

**TRADITIONAL ISLAMISM CONFRONTS A NEW ACTOR:  
SYRIAN BROTHERHOOD DISCOURSES ON DAA‘SH**

by

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**A THESIS**

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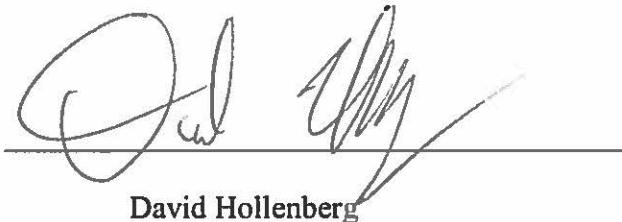
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## An Abstract of the Thesis of

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David Hollenberg

Exiled from the Syrian political scene for thirty years, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood seized upon the chaos of the 2011 uprising as an opportunity to revive their dwindling political status in the country. While they have made impressive strides towards this goal, they were certainly not the only organization to utilize the conflict for political ends. Daa' sh—the infamously barbaric Jihadi-Salafi institution—began expanding its operations into Syria as early as 2012. Daa' sh utilizes highly publicized brutality, which continues to revitalize a public dialogue on Islamism, forcing organizations like the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood to grapple with a rapidly evolving political and religious landscape. This Islamist challenge combined with the Ikhwan's struggle to unite various opposition forces has muddled the rhetorical scheme of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Add to these challenges some burgeoning internal divisions, and the result is a rhetorical blunder. In this thesis, I analyze Syrian MB public statements on Daa' sh, focusing on the rhetorical tools they rely on to respond to the political Daa' sh poses to the MB's legitimacy. I conclude by suggesting alternative rhetorical tactics the Ikhwan might use to improve their political standing.

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## **Introduction**

Islamism is the coalescence of Islam and political action; a vehement rejection of Western imperialism and a means of resisting cultural contamination. It was founded as a “specific social reaction to modern social and economic conditions, rapid urbanization, the dislocation of traditional communities and crafts, unemployment and anomie”<sup>1</sup>. Its means for alleviating contemporary social ills is the observation of Islam in all levels of society— both private and public. It is on matters relating to the latter component of Islamism—the observation of Islam in society—that Islamist organizations most frequently diverge, and it is precisely this point of disjunction that has produced this research endeavor.

One such organization is the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1940 during a wave of anti-Western sentiment which resulted from the post-Ottoman French Mandate. While this Islamist institution was equally critical of Western social and economic encroachment, they remained highly internally-oriented, concerning themselves with local Syrian issues. This preoccupation with establishing reform at the state-level, rather than the international level, has strongly affected the group’s developmental trajectory.

Daa’sh—the infamous Islamist terror group—is characterized by its unprecedeted use of highly publicized brutality. This tactic is tailored to serve their end goal of not only establishing an Islamic caliphate, but also the “uprooting of shirk,

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<sup>1</sup> Antony, Black. *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*. New York: Routledge, 2011. 329.

idolatry, wherever it is found”<sup>2</sup>. The destruction of shirk is a component of their “offensive jihad”<sup>3</sup>, or what the Daa’shi leader Abu ‘Umar al-Baghdadi described as “going after the apostate unbelievers by attacking [them] in their home territory, in order to make God’s word most high and until there is no persecution.”<sup>4</sup> This is the causative justification for the group’s brutal terror tactics.

Daa’sh is a very specific expression of the Jihadi-Salafi tradition. While the Muslim Brotherhood is widely recognized as contributing to the development of the Jihadi-Salafi ideology, it is very rarely categorized as such. Specifically, the Muslim Brotherhood is credited for championing the idea of the caliphate as being the utmost form of Islamist governance. While this idea is omnipresent throughout their early writings and political critiques, they have since then shown “a relative indifference” towards actually restoring the caliphate<sup>5</sup>, and have instead preoccupied themselves with the typical endeavors of a political party. It is worthwhile mentioning the Ikhwan’s role in the development of the caliphate ideology as that is the stated central goal of Daa’sh, but the group’s ideological overlap ends there. Their greatest similarity—if not only—is their shred categorization as Islamist institutions.

Due to their shared identity as Islamist institutions, there is therefore also a significant overlap in these organizations’ potential support and recruiting base within Syria—an overlap which has placed the Syrian Ikhwan in an awkward, quasi-diplomatic position. While they make it clear in their public statements that they do not condone

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<sup>2</sup> Cole Bunzel. "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State." The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, 19 Mar. 2015. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>4</sup> Baghdadi in Bunzel, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell in Bunzel, 11.

the violent tactics of the organization, they appear to be apprehensive to fully dismiss the organization on ideological grounds. As will be further delineated during the rhetorical analysis, this ideological apprehension appears to be fading as Daa' sh increases in brutality. If the Ikhwan continue to relinquish this apprehension, they will be able to explicitly narrow their rhetorical audience to non-violent Sunni Muslims rather than all Sunni Muslims, thereby avoiding any residual ideological friction with Daa' sh.

It is for these reasons that it is worthwhile to analyze the rhetorical strategies which the Syrian Ikhwan have employed in their public statements on Daa' sh, as these strategies illustrate the ways by which the Ikhwan are fighting to present themselves as a relevant and viable Islamist authority. These rhetorical strategies also grant insight into the group's internal dynamics, indicating what issues may be interfering with their capacity to skillfully respond to Daa' sh. The predominant rhetorical weaknesses which manifest throughout the Ikhwan's statements correlate with some burgeoning challenges faces the Ikhwan: challenges which they must address if they hope to gain the support of the Syrian people. Overcoming these onerous internal challenges is a necessary step in stemming Daa' sh's expansion, as the existence of Daa' sh and other extremist Islamist organizations in Syria is in part a result of the Ikhwan's "own failure to present itself as a credible and attractive option to many moderate Islamists."<sup>6</sup> The group therefore cannot undermine Daa' sh without first acknowledging their own failures and weaknesses.

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<sup>6</sup> Raphaël Lefèvre. "The Syrian Brotherhood's Islamic State Challenge." Project on Middle East Political Science, 2015.

## Notes on Terminology

For some of the prominent organizations and individuals which are discussed throughout this text, there are multiple terms which are utilized interchangeably. For the “Syrian Muslim Brotherhood”, the terms “Syrian Ikhwan”, “Ikhwan” and “Syrian Brotherhood” are all used interchangeably. Bashar Al-Assad is referred to as “Al-Assad”, “The Syrian Regime” or simply “The Regime”.

The texts analyzed in this piece and words of Arabic origin for which there are no English equivalents have been translated in accordance with the International Journal of Middle East Studies Transliteration Guide<sup>7</sup>. This is with the notable exception of the term Daa‘sh, which is most often referred to in English by the terms ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham/ Syria), ISIL (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), or the Islamic State. I have opted to make this exception as Daa‘sh is the term utilized by the communities which will be discussed throughout this thesis, and this term maintains important connotative nuances which are not present in the various English terms.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "IJMES TRANSLATION & TRANSLITERATION GUIDE." *IJMES Editorial Office*. International Journal of Middle East Studies, North Carolina State University, Department of History, 2013. Web.

<sup>8</sup> Acronyms are not traditionally used in Arabic, meaning that in the Arabic-speaking world, “Daa‘sh” is by and large considered to be a term in and of itself. This means that when the term Daa‘sh is used rather than ISIS, ISIL or Islamic State, it does not inherently credit the group as being either Islamic or a state, so the use of the term Daa‘sh can be a means to demean the organization. Further, it sounds and looks similar to the term Daa‘s, which means to trample or crush underfoot. Read more on this terminology here:

Alice Guthrie. "Decoding Daa‘sh: Why Is the New Name for ISIS so Hard to Understand?" *Free Word: Words Change Lives*. February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

## **Chapter One: Historical Background**

### **Origins**

Events which unfolded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Syria helped craft the social, political and economic conditions which were favorable to the founding of an organization like the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. In the early nineteenth century, the Damascene ‘ulama’ maintained a high social status which “depended on the value attached to religious knowledge”<sup>9</sup>. The status of these religious leaders was naturally affected by a series of political and economic developments in the period of 1839-1876, which “helped raise the status of non-Muslims”<sup>10</sup>, simultaneously diminishing the social value previously assigned to the ‘ulama’. These developments were put forth in the Ottoman Tanzimat—a series of reforms, which aimed to introduce some components of Enlightenment reform such as “individual rights, respect for private property and the market economy”<sup>11</sup>—traits which were all viewed as distinctly European. This invasion of foreign thought created the perfect conditions for an Islamic movement.

This movement had roots dating back to 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Salifiyya movement reached Dasmascus. Salafism “reconciled current ideas about reason, science, and progress with religion to disprove an assumption embedded in the Tanzimat and later Ottoman reforms, namely that the ‘ulama’ lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to guide the empire to prosperity”<sup>12</sup>. Simultaneously, this movement

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<sup>9</sup> David Dean Commins. *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>11</sup> Christian C. Sahner. *Among the Ruins: Syria Past and Present*. New York: Oxford UP, 2014. Print. Syria. Damascus: 1953. Print, 89.

<sup>12</sup> Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 48.

was also a reaction to the perceived threat of cultural invasion, as it “sought to reform Islam from within in order to give the Arab world the resources deemed necessary to confront the challenges of European domination”<sup>13</sup>.

The end of World War I marked the beginning of the French Mandate of Syria—a title which many Syrians saw as nothing more than a euphemism for “foreign despotism”<sup>14</sup>. The presence of a foreign ruler revitalized the fervor of an already blossoming political Islamic movement, which would thereafter gain broader support via its appeal to the notion of nationalism. Another factor supporting the general tone of civil unrest were the rapidly evolving economic conditions during the French Mandate period. Mandate authorities eagerly welcomed foreign trade, which naturally harmed “small urban traders and local artisans”<sup>15</sup>. This influx of trade benefitted only a few successful merchants, further strengthening the class tensions which had been sparked during the Ottoman period. These economic and social conditions strengthened civil discontent, fostering the growth of a social resistance movement.

One expression of ideological resistance to this invasion of foreign thought took the form of Islamic organizations, or *jami‘at*—“societies and clubs dedicated to the promotion of intellectual or political goals”<sup>16</sup>. These societies originated in Syria during Ottoman rule and would ultimately serve as the structure through which Islamism would later take a political form. One *jami‘a* specifically—the Shabab Mohammed—is widely regarded as being the predecessor to the Syrian Ikhwan. Throughout the nineteen

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<sup>13</sup> Raphaël Lefèvre. *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Sahner, *Among the Ruins*, 100.

<sup>15</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 13

twenties and thirties, groups like the Shabab Mohammed organized to resist the French authorities' efforts to impose western cultural norms, such as the unveiling of women.

The mandate period created a set of conditions that naturally set the stage for political and economic discontent. In addition to imposing French social norms, the mandate government failed to make any changes to the existing power structure which favored the landlord-merchant class<sup>17</sup>. Thus, members of the political periphery were being oppressed by both local and foreign interests. With the addition of a shortage of basic commodities, it is no wonder that the jami‘at were well-received by a discontent population.

