIS occupy two opposite ends of the spectrum in the global jihadist movement. While ISIS is generally known for its penchant for destroying borders and recruiting troops worldwide, the Taliban is often noted for its nationally oriented Afghanistan strategy.

Everything that is considered to have an Islamic color in Western literature and that has been perceived as a threat since the 2000s has been coded as a new type of enemy under the name of Salafism. All differences are pushed aside and new conceptualizations such as radicalism, fundamentalism, and jihadist are created by adding the word "Islam" to the beginning, and these movements are

considered as part of a whole and evaluated under the same title. This approach is one of the critical mistakes in understanding Islamic-based religious groups. Although there are many issues on which these groups differ, the basic matrices that determine their relationships with other Islamic groups are the concepts on which obvious differences are seen. In other words, although the structures that are considered to be based on Salafi ideology share a common religious orientation, they have different approaches to interpreting and applying basic concepts such as tawhid, taghut, al-vala wa'l-bera, takfir, and jihad. This difference is functional as the element that gives them new existence. Although radical movements associated with Muslim societies in the Western world use the same theological ground, the emergence of multiple schisms in a short time should be seen as an expected result; Because of the lack of systematic thinking, the inability to penetrate what is behind the events and facts, and especially the fact that Islam is seen as a tightly woven "ideology" rather than a "religion", make this result inevitable. When an issue is tried to be discussed or understood under the title of ideology, even if it is religion, every interpretation brings with it a new rupture.¹

1. The Roots of Jihadist Organizations

The seeds of the jihadist movement seen today were planted in Afghanistan. Around 25,000 fighters, who traveled to Afghanistan from many parts of the world to fight against the Soviet occupation and pro-Soviet communist rule in Afghanistan during the 1980s, were trained and financed by the United States and the Gulf countries. These individuals form the first generation of modern Jihad. War-weary and in the grip of tribal conflicts stemming from the authority vacuum, Afghanistan came under the rule of the Taliban organization led by Mullah Omar. Until the U.S. invasion in 2001, the country hosted many radical organizations, especially Al-Qaeda. As a result, Afghanistan played an essential role in the military training of the jihadists, their ideological formation, increasing their numbers, and becoming more organized groups. The mujahedeen who fought against the Soviets were also on the ground in the 1990s. They fought in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya. So mobilized, a class of professional jihadists was formed, capable of bringing their military training and skills to the world.

Al-Qaeda and the Taliban began to emerge in the resistance to the Soviet occupation of the late 1980s and Afghanistan's internal struggles in the 1990s. On the other hand, ISIS emerged relatively recently from the remnants of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and existed as a local element against the 2003 invasion of Iraq. From this point of view, ISIS can be considered a local jihadist group that emerged from Al-Qaeda which is the most inclusive and global organization among these organizations. In this respect, it is possible to say that while the Taliban and ISIS are two

¹ Hanifi Şahin, "Radikalleşmenin Meşruiyet Payandası Olarak Tekfirci Söylem: IŞİD Örneği", *Bayburt Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 16 (2022), 54.

organizations fighting as Jihadists on a local scale, it has become the regional organization that includes Iraq and Syria, rather than being local since 2011. In addition, it can be said that after losing its struggle in Iraq and Syria as well as losing dominance in these regions, it became a smaller organization that continues its activities in more countries.

The Taliban, which means “students” in the Pashto language, emerged in northern Pakistan in the 1990s after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Looking at the origins of the Taliban and other jihadist groups, most of them are affiliated with the Deobandi school of Sunni Islam. These fanatical groups are so strict that they do not hesitate to use violence by attacking the more moderate groups that have passed the education of the school called Deobandi from time to time. They adopt the Maturidi creed of Hanafism, which seems more flexible and moderate than other sects but does not prevent them from being extremely strict and fanatical. On the contrary, it makes them resemble radical formations such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Wahhabi. This extremism, militancy, and bigotry based on faith do not break them away from the Deobandi tradition from which the Taliban grew up.²

The branches of the Deoband School established in different parts of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan can create a cross-border network (communication and contact network, social-sectarian network) between the mentioned organizations and formations. Although all of the followers of the Deoband School gave religious interpretations and judgments according to the rules of the Hanafi sect, they were extraordinarily orthodox. They were deeply influenced by the Takfiri (accusing others of infidelity) mentality. In parallel with this, they use violence against their opponents as much as possible. Like all fundamentalist jihadists, they are followers of the jihadism of the medieval Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1268-1328) and the founding leader of Wahhabism in modern times, Mohammed Abdulwahab (1703-1792) in Saudi Arabia. This radical movement of Islam in India is the Diobend School, which was established in 1867. The Diobend School and all its derivatives in other countries are gradually gaining a political character. Especially those in Pakistan who have taken more distance on this road. Pakistan has almost become a fertile greenhouse and bed of terrorists.³ Today, Diobend School has many branches under different names among Sunni communities in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. Recently, it has been operating in England, South Africa, and some countries in the Far East.⁴

For 200 years, the Sunnis of India closely followed the Diobend School in the capital, Delhi. This school ranks second after Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which

² Faik Bulut, “Talibancıların İslam Anlayışının Fikir Ocağı: Diyobend Medreseleri”, *Independent Turkish* (Access 23 August 2023).

³ Masooda Bano, “Beyond Politics: the Reality of a Deobandi Madrasa in Pakistan”, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18/1 (2007), 49.

⁴ Faik Bulut, “Talibancıların İslam Anlayışının Fikir Ocağı: Diyobend Medreseleri”.

has created a school of its own in the Arab-Islamic world. Those who follow this school are in favor of purified and traditional (Salafi) Islam and act (behave) by the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Hadith; it shows traditionalist and pious reactions to Western influence. However, on the other hand, those who follow the Diobend School favor adopting the teachings, interpretations, and activities of imitation (Salaf-i Salih, that is, the predecessors of the early periods of Islam) in the field of theology. On this plane, they act according to Hanafi Fiqh (sectarian law). At this point, contrary to understandings like the Taliban and Salafism, two critical movements that continue the Diobendi tradition do not embrace violence at all: The Islamic Jamaat in the political arena and the Tablighi Jamaat in the non-political field.

The main reference of Diobendis is Hanafi fiqh texts, and they are a conservative religious orientation built on a text-centered understanding of religion. However, after the Afghan Jihad, the Diobendis recognized the "Salafist" interpretation of religion, that is, the interpretation of religion that produced religious radicalism, with the mixing of the groups we call Afghan-Arab. The information given here is valid for today's radical Islamists, and when it comes to Diobendism, it should not be forgotten that it is a Hanafism-centered structure. In other words, we can say that Hanafism started to become Salafi for the first time, starting with the Taliban movement, if we take today as the center. Previously, there was a perception/construction of religion guided by the texts to which these schools were affiliated.⁵

Some Westerners are aware that the Diobendi tradition is tied to "Ahl as Sünnah" and Community understanding. However, they also draw attention to the Diobendis Act and operate separately from the Sunni school, thus diverging from traditional Sunnism.

