

AMERICA'S REAL ENEMY

THE SALAFI-JIHADI MOVEMENT

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1. **The United States is losing the war on terror because it has misdefined the enemy.** The Trump administration is continuing and accelerating the flawed strategy of the Obama administration, which defined the enemy too narrowly. An effective strategy should not focus on retaking Mosul and Raqqa and killing ISIS and al Qaeda leaders plotting attacks against the United States.
2. **The Salafi-jihadi movement is the real enemy of the United States.** While this movement is inherently global and includes both ISIS and al Qaeda, it does not encompass all Muslims or Islam. Its goal is to destroy current Muslim societies as they are today and replace them with an Islamic caliphate through force. It also aims to attack and either subjugate or destroy the US and the West.
3. **Popular uprisings during the Arab Spring and ongoing conflicts in the Muslim world have mobilized Sunni populations.** Vulnerable Sunni populations have been forced to take action to defend their livelihoods and very lives as governments and governance have collapsed. By defending these communities and providing basic services, justice, security, and military support, al Qaeda, ISIS, and other groups have filled these governance gaps. The post-Arab Spring chaos achieved what members of the Salafi-jihadi movement had failed to do for decades: mobilize the Sunni community.
4. **The Salafi-jihadi movement's power lies in its relationship with Sunni populations.** It draws strength from its ties to Sunni communities much more than from its ideology, which the majority of Muslims ultimately reject. US alignment with Russia, Iran, and Assad in Syria have advanced a narrative of Western oppression of the Sunnis, whereas the Salafi-jihadi base is viewed as a defender of local populations against aggressors. As a result, some Sunni communities are willing to support Salafi-jihadi groups in exchange for security even if they reject the Salafi-jihadi ideology.
5. **The United States must reorient its strategy from killing ISIS and al Qaeda members to providing Sunni communities with an alternative that is better than what the Salafi-jihadis offer.** The movement focuses on securing local communities and redressing their grievances, and so must the US and its partners. A strategy to defeat the groups will ultimately fail in the long-term if the grievances that feed insurgencies persist. Simply continuing current US policies will ensure that the Salafi-jihadi movement amasses the resources and capabilities to conduct truly devastating attacks against the US and its allies in the years to come.