The Syrian chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood would not be officially chartered until 1945 following the return of Mustapha al- Siba‘i —a young Syrian from Homs— from Cairo where he had studied with the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna. Although the Syrian chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood would rapidly establish its own brand of the organization, it seemed to adopt the Egyptian Ikhwan’s primary aim of “becoming both the explicit extension of the local religious clubs, or jami‘at, and the intellectual heir of the Salafiyya movement”<sup>18</sup>. When al-Siba‘i returned to Syria with another Syrian native, Mohammed al-Hamid, the two strove to unify the various jami‘at into a cohesive Islamist organization, which would ultimately form the Syrian Ikhwan. Upon Syria’s independence from France in 1946, the Ikhwan moved immediately to become a political force by running in the first parliamentary elections.

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<sup>17</sup> Samer Abboud. *Syria*. Polity, 2016. 17-21.

<sup>18</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 20.

From the outset, the group was distinctly pragmatic. While they advocated for Islam to be the official state religion, they were also careful to note that they had no intention of creating a theocracy. Mustapha al-Siba'i's draft constitution, which he presented to the Constituent Assembly, stated in its third article: "Islam is the state religion; other divine religions and religious minorities will be respected"<sup>19</sup>. This provision was not warmly received by the assembly, and Siba'i eventually agreed to a provision that instead required the head of state to be a Muslim and for "fiqh—Islamic Jurisprudence" to be the root source of law.<sup>20</sup> The Brotherhood's practice of pragmatism would at times earn them criticism from constituents who viewed them as sacrificing religion for political gain.

The early Syrian Brotherhood was also strongly socialist in outlook, as is illustrated by al-Siba'i's doctrine of "Islamic socialism"<sup>21</sup>. Al- Siba'i underscored the ways by which Islam and socialism shared some fundamental values, such as social equality and the elimination of poverty. These were favorable positions to hold at a time when many potential constituents—the disgruntled members of the lower middle class—were maintaining an increasingly revolutionary outlook.

While the Salafiyya movement put forth the ideological basis of the Syrian Ikhwan, it is important to note that the group's formation was just as equally a result of the political and economic realities of the time. This close relationship with local conditions is an important attribute of the overall institutional structure of the Muslim Brotherhood. The chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood, while all adhering to a specific

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<sup>19</sup> Sibai in Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.,31.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 36.

ideological tradition, “they operate independently and in response to local conditions”.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, each chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood is geared towards achieving a revolution at the national scale, rather than having any international aspirations. It is therefore natural that such an internally-oriented organization would only be born in response to local conditions.

### **The Ikhwan and the Ba‘th**

The Ba‘th Party was founded in the late nineteen 1930’s during the same period of nationalist fervor which had helped the Ikhwan rise to prominence. The two groups, while often disagreeing on matters relating to the degree of Islam in the government, did not have notable clashes during this early period. Ba‘th ideology maintained a high degree of socialism, which was well-received at a time when the public was leaning increasingly towards the left. The Ba‘th party also put forth a heavily nationalist rhetoric, which earned them the support of various minority groups in Syria who had become increasingly ostracized by the Sunni majority.<sup>23</sup>

One such minority group which would eventually rise to power within the Ba‘th party was the ‘Alawiyya. The ‘Alawiyya “practice a small and poorly understood form of Shi‘ism”<sup>24</sup> which incorporates features of Isma‘ilism and Christianity. The ‘Alawi community has historically been concentrated in Latakia, where they have been subject to Sunni landowners. Many Sunnis do not consider the ‘Alawiyya to be Muslims at all,

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<sup>22</sup> Robert G. Rabil. "The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood." In *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*. Edited by Barry Rubin, 73-88. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> John Galvani. “Syria and the Ba‘th Party”. *MERIP Reports* 25, 1974. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Sahner. *Among the Ruins*, 81.

and they have therefore experienced a long history of discrimination in the predominantly Sunni country.

The Ba‘th party and the Ikhwan both aimed to gain the support of the same group—“the educated and nationalist lower and middle classes”<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the Ikhwan’s decision to opt out of the 1954 elections played directly into the hands of the Ba‘th. The Ikhwan’s move to minimize its political role in Syria was likely in response to tense conditions in Egypt, where the Nasser regime was carrying out a campaign of repression against the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>26</sup> After this sabbatical from politics, the Syrian Ikhwan struggled to compete with the increasingly popular Ba‘th party.

The Ba‘th party owes much of the credit for its successful 1963 coup to the French authorities’ ruling practices during the mandate. In order to maintain control, the “the French military recruitment had focused heavily on the dissident rural communities, which the French considered to be less nationalist than the urban Sunnis”<sup>27</sup>. Accordingly, the ‘Alawiyya and other pro-Ba‘th groups were disproportionately represented in the military. Further, due to their lower socioeconomic standing, such groups were often unable to pay the “badal” or financial substitute which would allow them to opt out of military service.<sup>28</sup> The ‘Alawis in the military constituted a relatively cohesive bloc, allowing them to rise in rank over the often divided Sunni officers.

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<sup>25</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 38.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>27</sup> Galvani. “Syria and the Baath Party”. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 69.

In 1954, the Ba'th party won twenty-two seats in the parliamentary elections, making it clear that they were a viable political threat to the Ikhwan. Further, popular support for Nasser was growing in Syria during the same time that Nasser was leading a campaign to sabotage the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The Ikhwan were appearing increasingly out of sync with the Syrian population that was backing the secular, nationalist and socialist parties.<sup>29</sup>

In 1958, Syria entered into a union with Egypt and formed the United Arab Republic under the leadership of Nasser, who demanded the dissolution of all political parties. It was during this time that “a core group of Syrian ‘Alawi officers based in Cairo became involved in the establishment of the Ba’th’s secret Military Committee”<sup>30</sup>—a discreet unit which played a leading role in the 1963 military coup which put the Ba’th party in power. In the years following, the ‘Alawiyya moved quickly to solidify their power within the party, leading to the 1970 installation of Hafez al-Assad as Syrian President.

Tensions between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Assad regime arose quickly. Although Assad at first made intentional efforts to overcome the Ba’thist sectarian past by appointing many Sunnis to government positions, he still disproportionately funneled resources to the ‘Alwai community. Moreover, his identity as an ‘Alawi was enough in itself to lead the Ikhwan to speak out against the regime. Sa’id Hawwa, the chief ideologue of the Ikhwan, started referencing “Ibn Tamiyya’s *fatwa* against the

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<sup>29</sup> Rabil. "The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood". 73-88.

<sup>30</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 69.

minority community”<sup>31</sup>. By doing so, the Ikhwan and other Islamic groups hoped to frame the regime as anti-Islamic and inspire popular support for their efforts.

The period of 1979-1982 was marked by an increase in violent uprisings against the regime—a period which breeds some confusion for those who study the activities of the Syrian Ikhwan. A campaign of assassinations was launched against members of the regime by the Fighting Vanguard—a jihadist organization that had loose connections to the Syrian Ikhwan. Since its inception, the Ikhwan had adopted a non-violent approach to achieving its political goals. During this time, however, many of the individuals carrying out acts of violence were in one way or another connected to the Ikhwan. “If a Muslim Brother wishes to commit violence, he generally leaves the organization to do so”<sup>32</sup>, write Leiken and Brooke, discussing the Brothers general success in sifting out radicalism. However, the Ikhwan’s mere association with these radical movements was enough to make them a target of the regime. Further, the issue of abstaining from or utilizing violence became an increasingly controversial topic within the Ikhwan’s. To this day, the issue of violence remains a tense topic within the group.

By 1979, “state repression had become such that the Ikhwan leadership decided it was time to respond to Ba’thist provocations by raising the banner of jihad itself”<sup>33</sup>. They staged violent uprisings Syrian cities, and members of the Ikhwan in concert with the Fighting Vanguard “stormed the Aleppo Artillery Academy and murdered dozens of

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<sup>31</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> Robert S Leiken and Steven Brooke. "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood." *Foreign Affairs* 86.2 (2007): 107- 121. EBSCOhost, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 109.

Alawi officers.”<sup>34</sup> In 1980, after narrowly escaping an assassination attempt, Assad issued Law 49, declaring membership in the Muslim Brotherhood to be punishable by death. The Brothers continued to stage attacks, believing that it would help them to earn popular support in Syria.

In February 1982, the Brothers allied with the Jihadi Fighting Vanguard and led an uprising which failed so miserably that it still serves as a demerit on the reputation of the Ikhwan. When the rebellion began in Hama, the regime responded ruthlessly, killing 20,000-40,000 Syrians<sup>35</sup> and shelling whole quarters of the city. The Ikhwan’s role in this attack and their following exile left them grappling for relevance in their home country.

### A “Crisis of Irrelevance”: The Ikhwan 1982- 2011

The brutal events in Hama in 1982 reinforced the longstanding sectarian divisions within the group that had been inhibiting its capacity to act as a cohesive unit. The most prominent division within the group lie between the “Aleppo clan” and the “Hama clan”. The Aleppo clan was “more cautious to not provoke the regime into a last-ditch battle before the Ikhwan were certain they had chances of winning it”<sup>36</sup>. This faction of the Ikhwan attempted to slow the process of radicalization leading up to the massacre of 1982, but eventually was overwhelmed by the Hama clan. The Hama clan was composed of younger activists who often advocated for more radical means. Though the Ikhwan did not resort to violence until late 1979, the Hama clan—who controlled the group throughout the seventies—had been fostering the notion of Islamic militancy

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<sup>34</sup> Rabil, "The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood." 75.

<sup>35</sup> Lefèvre, “The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria: A ‘centrist’ jihad?” *Turkish Review*, 4(2) (2014). 11.

<sup>36</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 125.

through the decade previous. Naturally, the bloody failure of 1982 incited mud-slinging between the two factions, who predominantly took up their exiles in separate states—the Allepines in Jordan and the Hamawites in Iraq, where they resumed Jihadi military training.<sup>37</sup> To this day, the animosity between the Aleppo and Hama clans continues to foster impractical sectarian divisions within the group.

The future of the group looked grim: “...the organization had been left for decades with neither a base inside the country nor the credibility it once enjoyed”<sup>38</sup>. The group attempted to launch a war of propaganda against the regime using its publication *al-Nadhir*, which utilized tactics such as comparing Assad to the Zionists to undermine his reputation. Meanwhile, the regime—seizing upon the Ikhwan’s ensuing crisis of identity—instigated conciliatory measures with the more moderate members of the brotherhood. These meetings, which didn’t lead to any resolution between the regime and the Ikhwan, did indeed bring about the intended result of amplifying tensions within the Brotherhood.<sup>39</sup>

In exile, the Ikhwan continued to try and insert themselves into the events unfolding in Syria. After Bashar al-Assad took over the position of president in 2000, Syrian intellectuals published a petition of their desired governmental reforms, which became a widely supported initiative. This ushered in the “Damascus Spring”—a civil society movement which culminated in the signing of the Damascus Declaration in 2005.<sup>40</sup> This declaration, which was crafted by an opposition coalition, called for “a gradual and peaceful transition to democracy and the equality of all citizens in a secular

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<sup>37</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 141.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>39</sup> Rabil, “The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.”, 79.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 82.

and sovereign Syria.”<sup>41</sup> It was a milestone in the development of a Syrian opposition force, as the regime had successfully repressed all but one anti-regime political organizations; the Syrian Ikhwan<sup>42</sup>.

For the first time in decades, the Ikhwan were involved in a Syrian opposition movement, which rightfully made some coalition members concerned about regime retaliation. In May of that year, the regime began a rigorous clampdown on the movement, once again reminding the Syrians to avoid the Ikhwan. Although the collaboration with the Ikhwan certainly strengthened the resolve of the regime, this was not the only reason for the end of the Damascus Spring. Despite the relative success of the Damascus Spring, “the Declaration signatories were never able to translate that cooperation into sustained pressure against the regime”<sup>43</sup>, which was actively working to repress the movement.