However, it is seen that the Taliban movement is thoughtfully separated from al-Qaeda and ISIS. In contrast is widely spread among the Pashtu living on the borders of Afghanistan and the northern parts of Pakistan, based on the synthesis of "tribal-shariah" in the current environment. It is seen that other jihadist organizations have a global jihad understanding apart from the tribal-shariah understanding. Adopting a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, the Taliban was initially financed with money from Saudi Arabia and manifested itself as a Pashtun movement. "The Taliban was formed in 1994 in the southern Qandahar province of Afghanistan. Initially, it aimed to restore peace and end the civil war among the mujahedin that followed the 1992 collapse of the pro-Soviet regime in the country. In the process, it became another warring faction, aligning itself with several international jihadist groups, including Al Qaeda, to fight a coalition of the former mujahedin groups."⁶ The Taliban promised to maintain peace and security in the

⁵ Mehmet Ali Büyükkara, *Çağdaş İslami Akımlar* (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2015), 71-73.

⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 13.

Pashtun region between Pakistan and Afghanistan with an administration based on Islamic laws and Sharia. Starting in southwestern Afghanistan, the Taliban quickly increased their influence. In 1996, he overthrew President Burhanuddin Rabbani and captured Kabul.

Although the roots of the Taliban are Diobend schools, as in other jihadist organizations, there is another structure on which they are based. This structure is called "suffe", one-room non-formal religious schools, which are widely found in rural areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, play a vital role. The poor people, who cannot go to big cities and work in villages, mostly receive religious education from village imams. These schools provide their students with free food and accommodation, which is very important for low-income families. Due to the ongoing instability in Afghanistan for years, these cells, where the sons of Afghans who had to immigrate to neighboring Pakistan also attend, are institutions established against secular education, providing mainly language, Fiqh, Qur'an, Tafsir, and Akaid education. Considering the geography and environment where the Taliban sprouted and grew, there was no possibility or need for such meticulous and fine weaving in the countryside, which had already sunk into long-standing instability. However, there were two urgent issues to be resolved: An order that would ensure public authority and order where there was no state and the creation and encouragement of Jihad. The first of these issues was resolved with the fiqh education that would ensure public order in these schools. second was to explain basic religious knowledge and participation in Jihad in the cells. As a result, virtue has come to be defined by three rules for a young religious male member of the rural Pashtun people living in the north of Pakistan and the south of Afghanistan, the main element of the Taliban, repeating the daily rituals, protecting the Sunnah learned from the hadiths by imitation and always ready for Jihad.

Although the exact number of these schools and cells is unknown, it is possible to express them in tens of thousands. Almost half of the members of the Taliban-led council, it is known, graduated from these one-room village schools. It is said that Mullah Omar, the founder of the Taliban organization, received training in such a place. In the place where he was educated, his teacher was called 'Sufi'. However, what is meant here is not the Sufi structures that provide higher education and have more sophisticated teachings, as in the Anatolian lands. Instead, they are structures based on the life of asceticism by leaving the haram and keeping the halal ones and turning to asceticism. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, sects based on this basis are pretty common.

Mullah Omar was also a person who believed in dreams and the extraordinary powers of saints following the creed of these structures. He used to visit his teacher's grave every week. Mevlevi Abdul Ali Deobandi, one of the leading religious scholars of the Taliban regime and the person Mullah Omar trusted most regarding religious decrees, said that it was permissible to seek help from the dead saints. The Taliban greatly upset al-Qaeda, which opposes even the

existence of cemeteries, as they allow and even encourage visiting shrines. So much so that in the late 1990s, Al-Qaeda ideologues asked, 'Is the Taliban from Ahl al-Sunnah?' They even wrote a pamphlet entitled.⁷

Another feature of the schools and cells is that they provide education based on memorizing hadith instead of generating ideas. Length of trousers, shirts, turbans; the colors of clothing of the Taliban leaders were all shaped according to the practices in the Hadiths. For the Taliban imitating the Prophet's Mohammad clothing is a religious requirement. The sensitivity of Hanafism to make medicine by choosing hadith materials with great care has turned into an understanding that tries to treat it with every herb it finds. The way the Taliban read the Sharia is nothing but the Islamization of their tribal temperament. The Pashtunwali (Pashtun tribe's customs, customs-traditions) values; imposed the concept of honor' emphasizing gender discrimination. The Taliban emerged from the countryside, right in the heart of Afghanistan. Its origin was formed by its own rural culture, civil war, and school structures politicized in Pakistan. Later, al-Qaeda ideology joined it. The Taliban is trying to give the world an image that it has changed. However, as they do this, ISIS, which is waiting at the border, will gain new opportunities to criticize "you betrayed the Sharia, you allied with the infidels". Whether the Taliban has changed or not will determine if it can rule Afghanistan and how it will fight ISIS."⁸

2. Similarities of Jihadist Organizations

Jihadism has always emerged as a combination of factors. Some individuals are motivated to join jihadist movements by ideology, a desire for meaning and belonging, anger at the West, and even wanderlust. Other conditions allow jihadism to flourish. These include the volatile mix of changing demographics, mainly growing youth, higher literacy, and greater social aspirations intersecting with economic hardships, rising unemployment, and deepening political discomfort or frustration. Since the Arab uprisings of 2011, the mix of personal motives and possible circumstances has become even more scalding. These driving forces of extremism are widespread in the Middle East.

The common point of all three organizations, when viewed in origin, is that they adopt a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam. All three organizations believe that social and political life cannot be separated from religious matters. In other words, they believe that people's daily and political lives should be organized according to Islamic principles. To achieve this, they accept the use of violence as a legitimate way and as a duty. Therefore, it can be said that they see Muslims who do not strive

⁷ Mujahid Shaykh – Yūsuf ibn Sālih al-Uyayri, "The Scale for the Taliban Movement", *Afghānistān the Tālibān, and the Battle for Islām Today* (Access 23 August 2023).

⁸ Hilmi Demir, "Taliban Hakkında Bilmediklerimiz: Benzerlerinden Farkı, Kökeni, Geleceği", *Fikir Turu* (Access 24 August 2023).

to establish the Islamic lifestyle, that is, do not engage in Jihad, as less devout Muslims This point of view sometimes negatively affects the opinions of these three organizations toward other Muslims and causes them to call them to takfir. In addition, the similarities of all three jihadist organizations are listed below.

2.1. Perception of Islam

The interpretation of Islam that the Taliban, El Kaide, and ISIS have been following is called 'Salaf-e-Saleh' (the ethical predecessors)⁹ Salaf means "the previous generation" in the dictionary, and Salafiyya means "those who belong to this generation". In Islamic literature, Salaf means scholars belonging to the first periods and past Islamic elders. The term Salafiyya, following the early scholars on matters related to the principles of faith, is content with the outward expressions of the verses and hadiths and accepts them as they are, and does not fall into simile and "Tajima" (to compare Allah to creatures and to think as a body). It is used to denote the Ahl as-Sunnah community that does not translate them into another meaning (ta'wil). Salafiyya was also called "Sifatiyya" because it accepts all of Allah's personal, actual, and informal attributes without any interpretation.

