

**Beyond Revolution:
Insurgencies and Revisionism in International Affairs**

By

Victor M. Sanchez

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in International Affairs

Middle Tennessee State University

June 2021

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Jonathan M. DiCicco, Chair

Dr. Andrei Korobkov

Dr. Moses Tesi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not be possible without the guidance and dedication of Dr. Jonathan M. DiCicco, who opened my eyes to revisionism. This thesis is a natural extension of our co-authored work, “Revisionism in International Relations.” I am indebted not only to a phenomenal scholar, but to an excellent mentor who has given me an opportunity to prove myself in the academic realm.

I am also extremely grateful to Drs. Sean Foley and Moses Tesi, who guided me through the complexities of Middle Eastern history, politics, and Islamic identity, and Dr. Andrei Korobkov, who has provided me a foundation which aided in my understanding of foreign policy orientations and globalization. Without this knowledge, this thesis would not have been possible.

Finally, I am grateful to Dr. Karen Petersen who was not only instrumental in my academic growth and enrollment in MTSU’s MAIA program, but also invested in my personal growth and stood next to me during some life’s most formidable challenges. There are many coincidences in life. This is not one of them.

ABSTRACT

A common dichotomy in the international affairs literature pits status quo actors, who are satisfied with the current arrangement in international affairs, against revisionist actors, who desire to change it. While revisionism is considered important and is studied by scholars and analysts, the existing literature generally seeks to understand revisionism as it relates to great powers and other states. Studies on non-state actors are rare by comparison. This thesis adds to the literature a study on non-state revisionist actors. It argues that there are insurgents who are dissatisfied with the status quo and desire to alter, disrupt, or destroy the regional or international order, but that not all non-state armed groups are necessarily revisionist. Using structured, focused comparison, this study examines three contemporary transnational insurgent groups. Utilizing a generally accepted indicator of revisionism and violent insurgent tactics, the study gauges whether each group is motivated by a revisionist strategy. The findings of this plausibility probe suggest that two of the cases – al Qaeda, and the Islamic State (ISIS) – merit the label “revisionist”. By contrast, the final case, Boko Haram, should be seen instead as revolutionary because it primarily seeks to disrupt governance dynamics at the state level.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Revisionism in international affairs has been widely applied as a concept since at least 1939, when in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* E. H. Carr discussed the “fundamental divergences of interest between nations desirous of maintaining the *status quo* and nations desirous of changing it” (2001, p. 53). The relationship discussed by Carr (2001) indicates a dichotomy between “status quo” and “revisionist” actors in international affairs. The study continues today, with scholars considering the possibility of struggles between revisionist and status quo states for control and influence over regional and international order. Yet, despite the longevity of revisionism’s conceptualization, the concept remains contested, and its study leaves much to be desired (DiCicco & Sanchez, 2021). Still, scholars and analysts remain fascinated with understanding and uncovering the desires of various so-called revisionist states in world politics, including Russia (e.g., Dzarasov, 2017; Piontkovsky, 2015), China (e.g., Aziz, 2016; Cabestan, 2016), and even the United States (e.g., Lind, 2017). However, rarely considered in such studies are *revisionist non-state actors*. Despite the proliferation of, and increased scholarly attention to, non-state actors in world politics, such as multi-national corporations or non-governmental organizations, non-state actors are rarely discussed in the literature on revisionism, with Ward (2017) being one notable exception. This thesis is dedicated to furthering the understanding of revisionism by considering the intentions of the non-state actor, specifically transnational insurgent groups. This study’s argument is simple and straightforward: revisionism extends into the non-state actor realm, and transnational insurgencies that have regional or international goals can be considered revisionist if they seek to alter, disrupt, or destroy key aspects of those orders, or the orders in their entirety.

Using *structured, focused comparison*, this study probes three cases to determine the plausibility of applying the label “revisionist actors” to insurgent groups: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS), and Boko Haram. Important to note is that all of these actors adhere to a fundamentalist interpretation and practice of Islam. Noting scholars’ concerns that Western audiences tend to label non-Western actors as revisionist in nature (Turner & Nymalm, 2019), limiting the cases to insurgencies that adhere to Islamist principles effectively allows the study to utilize Islamic fundamentalism as a control variable.

Two questions guide the plausibility probe. The first question is *do the insurgents utilize rhetoric to express their dissatisfaction? And, if so, are insurgents dissatisfied with the international or regional order, or with state-level governments and policies?* This question is primarily concerned with revisionist rhetoric, a discursive practice and indicator that is found in the existing literature on revisionism. The various ways in which these insurgencies employ rhetoric will be considered, particularly as it relates to their expressed dissatisfactions, and how they discuss actions needed to relieve those dissatisfactions.

The second question is *do the actors employ violent insurgent strategies intended to alter, disrupt, or destroy the status quo?* This seeks to look beyond the traditional indicators that are used to label actors as revisionist. This is important as the insurgencies have limited means of achieving their goals. This question is concerned with the utilization of guerrilla warfare and terrorism, detailed in Chapter III, as strategies that insurgents may use to revise their respective orders.

Based on the various existing indicators of revisionism and how they utilize guerrilla warfare and terrorism, this study finds that Al-Qaeda and ISIS should be considered *revisionist* actors, while Boko Haram is found to fall short of the revisionist label, remaining what is understood to be a *revolutionary* transnational insurgency group. As previously mentioned, this study controls for the Islamic fundamentalist variable, hedging against the complaint that actors adhering to these principles are inherently revisionist in nature. Further, this study argues that both guerrilla warfare and terrorism, methods of unconventional warfare, may be indicators of revisionist intentions, but stresses that scholars and analysts need to refrain from jumping to conclusions without proper analysis of each case, which ideally should include discursive evidence as well.