The Ikhwan left the coalition of the Damascus Declaration in 2006, when they formed a Saudi-backed opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front, with the defected former Syrian vice president, Abdel Halim Khaddam.<sup>44</sup> However, this coalition received very little support within Syria and in fact had the effect of harming the Brothers’ image, as they had allied with a former pillar of the Assad regime.

In exile, the Ikhwan continued to struggle with the role of Islam in their vision for Syria. In 2004, they published “The Political Project for the Future Syria.”, which enshrined Islam as the official state religion, and also included protections for democracy and other historically western values. The following year, a Syrian

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<sup>41</sup> “The Damascus Declaration.” *Carnegie Middle East Center*.

<sup>42</sup> Abboud, *Syria*, 51.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>44</sup> “The Damascus Declaration.” *Carnegie Middle East Center*.

expatriate named Wafa Sultan articulated the disdain which many Syrians had begun to feel towards the Ikhwan:

Do they have the courage to openly declare their new beliefs and apologize for their past so that we won't need to dig up their past? They are calling [now] for a pluralistic, democratic society ruled by the principles of justice and equality. On what basis are they going to build this society?...Have they changed their fundamental beliefs? Why don't they give an answer to this question?...They used to commit crimes [and then] escape to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Jordan [in order to find] a safe haven, and now they are planning to return from these safe havens to the scene of their crimes to participate in building a democratic, pluralistic society based on justice and equality?!<sup>45</sup>

As exemplified in this passage, the Ikhwan were becoming less outwardly religious as the Syrian population was becoming increasingly devout<sup>46</sup>, exacerbating their struggle to maintain relevance from abroad.

### **The Ikhwan, the Syrian Conflict and Daa'ish**

Regardless of their various defeats, Raphaël Lefèvre asserts that the 2011 Arab spring and the events following offered a golden opportunity to the Brotherhood:

...if their presence inside Syria was indeed limited, their ideological influence, history of unyielding opposition to the Ba'th, significant financial resources and organizational capacities would nonetheless make them an essential future component of any post-Assad settlement.<sup>47</sup>

Members of the blossoming opposition came to terms with this realization and invited the Ikhwan to the meeting which established the Syrian National Council in October 2011. They were not necessarily warmly welcome at first, as their various failures had

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<sup>45</sup> Yvette Talhamy. "The Syrian Uprising: The Muslim Brotherhood Reborn." *Middle East Quarterly*, 19(2) (2012), 35.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 35

<sup>47</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 188.

yet to fall from memory. "Those 30 years destroyed their organization,"<sup>48</sup> said Burhan Ghalioun, the first head of the Syrian National Council. "They lost their legitimacy because they changed positions so much without explanation over the past five years."<sup>49</sup> While the lingering distrust was palpable, so too were the potential advantages of allying with the Ikhwan, who had considerable resources to offer to the cause.

The Brotherhood became a leading member of this council and has utilized this role to help "reactivate their long-dormant networks throughout the country"<sup>50</sup>. They use these networks to help disperse much needed aid throughout the region, as very few outside humanitarian institutions enjoy the same broad reach and organization of the Ikhwan. Simultaneously, they continue denounce violence and maintains a moderate stance, rarely referencing Islam in its frameworks for a post-Assad Syria. In an attempt to have as broad an appeal as possible within Syria, it appears to some that the Brotherhood has prioritized nationalism over Islam.

While the rapidly unfolding conflict produced a power vacuum in Syria, the Ikhwan's ambiguous accord with Islam simultaneously established an Islamist vacuum. These two conundrums were exacerbated by the opposition's failure to establish a unified military force. The first opposition military force—the Free Syrian Army—attempted to unite the various rebel entities, but ultimately failed to centralize its leadership and military strategy.<sup>51</sup> So, too, did the Joint Command for the Revolution's

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<sup>48</sup> Aaron David Miller. "Syria 'Cessation of Hostilities': What Can We Count On?" *Wall Street Journal*, 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 190.

<sup>51</sup> Abboud, *Syria*, 89.

Military Council, and as this coalition began to fragment, “alternative networks of violence began to emerge”<sup>52</sup>.

It is within this chaotic context that Daa‘sh first entered the Syrian scene. Just as they had done in Iraq, Daa‘sh moved to “exploit existing political chaos and sectarian violence”<sup>53</sup> in Syria by founding a jihadi brigade under the leadership of Mohammed al-Jolani. The entity worked under the title Jabat al-Nusra until April 2013 when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi—the leader of Daa‘sh—stated in an online audio message: “It’s now time to declare in front of the people of the Levant and world that the al Nusrah Front is but an extension of the Islamic State of Iraq and part of it”<sup>54</sup>. A separate, al-Qa‘ida sponsored al-Nusra still operates under the leadership of Jolani, though many militants defected to Daa‘sh during the ensuing split. After the announcement of a Daa‘shi presence, the group worked swiftly to expand their territorial holdings, and by 2014 “controlled large swathes of Syrian and Iraqi territory stretching from Anbar in Iraq to the regions immediately east of Aleppo in Syria”<sup>55</sup>.

In May of that same year, Daa‘sh launched its online campaign, utilizing social media platforms to recruit militants and to terrify its potential enemies. Their initial videos and various online productions were very low quality, but with the assistance of a team of highly-skilled professionals, the group’s online presence quickly reached unprecedented quality levels for an organization of this nature.<sup>56</sup> Though it may seem to conflict with the group’s otherwise seventh-century ideologies, technology—with its

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<sup>52</sup>Abboud, *Syria*, 92.

<sup>53</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*. London: Saqi, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Joscelyn. "Al Qa‘ida in Iraq, Al Nusrah Front Emerge as Rebranded Single Entity." *The Long War Journal*, 2013.

<sup>55</sup>Abboud, *Syria*, 107.

<sup>56</sup> Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, 21.

capacity to establish a brand and disseminate information—has lent itself quite favorably to the Daa'shi cause.

Daa'sh and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood have the potential to appeal to similar audiences, but in very different ways. Both view Islam as the remedy for present social ills and advocate for the observation of Muslim values at the state level. While their means for establishing this end are greatly dissimilar, this fundamental similarity has greatly complicated the Ikhwan's attempts to publicly respond to Daa'sh's rise to prominence.

## **Chapter Two: Rhetorical Analysis**

### **Methods & Justification**

Daa‘sh’s unprecedented success in organizing in Iraq and Syria has posed a serious conundrum for other Islamist authorities. These organizations have had to reorient themselves on the spectrum Islamism as Daa‘sh has pushed the conservative, extremist end of the spectrum into uncharted territories. This is in part due to the fact that Daa‘sh has created its own “brand of Salafi Jihadism”<sup>57</sup> which maintains components of the traditional Jihadi-Salafi brand, but has added a stronger form of “offensive jihad”<sup>58</sup>. Thus, other Islamist organizations—such as the Syrian Ikhwan—can appear bland and outdated when compared to a tech-savvy group that is actively and violently pursuing their stated goal of establishing an Islamic Caliphate.

The relationship of Daa‘sh to Al-Qa‘ida—while being beyond the scope of this research—is a worthwhile example of how Daa‘sh has posed a challenge to other Islamist organizations. Daa‘sh’s Iraqi chapter was founded by leading members of Al-Qa‘ida, but the groups have since then taken separate paths. In the ensuing split, the older, loyal members of the Jihadi-Salafi community have generally given their support to Al-Qa‘ida:

The most prominent jihadi scholars, despite their own Salafi rigor, have tended to side with al-Qa‘ida over the Islamic State in the developing feud between the two groups. This is partly due to their loyalty to al-Qa‘ida and its senior leadership. Pro al-Qa‘ida jihadi scholars also object to the Islamic State’s inclination toward extreme and arbitrary violence,

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<sup>57</sup> Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate", 9.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.,10.

including gruesome beheadings, and its perceived excess in the practice of takfir, or declaring other Muslims to be unbelievers.<sup>59</sup>

Although this loyalty has helped Al-Qa‘ida maintain the support of the older Salafi generation, Al-Qa‘ida has failed to bolster such a sense of loyalty among the younger generation with a proclivity for Salafi-Jihadism. This failure to bridge a blossoming generational gap has also been a major challenge for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and is perhaps the greatest advantage which Daa‘sh maintains over traditional Islamist authorities.

For these reasons, it is warranted to research the effects of Daa‘sh’s newfound popularity upon the spectrum of Islamism, as other Islamist groups have had to find new ways to portray themselves as a viable Islamist authority. There is no single Salafi authority, creating a need to identify subunits within this category which can constitute a manageable unit of research. The Muslim Brotherhood, as a whole, has historically been labeled as a Jihadi-Salafi organization, although some may dispute this categorization. Indeed, most contemporary Jihadi-Salafists no longer recognize the ideology of the Brotherhood as a variety of their own ideology, but it is nevertheless recognized by scholars as a milestone in the development of the ideology of Jihadism. Cole Bunzel, a Ph.D. candidate of Princeton who has extensively written on jihadi ideology, identifies the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood as one of the two primary components of Daa‘sh’s unique form of Salafi- Jihadism. While noting that “the Muslim Brotherhood has never been as doctrinally rigorous as present-day jihadis,”<sup>60</sup> Bunzel also asserts that “the Muslim Brotherhood’s emphasis on the caliphate is

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<sup>59</sup> Bunzel, “From Paper State to Caliphate”, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 7.

particularly significant, as the earliest jihadi ideologues and groups emerged as radical splinters from the Brotherhood”<sup>61</sup>. Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood bears a strong relevance in a discussion on Daa’sh.

To discuss the response to Daa’sh of the entire Muslim Brotherhood would indicate a fundamental misunderstanding of the organization of the group. Each chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood is highly internally oriented: the groups have evolved in response to local conditions and therefore take on very different characteristics. This lies in contrast to the external orientation of other Islamist organizations, such as al-Qa’ida, which aim to combat a “far-enemy”—western countries and influence—rather than the “near enemy” of the Ikhwan—corrupt local governments<sup>62</sup>. Thus, rather than constituting an international organization, the Muslim Brotherhood is instead a coalition of vaguely similar groups which maintain little to no coordination. With this internal orientation of the group taken into account, it is easy to opt for an analysis at the scale of one single chapter. The Syrian Ikhwan are the natural choice considering that the civil war has served as a fertile soil for the expansion of Daa’sh, who have eagerly seized upon the state of chaos to grow their organization.

The texts analyzed in this piece have been translated from their original Arabic form into English. The Ikhwan do publish some articles in English on the Muslim Brotherhood’s English website, but considering the stated goals of this research project—to analyze how the Syrian Ikhwan are attempting to sustain and reinforce their support base—utilizing the texts written in the language of the majority of their

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<sup>61</sup> Bunzel, “From Paper State to Caliphate”, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Barry M. Rubin, Introduction to *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*. Edited by Barry M Rubin, 1-3. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

potential supporters is the logical option. The posts published in English are clearly oriented towards a Western audience as they most often address issues relating to terror attacks in the West or Western controversies, while the Arabic posts comment more often on local issues. Leiken and Brooke, discussing the discrepancies between the Muslim Brotherhood's English and Arabic publications, note that , “Islamists have been accused of using deceptive “double discourse”: good moderate cop in English, bad fundamentalist cop in Arabic”<sup>63</sup>. While it appears that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood may coordinate between their English and Arabic posts more than the organization at large, the Arabic posts are nonetheless more relevant to this research inquiry.