Until the emergence of Ash'arism and Maturidism, the dominant belief in the Sunni Muslim community was the Salaf belief. The most distinctive feature of the early period (muteqaddimun) understanding of Salafiyya is not to play a role in the mind in the field of "qaid" It is to be content with verses and hadiths, to refer to Allah to know them without interpreting the verses and hadiths whose meanings are not precise and therefore may have other meanings. The Salafiyya heavily criticized the theologians and philosophers who interpreted "mutashabih" verses and hadiths in the light of reason and the Sufis who interpreted them in the light of discovery and inspiration, accusing them of being "bid'atists" and perverts. Salafiyya has found more or fewer supporters until today. Generally, those who are Hanbali in fiqh are Salafis in the creed. Scholars who are interested in hadith have mostly adopted the Salaf belief. Today, 12% of the world's Muslims are Salafis. The countries where they are most concentrated are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Gulf countries.¹⁰

Salafism is essentially a protest movement against the diversity of faith and culture of the Islamic world. Salafism intends to make singular what they think is stated by taking the external texts as a basis. The emphasis on the uniqueness of truth here indicates the existence of other direct and indirect views and the intention to eliminate them. The apparent "nass" will control all different religious

⁹ Mohammad Moheq, "Taliban and ISIS: Seven Similarities, Seven Differences", *Critique* 47/3 (2019), 495.

¹⁰ Cengiz Gönültaş, "Selefilik nedir: Selefilik Mezhebi Ne Zaman Ortaya Çıkmıştır?", *Yeni Şafak* (Access 24 August 2023).

understandings and question them.¹¹ In Meddeb's words, Nasism is the "simple Islam" of those who think that true Islam has been given to them because they have lost the memory of their own culture.¹²

Salafi thought, which is based on the Age of Bliss (Asr-ı Saadet), believes that the most reliable way is to follow the religion of the ancients. The followers of Salafi argue that the path followed by the companions of the prophet Muhammad and the generation after them is the path of true believers. Based on the idea of the inadequacy of the mind, it shows unquestioned submission to the Quran and Sunnah and displays a conservative approach through adherence to Islamic tradition. It emphasizes the integrity of faith and deeds and requires that every religious commandment be fulfilled for people to be considered believers. To prevent deformation in religious thought and to cleanse Islam from foreign elements, it develops a discourse based on anti-bid'ah, and based on this, it enters into a conflict with traditional folk religiosity or the cultural understanding of Islam with revivalist. Since religious elements, especially religious issues, are not subjected to a rational and critical approach, a fideist approach is exhibited, and therefore this approach leads to dogmatism and fanaticism.¹³

Salafis want to return to the past/essence by reacting against the micro/macro problems of the modern world. Based on the idea of carrying the Age of Bliss to the present day, he puts forward his thoughts with a perception of history that is incompatible with the real reality of the post/modern world we are currently in. By identifying the Islamic religion almost entirely with Arab culture, it stands against the reconstruction of the goals and principles of Islam with local conditions in all times and different societies. In this respect, going beyond tradition is always considered a negative phenomenon, and cultural elements are perceived as a threat to religion.¹⁴ Since the views and works of the Salafi sālīhī are seen as authority, they are, in a sense, sanctified. It instrumentally uses religious personalities, resources, authorities, and structures, especially the Prophet, to achieve its own ideological religious goals.¹⁵ Therefore, by arguing that the absolute truth belongs to the Salafi thought, sectarian/group monopolization is carried out and people are offered ready-made salvation prescriptions based on this. It is seen that new Salafi groups have emerged, especially in the modern period, through unquestionable leaders and their books, based on the functional charisma built as a result of this approach. These groups, which see themselves as sects, marginalize other ideas

¹¹ Mehmet Zeki İşcan, "Selefi Akımların İslam Algısında Zahiri-Lafzi Yorumun Yansımaları", ed. Sönmez Kutlu, *Zahiri ve Selefi Din Yorumu*, (İstanbul: KURAMER Yayınları, 2019), 131.

¹² Abdelwehhab Meddeb, *İslam'ın Hastalığı*, çev. Haldun Bayrı (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2005), 125.

¹³ Mustafa Sarıms, "Selefi Din Anlayışlarının Psiko-Sosyal Olumsuz Yansımaları = Psycho-Social Negative Reflections of Salafi Understandings of Religion", *Eskiyeni* 44 (Eylül/September 2021), 439.

¹⁴ Ferhat Koca, "İslâm Düşünce Tarihinde Selefilik: Tarihsel Serüveni ve Genel Karakteristiği", *İlahiyat Akademi* 1/1-2 (2015), 15-70.

¹⁵ Mehmet Kubat, "Selefi Perspektifin Tarihselliği", *İslami Araştırmalar Dergisi* 17/3 (2004), 235-251.

with an exclusionary discourse and attitude, and therefore this approach can cause conflicts and integrate these groups with radical forms that produce violence.¹⁶

2.2. Rejection of the Modern Lifestyle

Salafi discourse makes the Islamic religion entirely specific only to the 7th century and to the Arab culture embodied in the early Islamic societies identified with it. Therefore, in this kind of approach, the period in which Islam was experienced at its best is the first period of Islamic society, which only serves as an example. For this reason, if Muslim societies want to live Islam in the best way, they should turn to this golden age called the 'Age of Bliss', move away from the corruptions that emerged after that period, purify themselves, and take the religious life lived by the Prophet as their guide. In this regard, Salafi's approach to interpreting Islam claims that there is a single universal truth of Islam.¹⁷ However, the most important point that draws attention to this perspective is that Islam develops itself over time, adapts to societies and cultures, and produces new solutions to the problems of the ages. Therefore, the Salafi approach always evaluates the contact of Islam with different cultures by taking into account the Arabic aspect of Islam; For this reason, it accepts the approaches of other cultures towards Islam as distorting the religion. This attitude creates a serious contradiction between the culture in which individuals live and live and the social structure presented as ideal, causing individuals to become alienated from their society.¹⁸

In general, it can be said that all political radical jihadist groups are at war with the way of life of modern civilization. However, these groups agreed to use only the war machines and technical equipment of this civilization. "They believe it is legitimate to go to war against this civilization using the very tools it has developed. The Taliban and ISIS have an apparent dispute with contemporary civilization. Their biggest animosity is with modern concepts and values such as law rather than 'fiqh' (jurisprudence), male and female equality, pluralism, human rights, freedom of speech, civil society, and other modern values."¹⁹

On the other hand, it would not be wrong to say that many of the members of all three jihadist organizations are from the modern world, even those born in the USA, England, and France or who received a modern education there. Brothers Said and Sherif Kouachi, who attacked the cartoon magazine Charlie Hebdo on January 7th, 2015, killed 12 cartoonists and the police officer guarding the street. Amedy Coulibaly, who killed four people taken hostage in a market, was born and

¹⁶ Faruk Sancar, "Seleflik Bir Mezhep mi Yoksa Bir Düşünme Tarzı mı? Selefi Düşüncenin Şifrelerine Dair Bir Değerlendirme", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 15/3 (2015), 21-49.

¹⁷ Mehmet Evkuran, "Bir Kriz Teolojisi ve Toplumsal Hareket Olarak Seleflik -Selefi İdeoloji ve İslâm Dünyasındaki Etkileri Üzerine Bir Analiz-", *İlahiyat Akademi* 1/1-2 (2015), 74-75.