The thesis is structured in three overarching chapters. Chapter II, *International Order(s) and Revisionism*, will provide an understanding of two important topics in international affairs discourse and study. It will discuss the conceptualization of the international order, and will provide an overview of the various components of the Liberal International Order (LIO) found within its “ecosystem” (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). These components of the international order are important when understanding the revisionism subsection of Chapter II, as it will provide context as to why key actors may be dissatisfied with those components. The subsection on revisionism will provide insight as to which actors are considered revisionist, the types of revisionism recognized in international affairs discourse, and how these actors are identified by scholars and analysts; it also explains why non-state actors, particularly insurgencies, are overlooked in the academic discourse.

Chapter III, *Insurgencies*, seeks to develop a clear understanding of the insurgent in international affairs, a subject that has long been misunderstood and mistreated. The major goals of the chapter are to outline what insurgencies are, and more importantly discuss how these insurgencies may choose to engage other actors in international affairs. In particular, detailed explanations regarding insurgency uses of guerrilla warfare and terrorism and how they may, if used within proper international context, may serve as an indicator of revisionist pursuits by these non-state actors. This is of particular interest considering their lack of capacity to pursue their revisionist goals through more traditionally understood methods and mechanisms.

Chapter IV, *Case Studies in the MENA Region and Beyond*, will serve multiple purposes. First, it provides a historical understanding of the development of the Greater Middle East's regional order, especially as it relates to the exploitation of the region from outside actors. This seeks to show the complexities of the international and regional orders sharing the same ecosystem in international affairs (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). More importantly this historical overview helps generate an understanding of the various issues that insurgencies may want to revise. In addition, the cases will be outlined to provide readers with an overview of each actor. Following this cases overview, a short section on Islamic fundamentalism will be provided as an introduction to the concept as each actor adheres to fundamentalist ideologies. Finally, a detailed overview of the two aforementioned guiding questions will be explored, concluding with a determination on whether the cases are revisionist in orientation.

The thesis will finish with Chapter V, *Conclusion and Future Directions*. While this chapter will reinforce the findings of the study, of greater importance is a discussion regarding any complexities discovered in the thesis, and how future studies can improve on the study of insurgent revisionism in particular, and revisionism in general.

CHAPTER II: INTERNATIONAL ORDER(S) AND REVISIONISM

Borrowing from Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Maull (2018) develops a convincing metaphor of a functioning international order: it is “like oxygen in the air: you do not take notice of it until it begins to disappear” (p. 1). The international order that Maull (2018) refers to, and its various components, is what sustains the interactions between and amongst states. The world in portions of the 20th century, particularly during the World War eras, culminated in the vast destruction of material and significant loss of life (Maull, 2018), offering insight to the grim realities of a dysfunctional international order. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States, and its allies, have sought to instill an international order in their own vision, which has projected values believed to reduce the likelihood of conflict. However, not all actors are satisfied with the current international order. The revisionist actor is not only dissatisfied with the international order, or its various components; it also *acts*, seeking to alter, disrupt, or destroy it.

This chapter seeks to lay the foundation for these two distinct, but related, international relations phenomena: the international order and revisionism. To fully understand the relationship between the international order and those who wish to challenge it, a deep understanding of each concept is warranted. The first section provides a detailed overview the international order, including how major theoretical paradigms aid in our understanding of the international order, how it is conceptualized, and its composition. The second section details revisionism, its conceptualization, and what variables drive actors to revise.

Understanding the International Order

Traditionally, there are three dominant theories of international society¹ which promote an understanding of the larger international order: the Hobbesian (realist) tradition; the Kantian (universalist) tradition; and the Grotian (internationalist) tradition (Bull, 1977, p. 24). Each theoretical paradigm offers insight as to how the international order operates, and detail how “order” can be achieved.

The Hobbesian tradition develops a notion that the international system is one in which states play a zero-sum game in a state of nature and, therefore, is in a constant state of anarchy (Bull, 1977; Doyle, 1983; Hobbes, 2017). Anarchy in the international system has been argued to reflect human reality, as individuals compose the state, and therefore, society. Effective central authority and a sense of community are the solutions to this state of anarchy, as community membership imposes limitations on the ends and means of *power*, a central component of both domestic and international politics (Lebow, 2013, pp. 60-61). Communities establish both collective identities and norms, which are the “most critical determinants of order, at home and abroad” (Lebow, 2013, p. 62).

Realists would argue the international realm lacks centralized authority (Hobbes, 2017; Lebow, 2013; Mearsheimer, 1994) and that due to this lack of authority, survival depends on security achieved through alliances and material capabilities (Mearsheimer, 1994, as cited in Lebow, 2013). Though it is never guaranteed, order can be achieved in

¹ Maull (2018) establishes that there has been expressed dissatisfaction with the lacking distinction between “international society” and “international order” established by Bull (1977), with some deeming it tautological. While the problem associated with Bull’s definition of “international order” is dealt with in the next section, these theories proposed by Bull do assist with conceptual understanding of the international order.

the international realm via alliances (Bull, 1977; Lebow, 2013; Quackenbush, 2014) and achieving a balance of power (Bull, 1977; Lebow, 2013; Morgenthau, 1958), which is understood to be achieved through military capacity, known as the distribution of capabilities. A simple balance of power, the balance established between two states, is achieved when power parity is achieved (Bull, 1977). However, a complex balance of power can exist despite significant asymmetric power relationships via bandwagoning, in which states join the strong side to enjoy the spoils of domination, and balancing, where states join weaker side to put a halt to hegemonic pursuits (Bull, 1977; Quackenbush, 2014, pp. 128-129; Schweller, 1994). However, balancing may drive states to conflict, as it is difficult to gauge the motives of other states (a challenge that some analysts of revisionism seek to address). Despite this, notable scholars, such as Morgenthau (1958), believe that balancing, despite failing to prevent war, may limit its consequences (as cited in Lebow, 2013, p. 64).