The texts which were selected for analysis all originated in the sites category “Bayaan wa Tasriaat”, or “Announcements and Commentary”. These are formal statements made on the behalf of the organization, commenting on a range of recent events. The specific texts selected either comment on a specific act of terror carried out by the group or utilize a discussion of other current events to critique Daa‘sh and contrast it with the Syrian Ikhwan. Although Daa‘sh had a presence in Syria as early as 2011, the group did not mention Daa‘sh by name in a public comment until January 11<sup>th</sup> 2014, so the process of text selection was aided by a relatively short period of discussion. The texts are discussed in chronological order.

### **Discussion of Audience**

As previously discussed, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood—like all chapters of the Ikhwan—is an internally-oriented organization that aims to achieve reform on a

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<sup>63</sup> Leiken and Brooke. "The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood", 8.

local scale. Accordingly, it is logical that the group's public statements would be geared towards persuading other Syrians to support their efforts, enabling them to eventually become a leading force in the country. In 2012, the group appeared to be confident in their capacity to gain political support in a post-Assad Syria, estimating that they might gain as much as 25% of the vote in post-conflict elections.<sup>64</sup> However, this estimate was made before it had become evident that Daa'sh was in fact rising to be a viable political contender. This necessitated that thereafter, the group would not only need to convey to Syrians that they were a viable political entity, but also that they were preferable to Daa'sh. In either scenario, their intended audience is clear: in order to continue marching towards their goal of gaining post-conflict political power in Syria, they would need to capture the hearts and minds of the Syrian population.

That is not to say that the Syrian Ikhwan are writing to impress their Syrian constituents alone. It is important to note that the Syrian Ikhwan are strongly beholden to their donors, though the intricacies of their finances are hard to ascertain as the group intentionally obscures this information in order to protect their donors. This apprehension surrounding financial transparency stems from the group's history of hostilities in Egypt, where donors to the Muslim Brotherhood have been convicted of "funding a banned organization"<sup>65</sup> and even charged with thereby supporting a terrorist organization. While it is difficult to definitely conclude what political alliances may be influencing the group's public statements, it is necessary to acknowledge that some

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<sup>64</sup> "Syrian Muslim Brotherhood to Launch Political Party." *Ynet News*, July 20<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph Mayton, "Egypt's MB and Their Money: Where Does It Come From?" *Ikhwan Web*, 2009.

political biases may at times affect the rhetorical trajectory of the group's public statements.

While it is impossible to know the precise composition of the Syrian Ikhwan's online audience, there are some notable indicators that speak to the group's intended audience. First, the fact that the pieces are written in Arabic indicates that they aim to connect with native Arabic speakers rather than Western audiences, who would instead be directed to the group's English statements. Second, the content of the statements is geared towards individuals who are highly familiar with the history of Syria and specific events occurring in the conflict and the Ikhwan's history. They often reference these specific events without giving context, implying that they assume their audience had extensive prior knowledge. Had these statements been geared for a non-Syrian audience, one can assume they would divulge more details as they frequently do in statements published on their English website.

Perhaps most importantly, their long-term political goals for the country, as outlined in their 2012 document *The Muslim Brotherhood's Vision of the Future*<sup>66</sup>, necessitate that they garner enough local political support to succeed in the post-Assad parliamentary elections. This document includes their *Covenant and Pact*, which outlines their specific vision for a post Assad Syria, calling for "a republican parliamentary system with representatives and officials elected in free, fair, and transparent elections"<sup>67</sup>, among other things. As an organization advocating for such a

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<sup>66</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 223.

<sup>67</sup> "The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

system of free and fair elections, their political survival is contingent upon their capacity to mobilize public support.

Although their statements are primarily tailored to an audience of Syrians, this does not mean that they write for Syrians alone. As is explained in the following section, the Ikhwan frequently address the international community, condemning them for their failure to intervene in Syria. While I identify this primarily as a rhetorical tool utilized to drum up support among Syrians, I have no doubt that this is a genuine statement. That being said, I do not identify the international community as a primary audience for the Ikhwan in these statements, as their English statements are far more explicitly addressed to the international community.

### **Predominant Rhetorical Strategies**

As will be exemplified in the following section, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood utilizes three primary rhetorical strategies which are summarized below.

#### *Daa‘sh-Assad Parallel*

The first—and perhaps most prevalent strategy—that the group uses to set themselves apart from Daa‘sh is likening Daa‘sh to the Assad regime and vice versa. This is not to say that the group only speaks hatefully of the Assad regime as a counter-strategy to Daa‘sh—their hostility towards Assad is perfectly robust on its own. However, they have recognized the widespread distaste for the Assad Regime and utilize this sentiment to build their argument against Daa‘sh. Further, the group makes it evident that they wholeheartedly believe that Assad is responsible for the existence of Daa‘sh, stating that the terror organization

only had the ability to expand in the context of the Syrian instability which was caused by Assad's brutal quelling of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. This strategy also seems to offer them yet another opportunity to disparage the Assad Regime; a recurrent theme throughout all of their public comments and statements.

#### *Negligence of the International Community*

Another rhetorical strategy is a condemnation of the international community for its failure to recognize and address the crises occurring within Syria. This is often coupled with a statement on a Western terror attack, such as the Paris attacks of November 2015. These pieces tend to begin with a condolence, followed by an abrupt shift to likening those atrocities to the daily suffering of Syrians. By illustrating the similarities between foreign terror attacks and the Syrian civil war, the group is attempting to highlight the hypocrisy of the international community which was slow to condemn the actions of Assad. This is a useful tool for connecting with a community of people presently living in diaspora and struggling to find willing hosts among the European countries. Thus, by highlighting this hypocrisy, the group connects with a sentiment which remains very vivid for the Syrian community at home and abroad.

#### *Ihkwan as Salvation*

The final rhetorical strategy is a depiction of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood as Syria's salvation, and this strategy is utilized throughout the majority of the texts. The authors frequently reference the group's longstanding dedication to

the Syrian people in an attempt to portray themselves as the best (if not only) option for a post-Assad Syria. They have crafted a revisionist account of their history in Syria, portraying their political past—preceding their period of exile—as being a bit more successful than it truly was. Thus, they frequently cite these “glory days” as evidence that they are the best political option for Syria.

This “salvation” category is reinforced by the group’s scarce Qur’anic references, which appear far less often than one might anticipate. Despite their infrequent use, the appeals to Islam are still a powerful rhetorical tool, especially considering that the Ikhwan and Daa’sh have developed from the same ideological foundation. The group’s shared ideological roots have complicated the Ikhwan’s rhetorical battleground, and this challenge will be explored further throughout the analysis.

## Analysis

The first online publication in which the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood mentioned Daa’sh by name was titled *Hashemi: Assad Regime Defends “Daa’sh” Valiantly...and the Syrian Revolution Will Come Out of This Ordeal*, and was published on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The author, Hassan Hashemi, was the president of the Syrian Brotherhood’s political bureau at the time and presently serves as “the head opposition political and diplomatic department in the United States and Canada”.<sup>68</sup> As a prominent opposition leader and a well-respected member of the Syrian Ikhwan, he is one of the few authors

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<sup>68</sup> "Coalition Appoints Hassan Hashemi as Head of Political and Diplomatic Affairs in U.S. and Canada." Zaman Alwasl, 2014.

who publishes *Tasreeat* on the behalf of the organization. His text incorporates features of all three previously described rhetorical schemes, which indicates a firm grasp of the public branding of the organization.

In this piece, Hashemi claims that a military maneuver carried out by Daa' sh was sustained with the support of Assad's troops, who defended an exit passageway, thereby enabling them to escape from the Syrian Free Army. While there does not appear to be any additional confirmation of the regime's involvement in this clash, the intent is clear: the Ikhwan are attempting to highlight the interconnectedness of the regime and Daa' sh. The use of the Daa' sh-Regime parallel is a prominent rhetorical tool in Hashemi's piece: in the third paragraph, he writes that "the Assad regime is one of the bases of terrorism. Terrorism is undertaken today with [the regime's] support, and it is managed and financed by the help of his masters in Iran and Moscow."<sup>69</sup> Hashemi makes it clear that he does not only consider Assad to be partially responsible for the existence of Daa' sh; rather, he sees the regime as being complicit in the atrocities of Daa' sh.

This statement illustrates a recurring point of weakness in the group's rhetorical strategy. On the one hand, the linkage of Assad to the growth of terrorism is compelling, as one can easily argue that his military actions did help to create a chaotic environment within which Daa' sh expanded. However, the Ikhwan frequently reference a material relationship between the regime and Daa' sh which they have not provided additional evidence to support. Perhaps it is a widely held belief among their audience—the Syrian community at large—that Assad has contributed to the growth of

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<sup>69</sup> Appendix 1

the group with actual material support. If this is in fact a widely held belief, than this line of argument would not constitute a rhetorical weakness. However, it does appear on its face to be an evidentially unsupported statement that is intended to strengthen the already tenacious sense of distrust towards the regime.

In the following paragraph, Hashemi continues to emphasize the Daa' sh-Regime parallel, while simultaneously engaging the strategy of "Ikhwan as Salvation":

Hashemi stressed that the Syrian revolution is solely concerned with rejecting the terrorism which the regime planted in a dust which nothing is able to grow in it. And he added "while Daa' sh and the regime continue the wasting of the blood of innocent people with a brutality and a savagery which the world has never seen before, the pious sons of the revolution deal with the situation with the morals of Islam. The devout Muslim will maintain focus on a concern for the blood of the innocents" <sup>70</sup>

This portion once again emphasizes the interconnectedness of the regime and Daa' sh by not only stating that the regime is responsible for its creation, but also by lumping the two into the same category as the killers of innocents. The juxtaposition of a condemnation of Daa' sh and the regime with an immediate portrayal of the "pious sons of the revolution" as heroes serves to reinforce the group's image as the liberators of the Syrian people. They further utilize this opportunity to appeal to a higher authority by referencing the "morals of Islam"; a maneuver which portrays their cause as being ordained by Allah. This passage exemplifies the Ikhwan's very intentional attempt to craft their public image.

Hashemi, who is clearly well-versed in the Syrian Ikhwan's standards of rhetoric, concludes his comments with a condemnation of the international community:

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<sup>70</sup> Appendix 1

“He concluded by directing a message to the international community which has been silent about the heinous crimes of the Assad regime, demanding that they stop supporting this murderer of his people, and cease their silence towards his crimes, and leave the Syrian people to regain their dignity and liberate their freedom of decision”<sup>71</sup>

This condemnation of the silence of the international community serves not only as a call to action for international actors, but also evokes a commonly shared notion that the silence of the international community has served as its implicit approval of the actions of the regime. In October of 2015, this sentiment was echoed by a group of “Syrian civil society organisations and actors”<sup>72</sup> who published a statement calling on the international community to stop ignoring the suffering of the Syrians. Their statement concluded with:

Our cries have fallen on deaf ears for far too long, and the list of our dead continues to grow. While our faith in the international community has all but disappeared, we continue to speak out for the millions killed, arbitrarily detained and displaced, in the hope that our collective dream of living in a democratic country where all Syrians are guaranteed equal rights and freedoms is realised.<sup>73</sup>

This negligence has been felt intimately by many Syrians, and therefore the Ikhwan’s appeal to a common experience of suffering serves to reinforce the image of the Syrian Ikhwan as the ultimate Syrian advocate.