¹⁸ Sarmış, "Selefi Din Anlayışlarının Psiko-Sosyal Olumsuz Yansımaları", 448.

¹⁹ Moheq, "Taliban and ISIS: Seven Similarities, Seven Differences", 496.

raised on the outskirts of Paris. A famous French lawyer describes these young people as the “lost children of the Republic”. Even if they went to Syria, Iraq, or Yemen and received armed training, they were brought up in the French system. Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, who killed British soldier Lee Rigby in London in 2013, were also born and raised in England. The majority of them are individuals who could not hold on to life, have poor school life, were able to work for a short time in the jobs they found, were introduced to crime at an early age, and have “adaptation problems”. They never saw themselves as a part of the Western society they lived.

On the contrary, they always felt like the “other”. Therefore, European countries should think more about overcoming this identity crisis and the integration problem of minorities. Making these young people feel like “part” of the country they live in can make it very difficult for radical groups to recruit. For example, the number of British Muslims in ISIS, which controlled a significant part of Syria and Iraq, exceeds the number of Muslims fighting in the British army. In France, the situation is not much different. Thousands of young Muslims from both countries have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and Al Nusra. Another fact that is as surprising as this one is that almost all those who carry out terrorist attacks in the West were born and raised in the countries where they carried out attacks. This condition marks a drastically changing paradigm.²⁰

Considered the most famous Middle Eastern historian, Bernard Lewis states they think that the problems of the Islamic world are not due to insufficient modernization but excessive modernization. He states: “Their struggle is against the Western enemy, as well as against the enemy who Westernises their country... Those who import 'infidel' practices from the West and impose them on Muslims... They see the duty of Muslims as overthrowing these 'infidel leaders'. They want to do this by defeating and expelling their Western supporters from the region, destroying the laws, institutions, and social traditions they have brought, essentially destroying their way of life, and returning their country to a purely Islamic way of life”. Therefore, the hatred for the West stems from its presence in the Middle East as well as from the values it represents. Saying that “the Arab world's test with democracy has not yielded brilliant results”. Lewis states that it is not surprising that many Muslims see modernization as a “bankrupt model” after all these “dictatorial” experiences: “The rejection of modernization in the name of returning to a sacred past has also led to the emergence of many radical movements.”²¹

²⁰ Anıl Emre, “Modern Zamanlarda Cihat”, *Habertürk* (Access 26 August 2023).

²¹ Bernard, Lewis, *Ortadoğu İki Bin Yıllık Ortadoğu Tarihi*, trans. Selen Y. Kölay (İstanbul: Arkadaş Yayınları, 2017), 27-29.

2.3. Instrumentalisation of Violence

Almost all jihadist groups believe that to oppose those means opposition to Allah and the Prophet and hostility to Islam. According to them, any person or group that disagrees should be suppressed and eliminated using violence. Tolerance of opponents is considered indecision and hypocrisy. Harsh treatment of infidels and hypocrites should be used as a strategic approach, not a tactic. In other words, jihadist groups do not accept Islamic approaches other than themselves, and they tend to see different Islamic approaches as “enemies” or “others” that need to be fought. They do not accept moderate or non-violent factions from among themselves.

The dividing line between moderate Muslims and radical Islamists in countries with legal systems based on the West (the majority of states in the Muslim world) is whether Sharia should apply.²² When evaluated in general, the Islamic model, which is expressed as moderate Islam, does not correspond to an understanding that jihadist groups can accept since it corresponds to a secular sense. For jihadist groups, a secular version of Islam is not an acceptable model of Islam, as it means removing Islam from political and daily life. In a way, it is precisely this approach that causes them to emerge and survive. In this respect, this distorted situation is at the core of jihadist groups' finding ground, especially in the Middle East and Africa. Because in countries governed by a secular system, although their people are Muslims, jihadist groups can quickly find fighters both inside and outside the country who can fight against this system. However, for jihadist groups -- there is no separation between the political and the religious. Islam is, in essence, both religion and regime (*din wa-dawla*), and no area of human activity is outside its remit. Be the nature of the problem as it may, “Islam is the solution.”²³ For this reason, what needs to be done for jihadist groups to reach a solution, that is, to make Islam dominate the world, is to struggle using violence.

2.4. Sheria is the Main Target (The End Justifies the Means)

“All jihadist groups believe that they are fighting for the sacred goal of establishing a pure Islamic government and the implementation of 'Shari'a'. To achieve this goal, they are allowed to use any means. They believe that they are fighting against the infidels and hypocrites and, in so doing, are permitted to use deception under the term 'al-Harb kheda'a'; war is trickery.”²⁴ Therefore, it is permissible for jihadist groups to do anything to deceive the enemy. For this reason, it is considered appropriate to do things such as lying, cheating, and causing strife, which is not considered morally appropriate in Islam.

²² Angel Rabasa, et al., *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (RAND Corporation Report, 2007), 67.

²³ Shmuel Bar, “The Religious Sources of Islamic Terrorism”, *Policy Review* 125 (2004), 27-29.

²⁴ Moheq, “Taliban and ISIS: Seven Similarities, Seven Differences”, 497.

2.5. Using Fear as a Strategy

For all jihadist groups, it is not enough to deal violently only with those opposing them. However, even potential or likely opponents must also be frightened and intimidated to the extent that they will change direction. In this way, they aim to reduce and destroy the fighting power of current and potential enemies that can fight them. In particular, the beheading images applied to soldiers and civilians of their enemies captured by ISIS were served to the whole world and aimed to create a climate of fear in the eyes of both states and citizens.

In addition, these groups do not hesitate to use violence to instill fear in the areas they have conquered or in areas where they have gained dominance to make people obey them and establish authority over them. For example, after the Taliban's capture of Kabul, thousands of Afghans fleeing the country at the risk of their lives is one of the most important indicators of this fear.

2.6. Establishing Islamic Caliphate

Achieving power is a strategic goal for all groups and will continue to be so. The ultimate goal of all jihadist groups is to seize power, which is called the "Temkin" (allegiance/obedience) stage in their dictionaries. "In their view, all other vital objectives, whether internal reform or external and international reform, depend on the formation of this anticipated administration. The intended model of ISIS and the Taliban is the same. Both need to have someone called 'Amir al-Momenin' (the commander of the faithful) on top of the pyramid of power. In traditional Muslim thought, 'Amir al-Momenin' possesses absolute power, and throughout our historical experience, there has been no higher authority that could restrict him. Recently, ISIS has successfully expanded its global interests to re-establish the so-called "Caliphate" and expand its influence globally."²⁵

"In contrast to Al-Qaeda, ISIS initially focused on the "near enemy"—Shia, the Iraqi and Syrian regimes, and secular, pro-Western states in the Middle East. However, in a tactical shift, ISIS has now taken responsibility for spectacular attacks in Europe and other places beyond the Middle East, making it clear that the group is increasingly interested in targeting the "far enemy" as well."²⁶

Since declaring the establishment of the Islamic State, ISIS has taken rapid steps to remove al-Qaeda from its leadership position in the global jihadist movement and has largely succeeded in doing so. Nowadays, the concepts of Islam terrorism are read through ISIS. Because, although ISIS has already been weakened, it is presented as the most dangerous of the existing radical movements in terms of

²⁵ Muhammad Munir –Muhammad Shafiq. "Global Threat: A Comparative Analysis of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (I.S.)", *IPRI Journal* 16/2 (2016), 3.