The Kantian tradition recognizes the potential for cooperation and progress within international society. Liberal schools of thought have heavily been influenced and driven by this potential. In this tradition, the essential nature of politics lies not within conflict between states, rather “transnational social bonds that link the individual human beings who are subjects or citizens of states” (Bull, 1977, p. 25). Thus, the “game” being played by states is to be viewed as non-zero-sum and one in which cooperation can truly exist (Bull, 1977). Kant’s ultimate vision is contested amongst scholars, with some suggesting he desires a cosmopolitan society (e.g., Bull, 1977), while others suggest he envisions a confederation of states which have similar functions and principles (e.g., Hurrell, 1990; Russett, 2013). Perhaps, as Hurrell (1990) put it, “Kant aims at what Barry Buzan has

called ‘mature anarchy’” (p. 200). The path to a more peaceful world has generally accepted elements that make up and drive aspects of the international order: democratic institutions and governance, economic interdependence, and international organizations (Doyle, 1983; Quackenbush, 2014; Russett, 2013; Russett & Oneal, 2001). If one examines the era after the Second World War, especially following the collapse of the Cold War system, one will find that there has been a significant decrease in battle deaths from violent conflicts (Russett, 2013, p. 98). Many see the increases of democracies, economic openness, and intergovernmental membership to be drivers of this phenomenon (e.g., Russett, 2013, p. 99). These findings indicate that the Kantian view of international society has motivated states to adopt and promote aspects of a world order, perceived as the *liberal international order* (Maull, 2018; Kissinger, 2014), which has been capable of reducing conflict.

The final view of international society that drives certain understandings of the international order is that of the Grotian or internationalist tradition (Bull, 1977). Those who adhere to the tradition posit that states are “limited in their conflicts with one another by common rules and institutions” (Bull, 1977, p. 26). In this sense, the Grotian tradition is one that centers around law and customary practices (Bull, 1977; Cutler, 1991; Lauterpacht, 1946). It separates itself from both the Hobbesian and Kantian perspectives by concluding that the conditions found at the international levels are formed between states, not individual human beings (Bull, 1977). However, there are aspects of Grotian thought that blur the hard distinction between state and man, such as the notion that both states and men have rights and owe duties under international law (Cutler, 1991).

While these theoretical paradigms assist one's understanding of the international order, this overview in itself is not enough to fully grasp the concept. The next section focuses on the conceptualization of the international order, including how this study defines it, and its composition.

Conceptualizing the International Order

The international order, as a concept, has undergone considerable development. Bull (1977) defines the international order as “a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society” (p. 8). According to Bull (1977), those primary goals are: 1) the preservation of the state system and society; 2) maintaining each state's external sovereignty, meaning a state's independence from outside authority; 3) peace, specifically the absence of war as a normal condition; and 4) limitation of violence (pp. 16-19).

Bull's (1977) work, dedicated to understanding the existence of international order under anarchy (Holsti, 2009), offers the most widely circulated definition of the international order (Mauil, 2018). However, many academics are dissatisfied with Bull's (1977) definition due to the similarities between the terms “international order” and “international society”, with critics deeming it tautological (Mauil, 2018). Considering that Bull (1977) views international society as a concert of states that bind themselves to common rules and work within common institutions, it becomes clear as to why this conceptualization and any distinction between the international order and international society may be problematic. For the purposes of developing an inclusive and exhaustive

working definition of the international order, this work relies on Maull (2018), who defines “*the international order*” as:

the sum of all formal and informal arrangements that sustain rule-governed interaction among sovereign states and non-state actors in pursuit of individual and collective goals. The international order is a dynamic social construct that, like its components, is created through human interactions, changes over time, and is eventually transformed or dissolved (p. 5).

This definition attempts to address those various issues that arose in academic discourse and makes it clear that “competing” understandings of international society (i.e., Hobbesian or Kantian) proposed by Bull (1977) do provide understanding to the international order. Further, it allows one to focus in on the aspects of the international order not only as they exist in theory, but also in the practice of international affairs.

While the term *international order* suggests that there exists a single order that extends beyond that of the state system, this would be incorrect. Regional orders have been identified as critical components of the larger international order (Cooley & Nexon, 2020; Kugler & Lemke, 1996; Lemke, 2002; Maull, 2018; Vayrynen, 2003; Volgy et al., 2017). Maull (2018) considers it important to develop an understanding of the regional components of the larger international order via partial orders, the “regional and/or functional arrangements of cooperation and competitions between states” (p. 8). In part because such orders may be misunderstood as static and unchanging, it is worth considering an alternative that adds nuance and complexity. Cooley and Nexon (2020), for example, provide an elaborate metaphorical conceptualization for the international order: it is an ecosystem composed of various orders that either co-exist or compete with each other. Not only do they believe that there is no singular international order, but

rather there exists a polycentric ordering structure (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). In this sense, not only is there no singular international order, but various regional orders. Like ecosystems, the orders are constantly evolving, with new dominant actors, norms, and institutions, among others, defining some portion of the evolution. This distinction between international and regional orders is indeed necessary, but one should consider that these regional orders do not exist in a vacuum. The international order and regional orders often shape each other (Cooley & Nexon, 2020; Maull, 2018), and as practices change and new actors become prominent, some of those actors might seek to revise regional orders or even the international order.