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<sup>71</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>72</sup> A complete list of the signatories to this letter:

**Yahia Nanaa** Former president of the Aleppo provincial council, Arab

**Gulsin Mohamad** Founding member of the Sawa organisation, Qamishli, Kurdish

**Hefa Jaja** Organisation for the Protection of Human Rights, Hasakah, Kurdish

**Ahed Nofal** Lawyer, Organisation for Equal Citizenship, Druze

**Shiyar Khaleal** Kurdish journalist/activist, former political prisoner

**Dr Abdulkarim Hariri** Deraa local council, Arab

**and 19 other Syrian civil society actors based in Tartus, Latakia, Damascus, Jarmana, Sweida,**

**Deraa, Deir Ezzor, Aleppo, Idlib, Hasaka, Qamishli and Homs, of Kurdish, Circassian, Arab**

**Bedouin, Assyrian, Alawite, Sunni, Shia, Christian and Druze backgrounds**

Read more at:

“We Syrians Are Losing Our Faith in the International Community.” *The Guardian*, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

The next commentary was published On September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014 when the NATO member countries were meeting in Wales and is titled *Message to the NATO Summit in Wales...Daa 'sh and the Regime are Two Sides of the Same Coin!*<sup>74</sup>. This piece integrates components of both the Daa'sh-Regime parallel and the condemnation of the international community. This piece also incorporates an extended “game” analogy, depicting Assad and his allies as maniacal puppet-masters who use tools of diplomacy in a game-like manner.

Speaking of the rise of global terrorism, they write “The regime bears responsibility for its beginning and its end”<sup>75</sup>, once again portraying Assad as the root cause of Daa'sh. They move on to state:

“The world continues to recall the Syrian regime's threats which it released on the lips of its officials during the start of the Syrian revolution, threatening to move the battle to the fields and domains of the American and European cities if the free world undertook to support the Syrian revolution.”<sup>76</sup>

This appears to be an almost direct reference to an interview between President Assad and CBS in 2013—Assad's first interview since President Obama asked Congress to approve a military strike against Syria<sup>77</sup>. While shirking the blame for the recent use of chemical weapons in the conflict, Assad made it clear that the US should expect repercussions if they became involved in the conflict. He stated that these repercussions may not come directly from the regime, but rather from the myriad of groups and factions in the region. When asked about the potential for a retaliation in the form of chemical weaponry, he stated: “That depends if the rebels or the terrorists in this region

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<sup>74</sup> Appendix 2

<sup>75</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>76</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>77</sup> "Charlie Rose Interviews Syrian President Bashar Assad." *CBS News* 2013. Web.

or any other group have it. It could happen. You are going to pay the price if you are not wise with dealing with terrorists.”<sup>78</sup> The Ikhwan would respond that the regime was in fact allied with the terrorist factions, supporting them in their attacks within and beyond Syria.

This discussion of chemical weapons is particularly important as it came just nineteen days after the chemical attacks in Ghouta, which claimed upwards of one-thousand Syrian lives—mostly women and children<sup>79</sup>. In the aftermath of these attacks, the Assad regime and the opposition forces both blamed each other. Following assessments made by outside agencies, many international actors blamed the Syrian regime, as “the Syrian military is widely believed to have more than 1,000 tonnes of chemical agents and precursor chemicals, including several hundreds of tonnes of sarin [the chemical agent used in these attacks], as well as the required expertise.”<sup>80</sup>.

Although this attack was highly publicized, the response of the international community did not inspire hope for the Syrians. On the two year anniversary of the attack, Hamish de Bretton-Gordon—“a chemical weapons adviser to NGOs working in Syria and Iraq”<sup>81</sup>, wrote:

The majority of Syrians I have met in Syria, and out of Syria since the Ghouta attack feel abandoned by the international community, and see the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad as an equal evil to ISIL, and worse in some cases. In some areas of Syria, this helplessness has fuelled support for ISIL, who are at least providing them with food and water, albeit under a brutal and inhumane regime.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Dan Roberts "Syrian President Assad Threatens 'repercussions' If US Launches Strikes." *The Guardian* [Washington D.C.] 9 Sept. 2013.

<sup>79</sup> Hamish De Bretton-Gordon. "Ghouta Chemical Attack: Two Years Onward." *Al Jazeera*, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

<sup>80</sup> "Syria Chemical Attack: What We Know." *BBC News*, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> De Bretton-Gordon. "Ghouta Chemical Attack: Two Years Onward."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

Bretton-Gordon's comments illustrate once again the value of the Ikhwan's use of a condemnation of the international community in their rhetoric, as it reflects the harsh reality which many Syrians have experienced on a daily basis. It further illustrates how the violent actions of the regime paired with the neglect of the international community have sponsored the growth of Daa'ish.

When speaking specifically of the previously referenced "repercussions" during his CBS interview, Assad stated that "It may take different forms, direct and indirect. Direct when governments want to retaliate, and indirect when you are going to have instability and the spread of terrorism over the region that will influence the west directly"<sup>83</sup>. The Syrian Ikhwan responded to this statement head-on, writing that

"...in fact, the regime put its threats into practice with the support and protection of the first formation of an extremist group in Syrian territory. The regime did not make good on implementing its threat by means of its own elements or by use of its direct tools. Verily it was apparent that the regime had tried to spread terrorism and its practice in Lebanon, Iraq and the Arabian Gulf... using that experience in the implementation of such a serious threat to save its throne set up by decades of corruption and tyranny."<sup>84</sup>

In the second sentence, the Ikhwan call out the Assad regime for its failure to complete its threat of using direct retaliation against the West. However, it is evident that the Ikhwan consider Assad's alleged sponsorship of the spread of terrorism to be an equally aggressive form of retribution. By once again associating Daa'ish with the regime, the Ikhwan are successfully tarnishing the both entities' public image.

The author moves to also utilize a condemnation of the international community to further strengthen the image of the Ikhwan as an advocate for the Syrian cause. They

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83 Roberts. "Syrian President Assad Threatens 'repercussions' If US Launches Strikes."

84 Appendix 2

criticize what they call the “hesitant condition” of the international community, stating that their failure to prioritize the Syrian crisis will lead to the expansion of a global terrorism that will ultimately threaten the security of the West. In the following passage, they call on the international community to condemn both Assad and Daa’sh:

“Indeed the agony of the massacre of American journalists was felt painfully by the Syrians—perhaps more than those other than them because it reflect a picture of their daily suffering between the hammer of the regime and the anvil of Daa’sh which has been killing them for three and a half years... More dangerous than that, the international community continues dealing with the danger of Daa’sh while ignoring the danger of the regime which vowed to move the fight to the European and American cities and left to complete its slaughter of the unarmed Syrian people.”<sup>85</sup>

The “American journalists” referenced here are Steven Sotloff and James Foley, who had both been abducted and beheaded by Daa’sh in late 2014.<sup>86</sup> This is the first of a series of passages where the Ikhwan reference an act of terrorism which occurred outside of Syria in order to thereafter liken it to the daily suffering occurring within Syria. This not only offers the opportunity to connect with the many Syrians who have felt disregarded by mainstream media, but also depicts the Ikhwan as the spokespeople for the Syrians.

The next passage summarizes an interview with Omar Mushawweh—head of the information office for the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria— after new elections for the Syrian Ikhwan’s Shura council had taken place in November, 2014. These elections were a significant step for the group which had been dealing with increasing internal

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<sup>85</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>86</sup> Greg Miller. "U.S. Confirms Authenticity of Second Journalist Beheading Video." *Washington Post*, September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014.

divisions and discontent among the Ikhwan's ranks. Indeed, Raphael Lefèvre commented that these "leadership elections have been seen as a key test of whether the Brotherhood can make the changes needed to strengthen the organization and boost its role in the country."<sup>87</sup>

This text specifically focuses on the election of the new comptroller general: Muhammad Hikimat Walid, "a seventy-year-old UK-educated eye surgeon from Latakia"<sup>88</sup>. The election of a Syrian hailing from Latakia is significant, considering that the majority of prominent Syrian Muslim Brothers have originated from Hama and Aleppo—the organizations two major power blocs. As discussed previously, these two blocs have maintained a longstanding regional rivalry within the Syrian Ikhwan, so the election of a general comptroller from neither bloc might be indicative of a desire to overcome the cumbersome rivalry.

This statement reflects the Ikhwan's desire to assure their present supporters, as well as potential future supporters, that they have made the necessary modifications to constitute a leading force in the opposition movement. In his statement, Mushawweh recognizes some of the realities of the situations:

"We need to actually change the reality, and contribute to the progress of the revolution, as we will work to restore the strong presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, especially because we have been absent from the domestic scene for the past thirty years."<sup>89</sup>

Mushawweh's recognition of the group's difficult position is notable, as many public statements made by the Syrian Ikhwan will acknowledge their exile status only as an

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<sup>87</sup> Raphaël Lefèvre, "New Leaders for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood." *Carnegie Middle East Center*, December 11<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Appendix 2

opportunity to reprimand the regime. Throughout this text, Mushawweh not only references their exile, but also acknowledges that it has affected their capacity to be leaders in the revolution. By recognizing the reality of the situation at a time when sectarian division in the group was coming to harm their public image, Mushawweh may be helping to reassure an audience which was beginning to doubt the group's leadership capacity. Mushawweh returns to this sentiment again later in the passage when he states that "Most certainly we want to restore the role that was played by the brotherhood before we were forced out in the eighties"<sup>90</sup>. This quasi-nostalgic statement falls in line with the Ikhwan as Salvation rhetoric, which often highlights the group's lengthy history in Syria. While they were indeed a notable political party in Syria preceding their exile, it is fair to say that they were not nearly as prominent as their present rhetoric implies. Regardless, they continue to construct a glorious depiction of their past in Syria, aiming to portray this fictional history as a symbol of their successes to come on the political Syrian scene.

Mushawweh concludes with another statement that falls into the scheme of Ikhwan as Salvation, stating that "regardless of everything, the Brotherhood is an essential part of the equation, and cannot be excluded from any solutions in Syria"<sup>91</sup>. This statement reflects the brotherhood's long struggle to achieve partnership in the revolution. Indeed, the revolution presented the Ikhwan with a "golden opportunity to make a historical comeback to the forefront of Syrian politics and society"<sup>92</sup>. Despite their eagerness to insert themselves into Syrian affairs, they faced an uphill battle:

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<sup>90</sup> Appendix 2.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Lefèvre, *Ashes*, 187.

forces within Syria, who were well aware of the Ikhwan's volatile relationship with the regime, were consistently apprehensive to collaborate with the Ikhwan for fear of attracting harsher retaliation from the regime. Simultaneously, the Ikhwan constituted one of the most stable and unified anti-regime organizations, regardless of their internal strife.

As Mushawweh's comments indicate, the Ikhwan found themselves once again struggling to achieve relevance in the Syrian public sphere. To combat this state of irrelevance, they continually utilized references to their history and their comparatively superior organizational structure to assert that they were a necessary component of any resolution.

The next passage, published on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, was titled Condemnation of the Crime of the Execution of the Jordanian Pilot... and the Responsibility of the International Alliance to Correct its Compass<sup>93</sup>. The phrase "correct its compass" is an idiom, which—as one can easily infer—means to correct one's path, direction or mode of operation. The article is commenting on the brutal execution of the Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh, who was captured by Daa'ish in Raqqa, Syria when his plane crashed. Daa'ish posted a horrific video of the execution, as well as a video of Kassabeh speaking directly to the Jordanian people, urging them to condemn their government, which he calls "an agent of the Zionists"<sup>94</sup>. Kassabeh is then burned alive in a cage, which is subsequently covered in debris and run over by a bulldozer. Following the

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93 Appendix 3.