²⁶ Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 5-7.

the threats it poses to many countries in the world. Although the reasons for ISIS's power, attractiveness, and longevity are debated, it remains the prototype for jihadist movements. The Islamic State declared in 2014, is a declaration that the "global jihadism", in which Osama bin Laden declared in 1998 that the entire West, especially America and the Israelis, would be the object of jihad, was outdated.²⁷ This symbolizes a very ambitious and high-level struggle, as jihad movements should be carried out under the umbrella of a state, namely the Islamic State. With the declaration of the Islamic State by ISIS, the following was clearly stated: The idea of the 'Islamic State', which is on the jihadist axis and has been sought and expected since the Afghan jihad, but has always been seen as a utopia, has now been put into practice from theory.²⁸

2.7. Rejecting Current National Borders of States and International Order

All jihadist groups do not agree with the current national borders of the world. From their point of view, the world should not be divided into more than two or three countries. According to this, the world is the region where Islamic rules are valid instead of national borders (Dar-ul-Islam country), where Islamic rules are not valid, and at war with Islam (Dar-ul-kufr country). On the other hand, non-Muslim countries (Dar-ül Ahd countries) have signed a cooperation agreement with Dar-ül-Islam and are not at war with it.

In other words, the modern international system shaped based on the nation-state is not a proper international order accepted by these jihadist groups. Although it is difficult to say that the Taliban openly adopt this view, they do not seem to have developed rhetoric against ISIS and Al-Qaeda, which have this view. However, it is possible to say that after the Taliban took control of the administration in Afghanistan in August 2021, it seems willing to recognize and cooperate with other states in the world in the image that it has been working on so far. It is also possible to say that Afghanistan is making an effort to recognize this new administration to the world.²⁹

3. Differences between Jihadist Organizations

The main difference is the structure of the three organizations gathered in the field of activity and the characteristics of actions. Accordingly, while Al-Qaeda and ISIS have global goals, the Taliban have regional goals. In addition, while the USA continues to be the main enemy of Al Qaeda, it is remarkable that ISIS continues to attack Shiites and other religious minorities in the Middle East, even attacking

²⁷ Büyükkara, *Çağdaş İslami Akımlar*, 71.

²⁸ Şahin, "Radikalleşmenin Meşruiyet Payandası Olarak Tekfirci Söylem: IŞİD Örneği", 55-56.

²⁹ Shirin Jaafari, "The Taliban want international recognition. Countries are debating", *The World* (Access 25 August 2023).

Shiite targets in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. For this reason, although the ideological structures of the three jihadist groups, their methods, and spheres of influence differ considerably. In the current situation, it is possible to say that ISIS has taken a more radical line among these jihadist groups. Local groups are attracted to ISIS for many reasons. One of the most important is the most obvious: "true belief". While ISIS is sickening to most Muslims, it has touched the beliefs of a significant subset of Sunni Muslims, especially young men. Moreover, ISIS has been touting sectarianism by portraying itself as the defender and avenger of Sunnis worldwide.

Moreover, the group's innovative videos and social media campaigns play with a sense of adventure and purpose, attracting even young Sunnis without fundamental religious knowledge or belief. As the US Africa Command commander, General David Rodriguez, groups connect to ISIS "to elevate cause".³⁰

3.1. Perception of the World and Differences in Practices

The use of violence to achieve their political goals is the primary tool of these three jihadist organizations. However, among these three jihadist groups, ISIS has become a dangerous non-state actor benefiting from porous borders and the unified global financial system threatening global security.³¹ "Although the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and ISIS have the same basic approach, the Taliban has not worked hard on theoretical issues since its inception. On the contrary, ISIS has been trying to formulate its views on religious, social, political, and economic issues and expand its global agenda since it announced its presence. In terms of theory Taliban is ambiguous; thus, their intellectual identity is not clear to the world. To understand the philosophical basis of the Taliban, one should look into the actions of this group throughout its history rather than written references."³²

ISIS's reference sources are not only the Quran and Sunnah. They re-interpret all the religious understandings throughout the history of Islam, based on today's values, in a selective way that suits their actions, without looking at their historical and socio-cultural values. They serve these comments for Muslims and those who want to become Muslims. In almost all of their visual or written publications, the ISIS organization identifies Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim. The leaders of the Salafi/Wahhabi movement, such as Abdulvehhab and Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi, have a lot to say about religion, social life, economy, etc. He acts according to his

³⁰ Daniel L. Byman, "ISIS Goes Global: Fight the Islamic State by Targeting Its Affiliates, *Foreign Affairs* 95/2 (2016), 82.

³¹ Sarah comp. Canna, *Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats: Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology, and Programs for Counter-radicalization and Disengagement*, Maryland: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, University of Maryland, (2010).

³² Moheq, "Taliban and ISIS: Seven Similarities, Seven Differences", 498-499.

fatwas on the issues. Developing an exclusionary perspective, ISIS considers non-believers like themselves as non-religious, even if they are Muslims.³³

However, the war between Taliban and ISIS so far has been about conquering territory with armed struggle, while Al-Qaeda's main war has been to launch a global jihad. In other words, Al-Qaeda's strategy is more gradualist. It believes that Muslims must be educated first on Sharia, that the idea of Jihad must be popularised, and that Muslims must be convinced to take up arms as the only method of emancipation. It is less exclusionary than the other groups. It has forged alliances and quietly entrenched itself and its ideas within local communities to eventually build a pure Salafi state. Both ISIS and Al-Qaeda have long-term strategies to create a Salafist utopia. The basic strategy of ISIS is to maintain a Salafi state through constant conflict both in Muslim-majority countries and beyond. ISIS believes that Muslims today can be subjected to an interpretation of Sharia. It is more doctrinaire, giving fewer places to non-Salafi tendencies. It regards the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood as an infidel and the Taliban as an infidel state. For ISIS, the end justifies the means; they entered a war of attrition in Iraq and Syria.³⁴

Although the two jihadist groups have similar ideologies, they compete with each other for dominance. So much so that ISIS and Al-Qaeda are trying to gain an advantage by using each other's successes or failures. After al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden was killed by the USA in Abbottabad, Pakistan, while it seemed that al-Qaeda could not take any resounding action, ISIS started to show itself as more strategically successful. In just a few months, he seized land and declared a caliphate, which caused its reputation to spread both in recruiting staff and by making more resounding actions. However, al-Qaeda appears to be acting more pragmatically by exploiting the instability created by ISIS.

3.2. Global and Regional Supporters

Local groups are often inevitably used to serve grand strategies. From this particular point of view, it can be said that the Taliban, ISIS, and Al-Qaeda are the same. However, upon closer inspection, there is a clear difference between the Taliban and ISIS. Because any regional or international power does not officially support ISIS.³⁵ While this situation makes ISIS more radical, it also makes it more brutal in its action methods. With their global ambitions, al-Qaeda and ISIS managed to recruit people far beyond the borders of the Middle East. It is possible to say that the most successful in this regard is ISIS. The interesting thing here is that the primary motivation for many young people born, raised, and educated in

³³ Adem Karadeniz, "İŞİD Örgütünün Dinî Açıdan Kriğiği", *İlahiyat Akademi* 15 (2022), 46.