Components of the International Order

In his definition of the international order, Maull (2018) refers to the components of the international order which are created through interactions amongst the various state and non-state actors. How can one conceptualize the composition of the international order? Further, how do these components assist in our understanding how order is established and maintained in international affairs? Attempting to compose a picture of how the international order may be represented in a tangible way is a challenging task. However, Cooley and Nexon's (2020) encompassing conceptualization of the international order offers a thoughtful way to imagine its composition: it is an ecosystem. Cooley and Nexon (2020) suggest that its ecology is composed of three components: 1) *architecture*, which consists of guiding principles, rules, norms, and values; 2) *infrastructure*, referring to the day-to-day interactions and practices between and amongst states; and 3) *institutions*, which act as the bridge between the architecture and

infrastructure (pp. 34-37). What are some prime examples of these components, and what benefits do they bring? And moreover, what problems arise due to these components?

Considered in the sections to follow are institutions, norms and international law, and hierarchies rooted in asymmetrical power relationships.

Institutions

While there is no universally accepted definition as to what an institution is, there are generalizable trends. Keohane (1988) states that an institution refers to a “*general pattern or categorization of activity or to a particular human-constructed arrangement, formally or informally organized*” (p. 383), while Mearsheimer (1994) defines it as “a set of rules that stipulate the ways in which states should cooperate and compete with each other” (p. 8), essentially acting as a means to constraining actor behavior (Martin & Simmons, 1998). Based on the alternative conceptualizations offered by these prominent scholars, one can deduce that institutions are rules or patterns that guide and constrain the various interactions between actors. While institutions can be informal in nature, they generally find themselves incorporated into formal international or intergovernmental organizations (Mearsheimer, 1994).

Institutions are believed to foster cooperation amongst actors by reducing transaction costs (Keohane, 1988, 1998). However, some scholars look beyond exogenous constraints and argue that institutional socialization is what brings about changes in actor behavior (Johnston, 2003). Nevertheless, this relationship between states, fostered through institutions, leads to greater degrees of predictability, credibility, and accountability, all of which strengthen the international order. Though the

organizations that manage these various institutions may at times be dominated by a single actor, many have mechanisms that ensure that even those dominant actors are held accountable for egregious institutional wrongdoings, such as penalties and fines. However, more damaging than those penalties and fines may be the risk of negatively impacting one's reputation, potentially making it so that others in the international community will find them anything but predictable, credible, or accountable. Further, these organizations provide institutional mechanisms to settling disputes, providing nonviolent means to an end, therein lessening the need to resort to war (Quackenbush, 2014). For example, if a state is concerned about a trade dispute, they may bring forth a case to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and seek justice, as did China did in 2020 when the United States imposed tariffs on over \$200 billion in Chinese goods, breaking trade rules in the process (Farge & Blenkinsop, 2020).

Though the world lacks a true global *government*, prominent institutions provide aspects of *governance* that support the international order. The United Nations, the largest and most recognizable coherent intergovernmental organization in history, is a prime example of an organization that plays a role in maintaining the international order via its various institutional mechanisms. Within the organization, states may come forth to voice their concerns on international issues. When considering the UN, one may immediately consider the powers that reside as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and their ability to direct or challenge international security and peace concerns. The permanent members enjoy an effective veto power when considering any substantive issue that arises in the Security Council. However, one should also consider the General Assembly, the closest thing that the international community has to a

legislature, which has nearly universal membership. Each member state, regardless of its size or power, is granted a single vote.

However, despite all the good that institutions attempt to achieve, they often fall short of their goals. Regardless of the drivers of international cooperation, all have to contend with the realities of state sovereignty, in which institutions with weak mechanisms may not be able to provide enough sticks or carrots to ensure cooperation between states. While sovereignty may challenge institutions, institutions by their nature undermine aspects of a state's sovereignty. While this is felt by all participating states, those whose practices or governing styles that are at odds with institutional guidelines are impacted the most. One can consider developing countries that request foreign aid at the expense of adopting practices that may go against cultural values or their governance style as being especially prone to feeling discomfort. More detailed accounts of this will be found under the next section on international norms.

Finally, one must contend with the reality that many of the institutions and international or intergovernmental organizations are exclusive to state membership. The question remains as to what becomes of the various non-state actors in international affairs? Consider the UN General Assembly, in which only two non-state actors, including the Palestinian Liberation Organization², are granted mere *observer* status. This is unprecedented indeed, but not much beyond that of a symbolic gesture. It may be that due to their lack of access to institutions, not only do they lack those incentives to

² The PLO represented Palestine when it held the status of a non-member entity. Palestine's status was changed to non-Member observer State in 2012, when the United Nations adopted Resolution 67/19 (*Status of Palestine*, 2013).

cooperate, but they also lack any socialization benefits that may exist. Within the networks of institutional power in the international system, state actors with low access and low brokerage in international institutions are more likely to resort to “extraordinary measures” when challenging these orders (Goddard, 2018, p. 775). Due to their relative lack of access and influence, they are more likely to “engage in expansive military spending and arms racing, increasing pressures for offensive action in pursuit of their aims” (Goddard, 2018, p. 775). The question remains: what of those actors that have *no* access and *no* brokerage? Perhaps they too will adopt more militant means to achieve their goals.

Norms and International Law

Norms, at times known as the rules of the game, and international law are contested regarding their theoretical importance to understanding international affairs, especially when dealing with the concept of power (Goertz & Diehl, 1992). This assertion is supported when considering that “the sense of common interests in elementary goals of social life does not in itself provide precise guidance as to what behavior is consistent with these goals” (Bull, 1977, p. 67). These complexities make it so that states are capable of violating some norms and laws while strictly adhering to others (Cooley & Nexon, 2020, p. 35). However, as Ikenberry (2012) argues, scholars concerned with understanding the international order will find that order is manifested in the “settled rules and arrangements between states that define and guide their interaction” (pp. 14-15). Cooley and Nexon (2020) believe that it is due to the various actors in the international system that these ambiguities and tensions form. Whether between states,

non-state actors, in intergovernmental organizations or multinational corporations, these norms and laws act as one of the many guides of interactions in international affairs (Cooley & Nexon, 2020, p. 35).