94 "Jordanian Pilot Kaseasbeh Burned Alive by Islamic State; Jordan Executes IS Requested Prisoner Rishawi in Response." *LeakSource*, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

publication of the video, Daa' sh circulated Islamic State circulated a “document citing Prophet Mohammed on burning apostates alive”<sup>95</sup>.

This gruesome video shocked the global community not only because of the unprecedented degree of brutality, but also because of its high production quality. A large degree of Daa' sh's success in recruiting can be attributed to its rapid development of a thorough social media presence, which has enabled the organization to connect with a global community of disaffected youth. Indeed, Daa' sh's online presence constitutes a “paradoxical clash between advanced twenty-first century technology and the Jihadi-Salafist interpretation of Islam, which espouses the values of life in the seventh century”<sup>96</sup>. Daa' sh has actively recruited IT specialists and web developers who have helped to develop their brand and create a breadth of online recruitment and training resources.<sup>97</sup> They frequently post selective quotes from the Quran or hadith to justify their actions, which are sufficiently persuasive for youth who have not thoroughly studied Islam.

This is both a terrifying and important reality which the Syrian Ikhwan must acknowledge if they intend to present themselves as a formidable Islamist alternative to Daa' sh. Their piece posted in response to the slaughter of the Jordanian pilot reiterates the group's traditional themes of a condemnation of the international community and a brief appeal to Islam—neither of which will be sufficient to sway the many youth who have been drawn into Daa' sh's “digital caliphate”<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, 16.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

The Ikhwan's passage begins with a condemnation of Daa' sh's actions, which they state "cannot be accepted by a human who holds moral values or a command of religious authority in their life". This is one of the few appeals to Islam the group has made throughout their critiques of Daa' sh, which could perhaps be because the group was apprehensive to attack an organization which they resemble in terms of ideology. Indeed, "the Brotherhood groups have a profile of their own that is self-consciously quite different in strategy and tactics—though very parallel in ideology and goals—from the jihadists groups"<sup>99</sup>. The Brotherhood has from its inception been an organization that aimed for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, though many note that they have shown "a relative indifference"<sup>100</sup> towards this proclaimed goal. This indifference has been prominent in the Syrian context, where their recent political platforms also include provisions for democracy, protection of minority populations and an overall depiction of a modern state. Further, they aim only to enshrine Islam at a national—not international—level.

Regardless, there is naturally a significant overlap in the two organization's potential recruiting pools. Therefore the Ikhwan appeared to tap dance around the topic of the Islamic aspects of Daa' sh in their early comments, condemning their actions while simultaneously failing to outright disparage their intentions. It is therefore notable that in this instance of a more brutal act of terror, the Ikhwan parted from their previous mode of operation and opted to critique Daa' sh on religious grounds.

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<sup>99</sup> RubinIntroduction to *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 9.

<sup>100</sup> Mitchel in Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate".

After the brief condemnation of Daa' sh's actions, the group resumes the traditional format of their Negligence of the International Community scheme:

Verily the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria condemns this heinous crime, while reminding the whole world that the Syrian regime's crimes against his own people have indeed exceeded all red lines, and transgressed all moral and humanitarian principles. It is incumbent upon the international coalition to address its connection with the first terrorist Syrian regime and his myrmidons of criminals and thugs, until it stops the flowing of blood on Syrian territory and purifies the region of the atrocities of terrorism in all its forms.<sup>101</sup>

The author quickly diverts the audiences' attention back to the suffering of the Syrians in order to underscore their role as the mouthpiece of the Syrian people. It simultaneously engages the Daa' sh-Regime parallel, by implying that Assad's actions against his people and the atrocities of Daa' sh are equal forms of terrorism. This piece is unique in that it seems to maintain a quranic reference by its use of the phrase "zabaneeah", translated above as "myrmidons". It originates from Sura ninety-six, aya eighteen. Sura ninety-six discusses how to handle the infidel:

15. Nay, but if he cease not We will seize him by the forelock (lock of hair growing over the forehead)—
16. The lying sinful forelock—
17. Then let him call upon his henchmen!
18. We will call on the guards of hell [myrmidons].<sup>102</sup>

The translation of "guards as hell" evokes a stronger image by likening the allies of the regime to a satanic force. The quranic reference also strengthens the image of the group as a religious entity, which is particularly valuable in this context as the passage is directly addressing the allegedly Islamic actions of Daa' sh.

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<sup>101</sup> Appendix 3

<sup>102</sup> Quran translated by Marmaduke William Pickthall, 1930.

The Ikhwan take a stronger stance on the issue of terrorism in their next passage titled “*This Terrorism is Unacceptable in Every Time and Every Place*”<sup>103</sup>, published following the 2015 Paris attack. In this strongly worded text, the author evokes each of the group’s three predominant rhetorical schemes. This piece seems to indicate that the Ikhwan have become more firm in their religious condemnation of Daa’sh, as they contrast their terrorism with the values that the Ikhwan deem to be truly Islamic:

The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria—a group that has always believed and discussed and behaved through its deep belief that Islam is characterized by tolerance and moderation; the path of justice and equity and the defense of all of humanity—strongly condemns this military aggression and all action against unarmed defenseless innocent ones, in every time and any place.<sup>104</sup>

This is the second instance in which the group so vehemently set themselves apart from Daa’sh on religious grounds. They use this instance not only to condemn Daa’sh, but also to portray themselves as a proper Islamic organization, highlighting all of the values which they maintain. While it is impossible to definitively conclude whether or not the Ikhwan consider Daa’sh to be a genuinely Islamist institution, it is evident that they have become more comfortable with condemning Daa’sh on religious grounds.

As you may have predicted, this passage utilizes the typical “Negligence of the International Community” structure by abruptly moving to discuss the plight of the Syrian people:

At the same time, as we watch the injured France with sadness and pain; we remind the world and its forces of all of those with wounds in the Syrian cave of deep bleeding—which was struck by the terrorism of Assad and his allies the Iranians and the Russians, with all their strength

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<sup>103</sup> Appendix 5

<sup>104</sup> Appendix 5.

and brutality and oppression; until the death toll became hundreds of peaceful innocent Syrians daily.<sup>105</sup>

This once again illustrates that the Ikhwan are eager to condemn the international community for failing to recognize the atrocities occurring within Syria—a move that not only serves as an international call to action but also expresses empathy for the millions of Syrians living in diaspora. The Paris attacks, with their considerable amount of news coverage, presented the Ikhwan with a unique opportunity to highlight the hypocrisy of both the international community and the prominent media sources. After expressing their condolences for Paris, they note that the deaths of Syrians have not yet warranted “that lengthy media coverage nor indeed heavily armed expressions”<sup>106</sup>. The failure of media to adequately cover the crisis in Syria, they charge, is not only a disservice to the Syrian people, but also threatens the safety of the entire global community:

The real threat is of a criminal murderer who declares himself in the glory of the day but rather clearly threatens to implement the acts of terrorism in the heart of Europe. Verily, the continuing of Bashar and his gangs and allies and the Russian intervention...is the real cause of terrorism, which exceeded the Syrian border. Indeed, the overthrow of Bashar is the only way to eradicate this terrorism.<sup>107</sup>

In this quote, the Ikhwan once again reference Assad's interview with CBS when he stated that the US should expect repercussions if they engage in air strikes in Syria. The Ikhwan eagerly seized upon this interview as the public confirmation they needed to claim that Assad was working in cahoots with Daa' sh.

Although it utilized some of the excessively prevalent tactics of Ikhwani rhetoric, this commentary is—from an outsider's perspective—one of the group's more

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<sup>105</sup> Appendix 5.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

persuasive pieces. It brings together their three standard rhetorical tools, but in this instance grounds them in specific current and historical events. In the concluding paragraph, they write:

Finally, we are pained by the pain of humanity in each place, and we hope that the negligent international community feels the great pain which the tortured Syrians have suffered for years under the weight of Assad and his allies. We hope that it will cooperate with the forces of the revolution if it wants to exterminate this terrorism.<sup>108</sup>

By likening the pain resulting from the Paris attacks to the pain of the Syrian people, the Ikhwan aim to establish a sense of solidarity between the Syrian population and the “negligent international community”<sup>109</sup>. Their linkage of Assad with the crisis in Paris would not have been compelling, had they not previously referenced his public statement about US repercussions. Their concluding statement—a call for collaboration with the international community against the regime and terrorism—is therefore more persuasive than it had been previously, as the Paris attacks exemplified the vulnerability of the global community.

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<sup>108</sup> Appendix 5.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter Three: Discussion and Conclusions**

The present rhetoric of the Ikhwan fails to meet the needs of their target audience, and thereby fails to portray them as a viable alternative to Daa' sh. Some of their rhetorical weaknesses were mentioned in the previous chapter, such as a redundant argument structure, a reliance on evidentially unsupported claims, and an unpredictable and uneven use of religious appeals. Lefèvre asserts that the Ikhwan, aware of the array of ideological hurdles in their path forward, hastily crafted their present rhetorical strategy<sup>110</sup>. As was illustrated in the previous chapter, the resulting strategy is ambiguous and fails to address the central issues which have placed them in their present state of ideological stagnation. Indeed, the “Syrian Muslim Brothers must clarify their ideological stance toward a range of issues and disassociate themselves more clearly from extremist groups”<sup>111</sup>—most specifically, they must clarify their stance on violence as well as the role of Islam in their desired state. This concluding chapter will discuss the three primary causes of this failure to adequately respond to Daa' sh, simultaneously suggesting how the group might craft a better rhetorical strategy.

The first issue which has contributed to the Ikhwan's failure to respond to Daa' sh is the similarity of the two organizations stated goal: to enshrine Islam at the state level. This goal is rooted in the two organizations' similar ideological legacy, as both are labeled as descendants of the Jihadi-Salafi tradition. It is important to note that

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<sup>110</sup> Raphaël Lefèvre. "The Muslim Brotherhood Prepares For a Comeback in Syria." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2013. 11.

<sup>111</sup> Lefèvre, “The Syrian Brotherhood’s Islamic State Challenge.”

the Ikhwan are very rarely categorized as Jihadi-Salafi; rather, they are credited for championing the notion of the caliphate as the ideal form of Islamic governance. This caliphate notion is the centerpiece of Jihadi-Salafi platforms, but it in fact bares little contemporary relevance to the political undertakings of the Ikhwan. While foundational Ikhwani literature advocates for the establishment of caliphates at the state-level, their present political endeavors are far more liberal. Therefore, while this caliphate conundrum is likely a source for some of the ideological friction which has caused the Ikhwan to respond ambiguously to Daa‘sh, it seems more likely that their apprehension results moreso from two groups shared identity as Islamist institutions.

This issue is linked to the Ikhwan’s seemingly ambiguous relationship to Islam. This religious ambiguity has traditionally been characteristic of Islamist institutions; indeed, “Islamic constitutional thought is characterized by a remarkable lack of specifics”<sup>112</sup>. Islamist authorities have often stated that Islam supports the utmost form of government, without divulging too many details about what form that governments may take. In the case of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, this lack of specificity has been compounded by the group’s political pragmatism, which—while at times allowing them to navigate complex political and social issues—has made some feel that the organization is willing to sacrifice religion for political gains.