³⁴ Robin Wright, et al. *The Jihadi Threat ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Beyond*, Wilson Center (2017), 7.

³⁵ Moheq, "Taliban and ISIS: Seven Similarities, Seven Differences", 499.

Europe to join this organization is that they feel themselves the “other” in their society. Furthermore, other factors play a leading role in turning these young people with identity crises into notorious criminal machines and jihadists.

ISIS carries out its inhumane activities with the chant of 'Allahu Akbar', one of the holiest words of Islam, and presents these to the whole world through the media. The organization intensively uses concepts such as Islamic state, sharia, hijra, and global jihad in all its visual or written media resources. This situation has been effective in the organization recruiting personnel from many parts of the world in a short time. It has been observed that the majority of those who joined the ranks of ISIS are people living in Muslim regions that have been in Western colonies and occupied for a long time. Those who join the organization are not only from Muslim countries in the Middle East. It was observed that there was also a lot of participation from Western countries and Turkish Republics. It has been determined that people, especially those who grew up in European countries, whose culture has been insulted, whose identity has been rejected, and who have been subjected to grudges and hate speeches due to Islamophobia, join the organization more easily, perhaps due to an explosion of anger over the years.³⁶

ISIS uses the power of the internet to lure these young people into their territories in Iraq and Syria and turn them into fighters. The effectiveness of the terrorist organization ISIS in using the internet and social media allows young people from many countries to become radicalized without leaving their computers. No matter how effective social media is in the “call to jihad”, prisons are still the address where Europe's most notorious terrorists are radicalized.³⁷ Therefore ISIS has a more significant number of young devotees. It has a following among youth (both men and women) via online networking, while Al-Qaeda adhered to more old-style enlisting techniques.³⁸ “The Islamic State's impressive social media efforts and overall appeal also make it better able to mobilize “lone wolves” to attack in the West. Many of these individuals will have had little or no contact with the Islamic State as an organization, but they find its ideology and methods appealing and will act on their own.”³⁹

In addition, the ISIS organization prepares its visual and written publications professionally. In particular, the "Al-Hayat Media Center", which they established in 2014, carries out global propaganda through the media by publishing the magazines *Kostantiniyye*, *Rumiyah*, and *Dabıq*, which are published in many languages including Turkish, daily news broadcasts, and many fascicles dealing with religious issues. Moreover, the organization Darul Khalifa Himmet Office also uses social media actively and effectively through websites such as A'mak Agency,

³⁶ DİYKB, DAİŞ'in Temel Felsefesi ve Dini Referanslar Raporu, 12-13.

³⁷ Emre, “Modern Zamanlarda Cihat”.

³⁸ Kristina Wong, “Five Ways ISIS, Al-Qaeda Differ”, *The Hill* (Access 23 August 2023).

³⁹ Daniel L. Byman, “Comparing Al-Qaeda and ISIS: Different Goals, Different Targets,” *Brookings Institution* (Access 28 August 2023).

Idrak Media, Tevhid, and Sunnah. The organization also effectively uses social media opportunities such as "Twitter", "Facebook" and the "Islamic Social Networking Sites" belonging to its members. There are organization sympathizers and organization members in many parts of the world. The ISIS organization's brutal killings of people and their presentation to the world through the media, their suicide bombings in different parts of the world, and their calls for global jihad have made them an organization that resonates around the world.⁴⁰

3.3. Organizational Structures

Al-Qaeda, which started as a group of trained cadres and Arab mercenaries fighting against the Soviet army in Afghanistan in the 1980s, turned into a global organization that took action and found supporters on a global scale. On the other hand, the Taliban, which operates regionally within these organizations, initially struggled with Pashtun and Tajik-origin Islamist resistance elements consisting of Afghan mujahideen. Interestingly, the Taliban was initially supported by both Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries against the Soviets. Even Bin Laden went to the region (Afghanistan) in 1979 to bring aid to the region (Afghanistan) as the Saudi wealthy merchant segment representative.⁴¹ According to some claims, the Saudi family itself. The Saudis found it more acceptable to take them to the field on their own rather than directly helping the Afghan mujahideen. Osama bin Laden was also seen as the most suitable person for this job and went to the region.⁴²

On the other hand, unlike the Taliban, ISIS did not base its organizational form on ethnicity, adopting an early form of Islam. That is why official ranks and positions are divided among a multitude of diverse ethnicities. ISIS leaders, commanders, and officers include Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Chechens, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tajiks, and other nationalities. In this regard, ISIS leaders criticized the Taliban and Al-Qaeda for why they accepted the tribal approach of Mullah Omar and the Taliban, as well as the old Jahiliyya or age of ignorance. Therefore, it is possible to say that ISIS is more forward-thinking than the Taliban in this regard. In other words, it is possible to say that ISIS has developed a more inclusive approach in both its organizational structure and task distribution, unlike the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, rather than an ethnic or tribal structure.

⁴⁰ Erdoğan Deligöz, "Irak Şam İslam Devleti (İŞİD): Gücü ve Geleceği", *Savunma Bilimleri Dergisi* 14/1 (Mayıs 2015), 5-37.

⁴¹ Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009), 250.

⁴² David Dean Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 273.

3.4. Strategy, Tactics, and Enemies

Al-Qaeda and ISIS differ on the main enemies, strategies, tactics, and other fundamental concerns. As a result, the threat they pose to the United States differs as well. Although the ultimate goal of Al-Qaeda is to overthrow the corrupt “apostate” regimes in the Middle East and replace them with “true” Islamic governments, Al-Qaeda's primary enemy is the United States, which it sees as the root cause of the Middle East problems. By targeting the United States, Al-Qaeda believes it will eventually induce the United States to end support for these Muslim state regimes and withdraw from the region altogether, thus leaving the regimes vulnerable to attack from within.”⁴³ Contrarily, the priority for the Taliban is the liberation of Afghanistan and establishing a state there according to Islamic rules and local traditions.

Unlike al-Qaeda, ISIS fights like a “traditional army” using “traditional military tactics”. For this reason, ISIS primarily establishes area dominance in a particular region and develops a government in this region under its ideology. For example, after ISIS captured Mosul and many Iraqi cities in June 2014, the Medina City Manifesto was first published. This document emphasized that the people had tried all secular systems, suffered under these regimes and that it was the turn of the “Islamic State”. It emphasized that many rules regulating social life were established, such as women had not to leave the house, no drinking alcohol and no smoking, and one had to pray five times a day

ISIS's “utopia” was like that of a typical authoritarian regime: First lay out the founding ideology, design society accordingly, and get rid of the undesirable. While doing this, use all kinds of violence to avoid resistance and establish an intelligence system suitable for people to report each other. An ISIS-style organization could not survive only with a totalitarian organization. It required a truly functioning bureaucracy. ISIS started with a severe census in Mosul. All people such as doctors, nurses, engineers, police, and teachers were recorded and classified according to their religion. In addition, all businesses and plots were classified according to the faith of their owners. According to the classifications made, the property of non-Muslims was marked, and three options were presented to them. They would either become Muslims or pay taxes. Those who did not accept these two options had to abandon everything and leave the city.⁴⁴

The new administrative language and dressing rules were based on the Divan system; although it resembled 800 BC, it was essentially a modern structure. Renovating and facilitating many municipal activities such as electricity distribution and garbage collection compared to the past, ISIS has also established a comprehensive inspection system to ensure their correct functioning. The fact that

⁴³ Byman, “Comparing Al-Qaeda and ISIS: Different Goals, Different Targets”.