Guiding the behavior of states is not without significant challenges, especially when considering which international norms or laws to promote and adopt. One of the troubling aspects is the push for universal acceptance of certain norms and codified laws, especially when considering Cooley and Nexon's (2020) assertion that tensions arise due to the variety of actors which exist. Often, actors will argue that international law or norms "based on universally accepted objective moral and rational standards in unattainable" (Mushkat, 2002, p. 1031). This comes as no surprise when these norms or laws are formed from the notion of natural laws, with core characteristics including: reliance on an absolute source (i.e., God); putting forth the assumption of "immutable and eternally valid principles"; and that the "content of natural law can be discovered through reason" (Curzon, 1979, as cited in Dembour, 2001, p. 57). These core characteristics make it so that norms or laws are established in conventions, with notions such as "rationality, human rights, or human nature, in the will of God" being the driving logic and legitimizer of pursuits (Erskine, 2013, p. 46).

One aspect that complicates this aspect of the international order is that understandings of what is deemed appropriate or just behavior vary due to cultural considerations. Often, this challenge is formed in a universalist-versus-relativist argument, and is framed around universal human rights norms and law (Dembour, 2001; Halliday, 1995). However, studies have expanded beyond that scope, considering the

dichotomy as it exists in the international legal realm when dealing with other topics, such as military interventions (Mushkat, 2002).

In order for some states to adopt these norms that have national or cultural implications, they must distance themselves from their “longstanding national understandings of appropriate behavior” in that particular issue area (Cortell & Davis, 2005, p. 4). Even generally accepted norms, such as state sovereignty or statehood, may be a source of conflict for some actors, especially if those norms are seen to be in conflict with one’s social belief or value system (Cortell & Davis, 2005), or if these norms conflict with an actor’s self-interests (Goertz & Diehl, 1992). One example of this source of conflict may be the proliferation of the state system in the Middle East region, wherein the notions of statehood and sovereignty have become widely accepted by rulers (despite the fact that territories and borders of states were shaped by departing colonial powers).

Despite a state’s ability to distance themselves from their understandings of what is deemed appropriate behavior, it is quite possible that some non-state actors within that state or region may be slow to adopt these new understandings or may push back against adopting these understandings altogether. Often, such pushback is seen through the lens of internal politics, and is understood as “strong domestic opposition” (Cortell & Davis, 2005, p. 3), but this perspective does not acknowledge that some of the non-state actors pushing back are transnational actors with agendas that are not limited to just one state. It would be wrong to assume all actors in the region are either for or against these norms, with some regional actors claiming the ability to assimilate and reconcile their beliefs and

these principles, while others argue that there is an inherent incompatibility (Halliday, 1995).

Making matters worse in the Greater Middle East region is the push for democratic principles found within the Liberal International Order. Both state and non-state actors have struggled with the notion of democratic principles and norms being adopted in their region. However, non-state actors in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region that ascribe to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam may argue on principle that these democratic norms are incompatible with their beliefs, and moreover, are a threat to Islam (Freeman, 2008). Further, the adoption of the multi-state system in the Greater Middle East is in conflict with the conceptualization of the *umma*, and should be rejected. More on the incompatibility of fundamentalist Islamic principles and the principles of the Liberal International Order appears in Chapter IV.

Hierarchies and Power Relationships

Hierarchies and power relationships are important components of a functioning international order. While the principles of sovereignty offered in the Westphalian understanding of international affairs is often emphasized by scholars, the sovereignty as it exists in practice is often more complicated. In the Westphalian understanding, anarchy is said to exist as states possess no authority over one another (Lake, 2007), while hierarchy exists when one state possesses authority over a second (Lake, 2007, 2009). Specifically, hierarchy can be defined as a continuous variable, in which the variance is determined by the number of actions one state can “legitimately issue commands and expect compliance” by another state (Lake, 2009, p. 39). Therefore, the relationships

between states may be understood as varying degrees of authority, and hierarchy (Lake, 2009). The concept of authority in Lake's definition of hierarchy is important. It is understood to be defined as "rightful rule" (Lake, 2007, p. 50). As simple as this understanding of authority is, it is complicated by the implications that come with power relationships (Lake, 2007). Lake (2007) argues that in the case of authority, obligation is often driving the behavior of states in the relationship, not coercion. However, Lake admits that "[a]lthough distinct, political authority and coercion are intimately related" (MacDonald & Lake, 2008, p. 51).³

Hierarchical relationships have long existed in the history of international affairs, complicating this notion of sovereign equality amongst states (Dunne, 2003; Lake 2007, 2009; Organski, 1958). Hierarchical relationships take many forms. The extent of these relationships exists on a spectrum, with one end of the spectrum being anarchic and the other hierarchical (Lake, 2009). Two of the most important forms of hierarchies exist in economic and security realms. Economic hierarchies exist on a spectrum between market exchange on one end, and dependency on the other (Lake, 2009). Practical examples of this phenomenon in action on the extreme hierarchical end of the spectrum include the various economic exploits conducted by the global superpowers in relationship with the Global South. Security hierarchies exist from diplomacy on one end, to outright protectorates on the other (Lake, 2009). One example of a hierarchical security relationship is the existence of troops of one state which are present in the territory of another, ultimately allowing one state to influence the security policy of another (Lake,

³ For a detailed understanding of the relationships of authority and coercion, see MacDonald & Lake (2008). Correspondence: The role of hierarchy in international politics. *International Security* 32(4).

2009). One important example of this was the stationing of U.S. military forces in Saudi Arabia during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 (Freeman, 2008; Lake 2007, 2009). By engaging Iraq through Saudi Arabia, the Saudi regime was, by default, subordinated in the conflict (Lake, 2009).