The Ikhwan’s seemingly ambiguous relationship to Islam has been exacerbated by Daa‘sh’s rise to prominence as this organization relentlessly speaks of their dedication to Islam, and it is their central rhetorical tool. Daa‘sh has indeed recognized that “The unity between the religious and the political has been, and still is, the stuff of

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<sup>112</sup> Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought*, 328.

rhetoric, whether it is put into practice or not”<sup>113</sup>. The Carter Center has researched the religious propaganda at length as a component of their project *Countering Daa’sh (ISIS) Recruitment Propaganda through Mobilization of Religious Leaders and Media*<sup>114</sup>. In the text below, they summarize the overarching themes of Daa’sh’s recruitment magazine, *Dabiq*:

From its initial release, *Dabiq* has emphasized *hijrah* (migration), *jihad* (to strive and to struggle—more specifically to “fight” according to Daa’sh) and the importance of the *Ummah* (community) to attract disenfranchised Muslim youth. According to Islamic tradition, when the Prophet Muhammed and his followers faced extreme persecution in *Makkah*, God commanded them in a revelation to perform *hijrah* to ensure the preservation of the faith. Daa’sh capitalizes on the symbolic importance of migration that was integral to the founding of Islam and coopts this concept drawing a parallel with its own caliphate in recruitment materials...Daa’sh manipulates the meaning of *jihad* to justify its violent actions and build legitimacy within its cohort...[it] attempts to link Daa’sh’s caliphate with the founding of Islam and the progression of the early Islamic community—they are suffering the same hardships, must migrate, fight to defend themselves to create a just society based on Shari’ah.<sup>115</sup>

As this passage exemplifies, Daa’sh’s relationship to Islam is not only more explicitly developed than that of the Muslim Brotherhood—it is also a prevalent theme throughout all of the group’s publications, as they coopt various interpretations of the Quran of hadith to justify their violent tactics.

The second issue causing the Syrian Ikhwan’s failure in responding to Daa’sh is rooted in their complicated relationship with violence. . It is evident that the Ikhwan have what Lefèvre calls a “complex with violence”<sup>116</sup>, as the issue of violence has been

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<sup>113</sup>Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought*, 329.

<sup>114</sup> "Countering ISIS Recruitment Propaganda through Mobilization of Religious Leaders and Media." The Carter Center.

<sup>115</sup> "Overview of Daa’sh’s Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine, *Dabiq*." *The Carter Center*, December 2015.

<sup>116</sup> Lefèvre, “The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria: A ‘centrist’ jihad?”

at the center of their most problematic sectarian divisions. This issue was expressed throughout the texts analyzed in the previous section, which simultaneously denounced Daa‘sh’s violence while calling for the overthrow of Assad and protection of Syrians—two demands which would necessitate some degree of violence. While they have remained for the most part non-violent since the failure of Hama in 1982, they still continue to sponsor rebel forces on the ground.

The Syrian Ikhwan’s inability to fully delineate their stance on violence stands in sharp contrast to Daa‘sh, which unapologetically calls for violent jihad. Since the outbreak of violence in Syria “... the Brotherhood [has] found its white-collar brand of Islamism outflanked by harder-line groups that demanded instant rather than gradual application of Islamic law, or rejected democracy as a deviation from God’s commands. Among poor, traumatised Sunnis in Iraq and Syria extreme jihadists with guns proved to have greater appeal.”<sup>117</sup> The issue of violence once again illustrates how the present conundrum of the Syrian Ikhwan is based on a few of the group’s fundamental shortcomings—shortcomings which become more pronounced when contrasted with the steadfast tactics of Daa‘sh.

The third—and perhaps most cumbersome—issue contributing to the Ikhwan’s present state of irrelevance is their failure to bridge and ever-widening generational gap. This gap is in part due to the group’s prolonged exile from Syria, but it has been made worse by a lack of willingness on the behalf of seniors in the organization to open up leadership opportunities to the younger members. The 2014 elections described by

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<sup>117</sup> “Islamism Is No Longer the Answer.” *The Economist Cairo*, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Mushawweh in the previous chapter were a major let down for the younger members of the Ikhwan, who had been expecting the election of some younger representatives.

While there is certainly a need to place younger Ikhwan in positions of leadership, the Ikhwan have been making more conscious efforts to engage the youth. In December 2012, the Ikhwan hosted a three-day youth conference in Istanbul, where 350 young Islamists “met, networked, and presented papers on subjects ranging from religion to economics to internal reform before discussing these issues in smaller study circles.”<sup>118</sup> This was a landmark development for the Syrian Ikhwan who needed such an event to bolster confidence in their capacity to be leaders in the revolution.

The results of this conference are indicative of the potential value of increasing the amount of youth in the Ikhwan. The younger Ikhwan, who were not raised in the context of the Hama v. Aleppo Ikhwani rivalry, are not burdened by that sectarian struggle. Further, they are more progressive than their older counterparts and have the capacity to overcome the ideological stagnation which has been diminishing the public appeal of the Ikhwan. This is exemplified by the youth branch’s adamant advocacy for a greater separation between the organization’s political organizing and social endeavors. “‘To have credibility,’ argued a youth branch leader, an initiative ‘must either be part of the parliament or part of the mosque—it should not do both at the same time’”.<sup>119</sup> This critique gets to the heart of the Ikhwan’s rhetorical failure to express and vision for the role of Islam in the state. While it is impossible to fully determine if such a modification would in fact enhance the group’s political stance, this critique indicates the potential value of increasing youth representation in the Ikhwan. It appears that the youth may in

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<sup>118</sup> Lefèvre, "The Muslim Brotherhood Prepares For a Comeback in Syria.", 9.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 10.

fact “represent the Muslim Brotherhood’s best chance to counter the argument that the organization is out of touch with Syrian society given its thirty-year exile.”<sup>120</sup>

Thus, while it is evident that the Syrian Ikhwan have a lot of work to do in order to appear as a viable Islamist authority, it seems that they are not necessarily doomed to a status of irrelevancy. The flaws of their rhetorical strategy appear to be firmly rooted in a need for internal reform and deliberation. Indeed, their redundancy, dependency of evidentially unsubstantiated claims and their ambiguous relationship to Islam all are likely all results of residual sectarian tensions which could be eased by an influx of young leaders. Such an influx would not only aide in the process of ideological solidification but would also revamp the group’s public image, bolstering public confidence that the Ikhwan are in fact a viable and contemporary Islamist authority.

Although they experienced a few notable stumbles at the beginning of the Syrian conflict, the Ikhwan have since been quite successful in rising up the leadership ranks within the Syrian opposition movement. Compared to other prominent opposition entities, they have displayed an unprecedented degree of elegance in standing as a united front, despite residual sectarian tensions. However, their rhetorical failures are strongly indicative of a need for internal reform. If the Ikhwan hope to sustain their influence in the Syrian opposition—and ultimately gain political support in a post-Assad Syria—they first must take an explicit ideological stance on Daa’sh’s form of Islamism, as well as clearly delineating their own stance on the role of Islam in their political project. Second, they must take a more explicit and unified stance on violence—a stance which, ideally, would help to overcome sectarian tensions within the

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<sup>120</sup> Lefèvre, "The Muslim Brotherhood Prepares For a Comeback in Syria.", 9.

organization. Finally, they must bridge the generational gap and place more young brothers in positions of leadership—a move which could help the group to overcome the issues of religious ideology and violence. While their future as political leaders is certainly not doomed, it is evident that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood cannot afford to stall on these burgeoning issues if they do hope to upset Daa‘sh’s present status as the victor in the battle of rhetorical Islamism.

## **Glossary**

### **– Alawism**

A sect of Shiism which has components of Christianity and Zoroastrianism and is highly controversial in the Sunni community, and is particularly despised by those of the Salafi ideology. Alawis are a minority in the predominantly Sunni Syria and have experienced heavy oppression and discrimination. Alawis are strongly represented in the Ba‘th party and helped conduct the 1963 coup.

### **– Al-Qa‘ida**

Meaning in Arabic “the base” or “the foundation”, Al-Qa‘ida is the title taken by the militant Sunni Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in 1988. Similar to other Islamist organizations, it aims to establish an Islamic caliphate and pursues this cause in part by carrying out acts of terror.

### **– Bashar al-Assad**

The Ba‘thist President of Syria who has been in office since the death of his father, Hafez al-Assad, in 2000. Bashar al-Assad is Alawi and has often attempted to appear devout in order to gain public support. Regardless of these attempts, his violent and authoritarian crackdown in response to the 2011 Arab Spring uprising in Syria have gravely tarnished his reputation in and beyond Syria.

### **– Ba‘th**

The Ba‘th party was founded in Iraq and rose to prominence in Syria during the wave of nationalism which was bolstered by the French Mandate period. The Ba‘th party became increasingly socialist overtime and supported the equitable treatment of Syrian minority groups, such as the Alawites. The Ba‘th party was strongly represented in the Syrian military and have been the ruling party in Syria since successful coup of 1963.

### **– Daa‘sh**

Also known as “ISIS/ISIL”: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/ the Levant. The anti-Western Sunni terror organization which has become notorious in recent years for its utilization of highly publicized acts of brutality.

– **Ikhwan**

“Brothers”, most often referring to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in this text.

– **Islamism**

A movement tailored to resist western social and economic infiltration by means of the observation of Islamic laws throughout society, including political entities. Islamists often emphasize the importance of Jihad in this movement, though they on what precisely constitutes “jihad”.

– **Jami‘at**

“Groups”; civil society clubs and organizations that flourished in Syria during the mandate period, contributing to the social movement which ultimately helped to establish the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.

– **Jihadism**

“Jihad” alone means “to struggle” or “to strive”, and has over time increasingly been translated as “to fight”, as in a holy war. Jihadism is the Sunni extremist interpretation of jihad; it advocates for the use of violence in the struggle to defend Islam. “Jihadism” today is often used interchangeably with “Jihadi-Salafism”.

– **Salafism**

A doctrine advocating for a return to a fundamentalist practice of Islam.

Salafism emphasizes the use of ijтиhad— rational interpretation of Islamic law. In the Syrian context, the Salafiyya movement was used as a means for resisting the Western influence of the Ottoman Tanzimat and the French Mandate.

– **Shi‘ism**

A shortened version of the phrase “Shi‘at ‘Ali” or “followers of ‘Ali”; the second largest sect of Islam. Shi‘i Muslims maintain the ‘Ali was the proper successor of the Prophet Muhammed, while Sunni Muslims hold that Abu Bakr was the proper successor. Sunni Jihadi-Salafi Islamists predominantly view Shi‘ism as

one of their greatest enemies, and have therefore directed much of their violence towards Shi'i Muslims.

– **Shirk**

“Shirk” in Arabic literally means “to share”. In Islam, it means to share as an equal partner an idol or another god with Allah; to commit idolatry or polytheism.

– **‘Ulama’**

‘Ulama’ in Arabic literally means “scholars” or “learned ones”. In the context of Islam, it refers to the religious authorities. The ‘ulama’ in Syria have experienced changes in their social status at different times correlating with a shift in the value placed on religious knowledge.

– **Umma**

“The community”—in Islam, referring to the global community of Muslims.

– **Zabaneeah**

Translated in this text as “myrmidons”. A reference to the phrase “Saned‘ al-Zabaneeah in Sura 96, verse 18 of the Quran, meaning “angels of hell” or “guards of hell”.