⁴⁴ José Carlos Cueto, Afghanistan: Taliban, İŞİD Ve El Kaide Nasıl Ayrışıyor, Aralarındaki Farklar Neler? *BBC Türkçe* (Access 23 August 2023).

ISIS exercised its authority through terrorism enabled it to pay its bills on time. For example, someone who smuggled electricity could lose their hands on charges of theft.⁴⁵

Similarly, the Taliban established a state organization that dominates the area and acts according to Islamic methods in these regions. However, unlike ISIS, the Taliban also observes the tribal system and traditions of their control regions. In other words, the Taliban do not have a radical understanding of Islam like ISIS. Al-Qaeda supports the jihadist groups in the Islamic world to fight against U.S.-supported regimes. "The Islamic state adopts some of these goals, but the approach is quite different even where the agreement is in principle. The Strategy of the Islamic State is to control the lands, steadily strengthen its position, and, in time, expand the land it finds the opportunity. ISIS uses mass executions, public beheadings, rape, and symbolic crucifixion displays to subjugate the population and "purify" its controlled society. While also providing (if minimal) basic services: gaining them some public support or at least not giving in because of fear. Al-Qaeda, by contrast, prefers a softer approach."⁴⁶ ISIS has utilized violence to draw in considerable supporters. ISIS has gained worldwide recognition by executing detainees and adversaries and posting photos of its viciousness on social media.⁴⁷

It can be said that the Islamic State has been much more "successful" than Al-Qaeda in achieving its goals. The Islamic State is a "state" because it controls and administers the land. Its military presence is troubling Iraq and Syria, and even Afghanistan's Khorasan branch, Afghanistan under the Taliban. Its threat extends to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and especially Lebanon. The thousands of foreign fighters under its flag are at least at greater risk of regional instability, and U.S. officials legitimately fear they pose a counter-terrorism problem for the West. Ideologically, the sectarianism it incites worsens Shia-Sunni tensions across the region. So the Islamic State is a more significant threat to the stability of the Middle East than Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban have ever been.

3.5. The Concept of "Us and Them"

"All jihadist groups draw a line between themselves and others. The Taliban and ISIS are different in this regard. The domain of ISIS is minimal and includes only its members. All other groups, including the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, are aliens and can be killed if necessary. In the Taliban's view, the circle of insiders is more expansive, and all other extremist groups except ISIS are on their side. So they can partner with Mujahedeen in Chechen, Philippines, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, and

⁴⁵ Edgar Sar, "Bir yükseliş ve çöküş öyküsü: İŞİD Musul'u üç yıl boyunca nasıl yönetti?", *Medyascope* (Access 28 August 2023).

⁴⁶ Byman, "Comparing Al-Qaeda and ISIS: Different Goals, Different Targets".

⁴⁷ Wong, "Five Ways ISIS, Al-Qaeda Differ" *The Hill* (Access 23 August 2023).

others."⁴⁸ Although the Taliban is the root of all these groups, it is seen that the softest one is the Taliban. After Al-Qaeda broke away from the Taliban and turned into a global jihadist organization, ISIS, which emerged from within Al-Qaeda, gained power after the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 and then started to become the "Caliphate", declaring Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi the "Caliph". After this announcement, the title "Islamic State (ISIS)" was stuck, and it continues to be referred to as ISIS in some media reports.⁴⁹

Although the territory under their direct control has shrunk recently, ISIS fighters once controlled an area larger than Finland or Belgium and ruled them as states. It motivates foreign extremists to join them. Its rapid rise has become a driving force for the so-called "global jihad".⁵⁰ (ISIS Goes Global, 2016) With a more potent ideology and propaganda device than Al-Qaeda (especially by gathering through social media), the Islamic State, which finances from the oil fields it controls in Iraq and Syria, is better positioned to expand its ideological warfare. Under the guise of re-establishing the "Caliphate," their message has become much more inspiring than Al-Qaeda's covert terrorist exercises.⁵¹

In addition, the ISIS organization says, "*Fight them until there is no more discord and all religion belongs to Allah.*"⁵² Based on this verse, the members of ISIS interpret the verse in their world of mind. He states that this verse should be applied to those whom he defines as "mumteni"⁵³. The word *mumtani'* refers to those who are members of Islam, approve but abstain from the provisions of sharia, that is, do not comply with these provisions. By the opinion of Ibn Taymiyyah, whom they frequently refer to in fatwas regarding this issue; They see them as blasphemers and people of apostasy. According to this verse and the views they reference, they do not refrain from killing those who do not fulfill religious rituals such as prayer, and fasting, even if they are Muslims.

Based on the 5th verse of Surah At-Tawbah, he states that the commandment "*Kill the polytheists wherever you find them*"⁵⁴ is valid for all polytheists and states that all of them should be killed. ISIS, which directly accuses everyone who does not think like them, whether they are Muslims or not, of being polytheists and considers them to be polytheists, alienates them and considers their killing as a

⁴⁸ Moheq, "Taliban and ISIS: Seven Similarities, Seven Differences", 499.

⁴⁹ "Mapping Militant Organizations-The Islamic State", Stanford University Center for International Security and Cooperation Freeman Spogli Institute (Access 29 August 2023).

⁵⁰ Tim Lister et al. "ISIS goes global: 143 attacks in 29 countries have killed 2,043", *CNN International* (Access 29 August 2023).

⁵¹ Sue Lannin, "Islamic State Far Greater Threat than Al-Qaeda and Taliban: Terrorist Financing Expert", *ABC News* (Access 23 August 2023).

⁵² al-Anfāl 8/39.

⁵³ *Mumteni'*: The term of theology and logic, meaning that its non-existence is a requirement of its essence or that it requires the non-existence of the subject in its essence. See Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi, (Access 9 October 2023).