Important in the hierarchical relationship is the *perception* of the relationship from all actors involved, especially due to the interconnectedness between authority and coercion. Lake argues that “[a]ctors with political authority are empowered to use coercion legitimately, but the adjective makes all the difference in separating rules from bullies and subjects from victims” (MacDonald & Lake, 2008, p. 177). Depending on the actions taken, what is happening and what is perceived to be happening can vary in extreme ways. Consider the previous example of the U.S. and Saudi Arabian security relationship during the Persian Gulf War. Perhaps the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had vastly different perspectives on the authoritative relationship between them. Further, one should consider the perception of the relationship from the perspective of *all* relevant actors, even those that were not directly involved. There are certainly non-state actors that may have viewed the U.S. as being a foreign occupier in their homeland (Freeman, 2008), and that their fellow countrymen and women were falling victim to the imperialistic exploits of (yet another) foreign power. As the United States has been argued to be in “unilateralist overdrive” with the profligacy of its primacy (Dunne, 2003, p. 303), it is vulnerable to accusations of acting like an imperial power that reinforces its own position by exploiting others, while disregarding their interests. For example, Russia has accused Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norms, which the United States strongly supports, as being a “vehicle to advance a liberal, western normative agenda, if not a Trojan Horse for

western powers' strategic designs" (Allison, 2017, p. 524). Similar accusations of imperialistic desires and exploitations of the United States will be emphasized by insurgencies in Chapter IV of this thesis.

Revisionism

While there are certainly actors that stand to benefit from the existing international order, it would be unwise to believe that all actors are satisfied with it, or its various components. By assessing an actor's satisfaction with the "status quo," one may begin to predict any behaviors that may be intended to alter that status quo (DiCicco & Levy, 1999; DiCicco & Sanchez, 2021; Kugler & Lemke, 1996; Tammen, et. al., 2000). Maull (2018) makes it clear in his definition that the international order will eventually transform or dissolve. This section concerns itself with dissatisfied actors that pursue strategies to revise the international or regional orders, or their components. Some may be pursuing minor alterations to specific aspects of the international or regional order (i.e., norms, institutions, hierarchy etc.), while others may seek to destroy those orders at large.

Conceptualizing Revisionism

Due to the fact that the revisionist finds itself pitted in opposition to the status quo, the term has long had a negative connotation, rather than being viewed objectively as one of the various phenomena at work in international affairs (Buzan, 1983, p. 176). With the various actors in global politics, there will certainly be actors that find themselves supporters of the status quo, and those that oppose it.

Besides opposition to some aspects of the status quo, or the status quo in its entirety, there is no universally accepted conceptual definition of revisionism, with some definitions being tailored to explain one aspect of the phenomena. For example, consider Miller (2009), who is concerned with territorial revisionism; he defines revisionism as "a state which is dissatisfied from the current international order and is willing to incur high costs by using force to change the territorial status quo or the regime of other states" (p. 89). However, some definitions are more generalizable. Ward (2013) defines it as a "grand strategic orientation that rejects and challenges the international status quo at its most basic levels: the hegemonic leadership of the system and/or the constitutive norms, principles, and rules that undergird the system's hierarchic and normative structure" (pp. 608-609). Taking into consideration the various components of the international order provided by Cooley and Nexon (2020), this work defines revisionism as a strategic orientation that seeks to *alter*, *disrupt*, or *destroy* the international or regional orders in their entirety, or the various components of those orders, including its architecture, infrastructure, institutions, or hierarchical structure.

Are States the Only Revisionist Actors?

Various studies have concerned themselves with rising powers, and have attempted to discern whether they are revisionist. By and large, studies consider Russia (e.g., Dzarasov, 2017; Piontkovsky, 2015) and China (e.g., Aziz, 2016; Cabestan, 2016), as being revisionist in orientation. Others (e.g., Buzan, 1983) emphasize that weak states may act in concert to achieve their revisionist goals (DiCicco & Sanchez, 2021).

Russia has long been a focal point for scholars and analysts who study revisionist phenomena (Allison, 2017; Bremmer, 2009; Dzarasov, 2017; Piontkovksy, 2015; Konyshv & Sergunin, 2014). Long a bulwark in the Cold War-era of international politicking, some deduce that is easy to understand why the former Soviet Union, whose *de facto* control of Eastern Europe rapidly diminished, would rise against the status quo: Russia wants to reclaim its own sphere of influence, free from Western interference, in which its hierarchical rule of a not so forgotten era is reinstated (Allison, 2017; Piontkovsky, 2015). Russian capacity allows them to not only challenge the status-quo in Eastern Europe, but also in the South West Asia, the MENA region, the Arctic (Konyshv & Sergunin, 2014), and in the UN Security Council (Allison, 2017).

China's rapid rise in the late 20th and early 21st century has resulted in it becoming a major focal point in United States foreign policy, and much analytical and scholarly activity seeks to gauge China's revisionist intentions (Cabestan, 2016; Chan, Hu, & He, 2019; Johnston, 2003; Lind, 2017; Mearsheimer, 2010; Walter, 2010). Chinese abilities to not only challenge the United States in the IMF, but its attempts to mirror institutions (like international development banks) has been one of the key indicators of its revisionist orientations (Cabestan, 2016). One may also consider the renewed and revitalized interest in the Silk Road with the Belt and Road Initiative, and subsequent Chinese policies in the Middle East and Africa, as not only disrupting United States primacy, but also challenging the World Bank -- actions that will ultimately better position China as a global contender for influence, and even predominance, in the Global South.