## **Appendix 1: Al-Hashemi: Assad Regime Defends “Daa‘sh”**

### ***Valiantly...and the Syrian Revolution Will Come out of This Ordeal***<sup>121</sup>

*Date of Publication: January 11, 2014 (Gregorian) 10 Rabī‘ Al-Awwal 1435 (Hijri)*

Syria Brothers Press

Hassan al- Hashemi, head of the political office of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, said that what occurred today—the move by the Syrian Revolution Brigades to remove the organization Daa‘sh from the Syrian scene—was accompanied at the same time by a desperate defense by the Assad regime for this escape passageway.

Al-Hashemi professed in a written statement, that the latest manifestation of this blatant contradiction between the position of the revolution and the position of Assad, is the recent success of the Syrian Revolution Brigades in the ousting of "Daa‘sh" from the city of Dana, the northern province of Idlib. This was followed by aircrafts of the regime which bombed the affected area in an attempt to rescue its ally and inflict suffering upon the sons and heroes of the revolution.

Al-Hashemi denounced the international community's disregard of what is happening in Syria, as well as the repetition by some authors and politicians of the lies of the criminal regime which markets itself as a warrior of terrorism, while ignoring that the Assad regime is one of the bases of terrorism. Terrorism is undertaken today with

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<sup>121</sup> This is my translation of a text originally published on Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's website. Publication information: "Al-Hashemi: Assad Regime Defends “Daa‘sh” Valiantly...and the Syrian Revolution Will Come out of This Ordeal". (الهاشمي: نظام الأسد يدافع مستميتاً عن "داعش" .. والثورة السورية ستخرج من هذه المحنّة). *Ikhwan Syria*. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (الإخوان سوريّة), Web.

[the regime's] support, and it is managed and financed by the help of its masters in Iran and Moscow.

Al-Hashemi stressed that the Syrian revolution is solely concerned with rejecting the terrorism which the organization planted in a dust which nothing is able to grow in it. And he added "Daa' sh and the regime continue the wasting of the blood of innocent people with a brutality and a savagery which the world has never before seen, while the pious sons of the revolution deal with the situation with the morals of Islam. The devout Muslim will maintain his focus on concern for the blood of the innocents.

Al-Hashemi expressed his confidence that the Syrian revolution will emerge from this ordeal as it emerged from her other, and "She will be free from the criminal traitors who destroyed the country and killed mankind."

He concluded by directing a message to the international community which has been silent about the heinous crimes of the Assad regime, demanding that they stop supporting this murderer of his people, and cease their silence towards his crimes, and leave the Syrian people to regain their dignity and liberate their freedom of decision.

## **Appendix 2: Message to the NATO Summit in Wales...Daa'sh and the Regime are Two Sides of the Same Coin!<sup>122</sup>**

*Date of Publication: September 5, 2014 (Gregorian) 10 Dhū al-Qa'dah 1435 (Hijri)*

In the near past the world watched the criminals of Daa'sh as they massacred American journalists and threatened to slaughter more in a crime against humanity, for which the regime of Assad bears responsibility for its beginning and for its end. The world continues to recall the Syrian regime's threats which it released on the lips of its officials during the start of the Syrian revolution, threatening to move the battle to the fields and domains of the American and European cities if the free world undertook to support the Syrian revolution.

On that day the responses of the world varied between disregard and disdain of such threats by the regime, but in fact the regime put its threats into practice with the support and protection of the first formation of an extremist group in Syrian territory. The regime did not make good on implementing its threat by means of its own elements or by use of its direct tools. Verily it was apparent that the regime had tried to spread terrorism and its practice in Lebanon, Iraq and the Arabian Gulf... using that experience in the implementation of such a serious threat to save its throne set up by decades of corruption and tyranny.

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<sup>122</sup> This is my translation of a text originally published on Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's website. Publication information: "Message to the NATO Summit in Wales... Daa'sh and the Regime Are Two Sides of the Same Coin!". (رسالة إلى قمة الناتو في ويلز.. داعش والنظام وجهان لعملة واحدة!). Ikhwan Syria (الإخوان سوريون). The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Web.

With Iranian support and joint planning, and on its same accustomed way, the regime of Assad returned the ball to his square this time, to apply the hand of terrorism again...to wreak havoc on earth corruptively and publicize the alleged state. That coincided with Iran's implementation of its plan, which aims to achieve significant strategic gains through the use of the threads of the game to which they clung in order to be accepted as a partner for the international community in the war on terrorism... transforming the producers of terrorism into partners in the war against it.

Indeed, the shrewd Iranian party has achieved many political successes at the international level. It was of some strategic importance for Iran: it strengthened itself regionally through its signing and appeared as a new moderate partner, in exchange for the low prices they paid for their allies, such as Syria's chemicals and their acceptance of the replacement of al-Maliki, as well as some flexibility in minor details in the nuclear project.

With that same skill and political expertise that Iran played the resigning of its ally al- Maliki in Iraq, the game continues to be open to many possibilities depending on the performance of the international party in the Syrian issue. Meanwhile—when the situation requires— Iran preserves the threads of the game with a position to possibly improve the circumstances of its negotiation and its directing of the course of events.

As for the hesitant international condition and the one seeking narrow political gains, [the international community] continues to suffer from the condition of chaos in the hierarchy of priorities within the big picture of the regional and international situation. The repercussions of chaos in the region lead [the international community] to work from a strategic perspective, distancing themselves from the specter of terrorism

which threatens international peace and security. And whose threats reach to all sectors of its stable cities. It is required for the international community to not respond to the regime's attempts to achieve partnership in the war on Daa' sh, rather it is necessary [for the international community] to be bent on the importance of pronouncing judgment on the regime which threatened and vowed to move the fight to the European and American cities, just as [the international community] should strive to condemn Daa' sh which has implemented the threats of the regime of abducting Western civilians and killing American journalists in a clear challenge to the whole world.

Indeed the agony of the massacre of American journalists was felt painfully by the Syrians— perhaps more than those other than them because it reflects a picture of their daily suffering between the hammer of the regime and the anvil of Daa' sh which has been killing them for three and a half years in front of weakness and ignorance of the international community... More dangerous than that, the international community continues dealing with the danger of Daa' sh while ignoring the danger of the regime which vowed to move the fight to the European and American cities and left to complete its slaughter of the unarmed Syrian people.

By planning in advance and by the work of an arbitrator, the regime released the hand of these criminals across the length and width of the country in order to kill the innocent ones and pulverize the country and burn the green and dry lands. Will the world move before the fire extends to the safe cities of the world??

## **Appendix 3: *Mushawweh: Towards a New Plan for the Muslim Brotherhood to Restore its Strong Presence in Syria*<sup>123</sup>**

*Date of Publication: November 8, 2014 (Gregorian) 15 Muḥarram 1436 (Hijri)*

Syrian Brothers Press

Omar Mushawweh, head of the Media Office of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, said that the most prominent task that awaits the new Comptroller General Mohammed Hikmat Walid, is arranging a new plan for the brotherhood.

Mushawweh said in a communication with the site "Arabic Online", "We need to actually change the reality, and contribute to the progress of the revolution, as we will work to restore the strong presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, especially because we have been absent from the domestic scene for the past thirty years."

The director of the Office of Media added, "We try to do our work in the institutions of the revolution such as the coalition and the National Council in order to contribute to raising the level of these institutions, and also open up to other currents on the Syrian arena, Most certainly we want to restore the role that was played by the brotherhood before we were forced out in the eighties."

Mushawweh affirmed that the new leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood and the cadres will, without the nearest doubt, help Dr. Mohammed Hikmat Walid in his duties.

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<sup>123</sup> This is my translation of a text originally published on Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's website. Publication information: "Mushawweh: Towards a New Plan for the Muslim Brotherhood to Restore Its Strong Presence in Syria" (مشوّح: نحو خطة جديدة لجماعة الإخوان لاستعادة وجودها القوي في سوريا). Ikhwan Syria (الإخوان مسلم السوري), Web.

And on the possibility of an election of a new overseer of the group, a prelude to the possibility of a political solution to the Syrian crisis, Mushawweh said: "Regardless of everything, the Brotherhood is an essential part of the equation, and cannot be excluded from any solution in Syria."

**Appendix 4: Condemnation of the Crime of the Execution of the  
Jordanian Pilot...and the Responsibility of the International Alliance to  
Correct its Compass<sup>124</sup>**

**A Media Statement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria**

*Date of Publication: February 4, 2015 (Gregorian) 15 Rabī‘ al-Thānī 1436 (Hijri)*

Indeed the tragic end which Daa‘sh imposed on the Jordanian pilot M‘uth Kassabeh cannot be accepted by a human who holds moral values or command of religious authority in their life. .

Verily the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria condemns this heinous crime, while reminding the whole world that the Syrian regime's crimes against his own people have indeed exceeded all red lines, and transgressed all moral and humanitarian principles. And it is incumbent upon the international coalition to address its connection with the first terrorist Syrian regime and his myrmidons of criminals and thugs, until it stops the flowing of blood on Syrian territory and purifies it the region of the atrocities of terrorism in all its forms.

Media Office

The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria

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<sup>124</sup> This is my translation of a text originally published on Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's website. Publication information: "Condemnation of the Crime of the Execution of the Jordanian Pilot...and the Responsibility of the International Alliance to Correct Its Compass" (إدانة جريمة إعدام الطيار الأردني .. وعلى التحالف الدولي أن يصحح بوصلته). *Ikhwan Syria*. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (الإخوان مسلم السوري), Web.

## **Appendix 5: This Terrorism is Unacceptable in Every Time and Any Place<sup>125</sup>**

### **A Media Statement**

*Date of Publication: November 14, 2015 (Gregorian) 2 Safar 1437 (Hijri)*

For the second time in one year, a mad killing has struck the capital of France—Paris—with its viscous stick; positioning hundreds of dead and wounded in an incident not seen in France since World War II.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria—a group that has always believed and discussed and behaved through its deep belief that its Islam is characterized by tolerance and moderation; the path of justice and equity and the defense of all of humanity—strongly condemns this military aggression and all action against unarmed defenseless innocent ones, in every time and any place.

At the same time, as we watch the injured France with sadness and pain; we remind the world and its forces of all of those with wounds in the Syrian cave of deep bleeding—which was struck by the terrorism of Assad and his allies the Iranians and the Russians, with all their strength and brutality and oppression; until the death toll became hundreds of peaceful innocent Syrians daily—which does not merit that lengthy media coverage nor indeed heavily armed expressions. The real threat is of a criminal

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<sup>125</sup> This is my translation of a text originally published on Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's website. Publication information: "This Terrorism Is Unacceptable in Every Time and Any Place (هذا إلّا هاب مرفوض في كلّ زمان وأيّ مكان)." *Ikhwan Syria* (الإخوان سوريّة). The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (الإخوان مسلم السوري), Web.

murderer who declares himself in the glory of the day but rather clearly threatens implementing the acts of terrorism in the heart of Europe.

Verily the continuing of Bashar and gangs and his allies and the Russian intervention...is the real cause of terrorism, which exceeded the Syrian border, and indeed the overthrow of Bashar is the only way to eradicate this terrorism.

Finally, we are pained by the pain of humanity in each place, and we hope that the negligent international community feels the great pain which the tortured Syrians have suffered for years under the weight of Assad and his allies. We hope that it will cooperate with the forces of the revolution if it wants to exterminate this terrorism.

Media Office

The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria

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