⁵⁴ al-Tawba 9/5.

divine order. In this context, the organization states that killing infidels or polytheists is a virtue for its members, and explains that the most important characteristic of getting closer to Allah and being a righteous servant is the shedding of polytheist blood.⁵⁵ At this point, the organization does not care whether young, old, elderly, women, civilians, or soldiers. He thinks that people should be killed without discrimination. At this point, when determining polytheists and infidels, they consider all places outside the region they have determined as the ISIS Islamic State (Dar'ül Islam) or Muslims who do not migrate to these places as polytheists. In this regard, they believe that all polytheists should be fought collectively, based on the order "*Fight the polytheists as they fight you*"⁵⁶

At this point, ISIS and ISIS-affiliated groups have come to the most radical and brutal position among the jihadist organizations. For example, ISIS-K (ISIS-Khorasan), established in January 2015, recruits both Afghan and Pakistani jihadists, especially Afghan Taliban members who do not see their organizations excessively enough. ISIS-K has targeted Afghan security forces, Afghan politicians and ministries, the Taliban, religious minorities including Shia Muslims and Sikhs, U.S. and NATO forces, and humanitarian aid organizations. Unlike the Taliban, whose area of interest is limited to Afghanistan, ISIS-K is part of the global ISIS network that seeks to launch attacks on Western, international, and humanitarian targets wherever they can reach them. Although there are strong links between ISIS-K and the Haqqani group within the Taliban, ISIS-K has significant differences with the Taliban, making them abandon Jihad and the battlefield in favor of a negotiated peace deal at "luxury hotels" in Doha, Qatar. Therefore, ISIS-K considers Taliban militants "apostates" and justifies their killing according to interpretations of Islamic law. ISIS militants now represent a significant security challenge for the newly arrived Taliban government, something the Taliban leadership shares with Western intelligence agencies.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and ISIS have one thing in common: their fundamental rejection of democratic Western values. All three reject a system in which men and women have equal rights. They do not accept the formation of a parliament and elections. According to the understanding of all three structures, the only basis of political actions, social life, and economic activity should be organized according to religious values. According to them, Islamic societies are victims of Western intrigues and oppression, so the struggle against Western influence in Islamic countries is a sacred duty. For 20 years, the strategy of the al-Qaeda terrorist

⁵⁵ Karadeniz, "İŞİD Örgütünün Dinî Açıdan Kitiği", 50.

⁵⁶ al-Tawba 9/36.

⁵⁷ Frank Gardner, "Afghanistan: Who are Islamic State Khorasan Province Militants?", *ABC News* (Access 29 August 2023).

organization has been to attack Western targets all over the world, especially the USA, regardless of the military, commercial, or civilian. After the Afghan Jihad, together with Bin Laden, the new generations of Jihad were suicide bombers, and their unique method was terrorism.

In addition, the struggles of these jihadist organizations are against the Western enemy but also against their leaders and political elites, whom they see as enemies who are Westernising their country. That is why they want to overthrow these pro-Western leaders and political structures and implement their Islamic model. For this reason, hatred of West and Western values stems from the presence of the West in the Middle East and the values it represents. In any case, the Arab world's test of democracy showed itself in the developments in the region after the Arab Spring, when it did not yield encouraging results. Later, under the name of a sacred return to the past, it led to the emergence of radical movements in the Arab world and the Middle East.

The beginning of all three jihadist organizations is the Al-Qaeda movement. Founded in the late 1980s under the leadership of Saudi Arabian millionaire Osama bin Laden, this organization inspired other jihadist organizations in the following years. On the other hand, the Taliban, which adopted a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, was initially financed by money from Saudi Arabia and emerged as a Pashtun movement. Taliban, which means "students" in Pashto, emerged in northern Pakistan following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in the 1990s. The Taliban had promised that peace and security would be maintained in the Pashtun region between Pakistan and Afghanistan with a government based on Islamic law and sharia.

In the meantime, Al-Qaeda turned from being a logistical support network to a jihadist organization with global ambitions. The first important strategy roadmap determination in al-Qaeda's history was the declaration published on August 23th, 1996. The organization stated the "Declaration of Jihad against the American Forces Occupying the Holy Land". Although the declaration targeted the USA, the main target of the declaration was the Saudi regime. In this statement, the Saudi regime is accused of allowing U.S. soldiers to enter the holy land and betraying the principles of Islam.

The second critical strategy determination of Al-Qaeda was the declaration called "International Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders", published on February 23rd, 1998. This declaration is also significant for the history of international security. Because it is considered the beginning of the transition from the close enemy concept to the distant one, in other words, the Saudi regime is no longer a target, and the USA has begun to be targeted directly. It is estimated that the theorist behind this concept change was Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second man of the organization at that time. According to this concept, the power behind the current so-called collaborative Arab regimes is the USA. If the USA is hit and its

influence can be reduced; It will have to withdraw, unable to stand behind the Arab regimes it supports in the Middle East. Regimes with American support behind them will not defend themselves against al-Qaeda and will fall.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq, on the other hand, differed from the original Al-Qaeda line and gained a global perspective again. In 2006, it separated from other extremist groups and became the Islamic State of Iraq. After 2011, the Islamic State became fully involved in the war in Syria and changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS). He parted ways with Al-Qaeda. Since 2013, al-Qaeda and ISIS have varied little in core ideology but have adopted divergent strategies and tactics. Al-Qaeda has sometimes capitalized on ISIS tactics—and made gains in unexpected ways.

ISIS seeks a war of attrition with the West in the Middle East and presents itself as a defender of Sunni Muslim communities. It actively fueled local conflicts and sectarian tensions, working for its benefit. The primary goal of ISIS, unlike al-Qaeda, is to seize and directly rule territory. ISIS has successfully appropriated and cooperated with other groups, especially among Sunni tribal groups, forcing them to swear allegiance—or allegiance—to Baghdadi. Nevertheless, it has few natural alliances with other armed groups in Iraq or Syria. It has tended to act unilaterally.

Al Qaeda's primary strategy has been progressive destabilization. It is focused on achieving long-term goals in a controlled, pragmatic manner. Its goals are focused on building power in multiple countries, garnering support from local communities, and gaining the ability to operate openly. Al-Qaeda is trying to establish a global caliphate, but only as an eventual goal. Controlling the area has been less critical to Al-Qaeda's short-term strategy than it has been for ISIS. Like ISIS, Al-Qaeda showed little tolerance for Shiites and other minorities who had no place in its narrow worldview.

Nevertheless, it sees the U.S. and the West as bigger enemies. Al-Qaeda sought to capitalize on the brutality of ISIS by portraying itself as a more rational jihadist actor. It continues to spread this narrative. Compared to the Islamic State, al-Qaeda uses violence in a more politically calculated way.

However, the two movements have complementary effects on the global jihadist Salafist network. First, both exploit disenfranchised or disillusioned Sunni youth in the Middle East and abroad. Second, they both undermine the existing state system and contribute to the increase in wars in the region. Finally, both normalize the belief that violent Jihad is necessary to defend the Sunni community globally.

Even if the Taliban seeks to revive the past in Afghanistan, it does not aim to change other countries. Al-Qaeda, with its highly effective methods, aims to mobilize Muslim fighters around the world and drive the United States away from the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia and its holy sites. Although their

propaganda revolves around the idea that Jihad is the obligation of every Muslim individual, local Muslims are their priority. Although ISIS has the same approach to the issue, it has a much more violent approach. "For ISIS, terrorism is part of the revolutionary war. They carried out massive execution, rapes, and beheadings in the areas under their domination. They tried to terrorize the local population to bring them to their knees. Al Qaeda, on the other hand, has a 'gentle' approach, so to speak." It seems that the cells and groups of ISIS terrorists continue to pose a severe threat in Syria and Iraq. Now the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan is fueling another concern. Fears that the country will again become a magnet for extremists, and from there, a structure that will destabilize other countries will arise.

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