Though more frequently characterized as a declining power than a rising one, the United States has been argued to be revisionist (Chan, Hue, & He, 2019; Cooley, Nexon, & Ward, 2019; Jervis 2009; Lind, 2017), establishing that hegemonic status does not inherently predispose it as satisfied and status quo in orientation (DiCicco & Sanchez, 2021). Depending on the time period and the issue at hand, the United States often finds itself in the minority of the international community with issues brought forth in the UN, and is no stranger to utilizing its veto power in the UN Security Council to successfully halt, at least in a formal capacity, a rival from pursuing specific security policies (Chan, Hu, & He, 2019). The United States has even challenged aspects of its own Liberal International Order, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

However, largely absent from the literature is the consideration and examination of *non-state actors* as potential revisionists, with few authors signaling the value of exploring this possibility (e.g., Lemke, 2008; Ward, 2017). While playing an important role in the international and regional ecosystems, their desires and capacity to revise the international or regional orders has not been fully considered, potentially leaving a gap in understanding the motivations and intentions of these actors. Of particular interest to this study is that of transnational insurgency groups originating from the Greater Middle East region, whose impact has been felt regionally and even worldwide. The impact of terrorism on the larger international order, and its components, has been explored. Milte (1975) finds that the fear and uncertainty created by the use of terrorism destabilizes the international order. Cronin (2003) believes that terrorism is an anti-globalization response to the U.S.-led international system. However, it is Ward (2017) who suggestively labels an insurgency as a revisionist actor, arguing that weaker actors can pursue revisionist

aims. He cites the example of ISIS, which “simultaneously seeks to change the distribution of territory and wealth in the Middle East and to overthrow not just the Western normative and institutional order, but also the Westphalian foundation of the state system itself” (Ward, 2017, p. 21).

The “Inherent” Revisionist Problem

Why is it that insurgencies are left out of mainstream scholarly analysis of revisionism? One of the issues with understanding revisionism is that there is a tendency to classify some actors, especially those that utilize means that fall far outside of what is deemed acceptable by international society, as “inherently” revisionist.⁴ Deeming any actor as inherently revisionist is troublesome. First, revisionism refers to the *goals* of the actor, not the *means* in which they are seeking to achieve their goals. As previously stated, a revisionist is an actor which seeks to alter, disrupt, or destroy aspects of the international order, or its subcomponents. While understanding the means of achieving revisionism is important to identification and perhaps classification, one should not confuse the ends and means. The means of achieving revisionist goals are vast and include strategies that are practiced by the vast majority of states or those that are rarely practiced, if at all.

Second, the implications of this “inherent” tag are problematic. If this is the case that all insurgencies are believed to be revisionist, we are bound to overlook the diversity of the insurgency community. Just like their state and non-state counterparts, these actors

⁴ This phenomenon became apparent when the author presented a condensed draft of this thesis at the International Studies Association’s Midwest conference in Fall 2020, and received constructive criticism alleging that terrorist groups are inherently revisionist (personal communication, November 20, 2020).

have a diverse set of goals – substate, state, transnational, and so on – that must be understood. To clump them is to do a disservice to the diversity of insurgent groups and their agendas. The following sections are dedicated to understanding the revisionist actor in international affairs, and showcasing how insurgencies are comparable to the revisionist states that are often studied.

What do Revisionists want to Revise?

One important step in understanding, and ultimately identifying, the revisionist's decision to pursue policies that seek to alter, disrupt, or destroy key aspects of the international or regional order is to understand the aspects of the order that they may be *dissatisfied* with (DiCicco, 2017; DiCicco & Sanchez, 2021). Cooley and Nexon's (2020) conceptualization of the international order, discussed in detail in the previous section of this thesis, lends itself once again. Depending on the actor, it may be that they are dissatisfied with the international or regional order at large, its institutions (Cabestan, 2016; Chan, Hu, & He, 2019; Goddard, 2018; Johnston, 2003), the rules or norms as they exist (Allison, 2017; Buzan, 1983; Hurd, 2007; Lind, 2017), or perhaps other components such as the balance of power (Cooley, Nexon, & Ward, 2019; Mearsheimer, 2010), the social hierarchy (El-Doufani, 1992; Kang, 2004, Murray, 2019; Ward, 2013), or something as specific as trade agreements (Cabestan, 2016; Walter, 2010). An exhaustive list is unwarranted and perhaps impossible. However, the aforementioned "triggers" will allow us to better identify and understand what drives an actor to take on a revisionist orientation.

For example, consider the dissatisfaction that may be derived by the existing international institutions that exist. Perhaps it is that one state, or a coalition of states, stands much to gain from the existence of that particular institution. For example, the United States' influence over the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is significant, with a 17.4% share and a veto privilege (Cabestan, 2016, p. 4). It may be that powerful states, such as China, view the United States with contempt or envy, as they stand not only to direct and influence the IMF, but perhaps are better situated to benefit from the organization itself.

Like states, insurgencies are likely to be dissatisfied with specific aspects of the international order. The aforementioned dissatisfaction with the international hierarchy as conceptualized by Lake (2017, 2019) is a practical example. States are often discussed when it comes to the various economic or security hierarchies that exist. Often states are the ones which dictate and agree to the terms of the relationships in which they enter. However, one must deal with the reality that there has long been a history associated with colonialism, in which great powers subjected their colonies, and at times newly emerging states, to hierarchical relationships that resulted in consequences still felt today. These relationships are likely to resonate with both state and non-state actors, especially those in the developing world. Therefore, there may be hesitancy for these actors to enter new economic or security hierarchies. While state actors themselves are capable of making the ultimate decision as to if they enter or reject these relationships, non-state actors have no legitimate say in the matter. Even if the state actors are satisfied with the relationship, non-state actors may be dissatisfied. Once again, the security relationship between the

United States and Saudi Arabia was one that agitated actors such as Osama Bin Laden, who would soon act on this dissatisfaction.

Indicators of Revisionism

Because dissatisfaction may be passive, but revisionism is active (DiCicco, 2017), one should not simply declare that a state is revisionist without proper identification of revisionist strategies in action. Identification of revisionist states is largely organized around what states are seeking to revise. States that are dissatisfied with aspects of the international order, such as norms or institutions, or the order itself, might choose to carry out actions that are seen by others as an attempt to challenge and alter the order. Those dissatisfied with specific international norms may decide to operate outside of those norms (Allison, 2017; Johnston, 2003). If one is dissatisfied with international institutions (consider the example of the United States' disproportionate influence over the IMF) the revisionist may decide to create mirror institutions, better positioning themselves to be the beneficiary of those institutions (Cabestan, 2016; Goddard, 2018). Alternatively, they may try to leverage their influence within the existing institution in order to generate change, and in some extreme cases they may decide to exit the institutions completely (Goddard, 2018). Whether revisionist orientations are aimed at international norms, institutions, the international order, or the international hierarchy, revisionist states generally will leave a trail of breadcrumbs, hinting at their revisionist aims; or, perhaps, they are being followed closely by analysts who know the signs of a revisionist actor.

Rhetorical discourse has been found to be an important phenomenon in international affairs, as it is central not only to the processes of politics, but its outcomes

(Krebs & Jackson, 2007, p. 35). Often the declarations and rhetoric of elites indicates a state is dissatisfied with aspects of the status quo, and may seek to revise it (Aziz, 2016; Chan, Hue, & He, 2019; Piontkovsky, 2015; Ward, 2013). While the reliance on rhetoric to determine revisionist intentions is inadvisable due to the fact that talk may be cheap, analyzing rhetoric does serve a valuable purpose by helping interpret the intended meanings behind actions that appear to be revisionist. In some cases, it may even serve as an early indicator that revisionist actions are on the horizon. Chan, Hue, and He (2019) find that understanding an actor's official declarations, and actual conduct pertaining to their declarations, are important indicators of revisionism, especially as it relates to established international norms. Insurgencies, too, have a rich rhetorical history that may serve as an indicator of revisionist orientation. As will be discussed in great detail in the case studies that follow, speeches, magazines, and religious declarations may be understood as materials that express dissatisfaction with aspects of the international or regional orders, and seek to bring about action to revise those aspects to alleviate that dissatisfaction.

It is often difficult to rely exclusively on military indicators of revisionism. Mearsheimer (2010) argued that the propensity for analysts to deduce intentions attributed to China, or any other state actor for that matter, on military actions, armament, or arms proliferation, is problematic. This is due to the fact that it may not be easily understood, or argued for that matter, if an instrument, device, military, or technological innovation is intended to be used for offensive or defensive purposes. Even nuclear weaponry is being developed and positioned worldwide. Can one say for certain that nuclear proliferation it is offensive or defensive in nature? Further, the use of private

security contractors (PMCs), on the one hand, and Russia's use of troops without insignia (the so-called "Little Green Men") on the other, has further complicated this understanding, offering states plausible deniability regarding their involvement in military actions.

However, this difficulty to argue that militarization is defensive in nature does not hold the same theoretical merit when the actor being examined is an insurgency, whose militant activities are carried out in order to achieve its own political goals. While the state is the predominant actor in international affairs with the monopoly on violence, these actors circumvent this norm and carry out militarized campaigns. The question still exists despite the theoretical differences between state and non-state violence: do the militarized means at the disposal of transnational insurgencies prove to be an effective indicator of revisionist orientation? This study will engage this question directly.

Sources of Revisionism

Revisionism does not emerge in a vacuum, and in most cases, it should be possible to identify the source of an actor's revisionist orientation. Whether the revisionist orientation is adopted internally in a process shaped by elites, or if dynamics related to identity or status drive these pursuits, scholars and analysts should seek to include what sources may be influencing particular cases.

Identity

Identity has been considered an important source of revisionism (Hinnebusch, 2013; Koneyshev & Sergunin, 2014; Lyall, 2005; Miller, 2009; Piontkovsky, 2015;

Ward, 2013). Building off the conceptualization of an “identity bundle,” created by ruling elites to legitimize their regimes, Lyall (2005) contends that revisionist ambitions do not arise from anarchy in the international system; rather, they arise from this “collective identity project” (p. 64). The inclusivity or exclusivity and the degree of coherence of a state’s identity bundle has considerable impact on a state’s grand strategy orientation (Lyall, 2005, p. 68). Exclusive identities, those that are “drawn on narrow grounds that marginalize actors either within or outside society” tend to result in revisionist orientations -- though the degree to which they are revisionist depend on their coherence, referring to the degree of which identity bundle strands “generate mutually compatible or contradictory behavioral expectations” (Lyall, 2005, p. 68).

These issues of identity may be more apparent in cases that have deep historical roots, especially if those cases have a history of having achieved a certain power status. Russia and China serve as practical examples. China’s desire to see itself return to its “rightful place in the world” has been argued to be an influencer of the “trajectory of its future ascent” (Aziz, 2016, p. 5), and acts to reestablish dominance in its own sphere of influence, especially as it relates to territorial disputes (Lind, 2017). One need not look further than to see its assertiveness sharply increased in the South China Sea (Lind, 2017). Russia finds itself in a similar situation. Putin desires to return as the *de facto* bulwark of the “Russian World”, which has long been divided, especially following the collapse of the USSR, explaining, in part, its propensity to undermine Ukrainian European aspirations (Piontkovsky, 2015). Often, Putin’s desires for regional security fall outside of the immediate scope of what was previously thought to be the Soviet Bloc, with concerns of militarization of the Arctic (Konyshev & Sergunin, 2014), and arguing

for protection of ethnic Russian and speakers of Russian, globally (Piontkovsky, 2015). It may be that, like in China, these desires of a return to a bygone era are merely a starting point and do not signify the end of such desires to expand one's region of influence.

While the aforementioned examples of China and Russia had historical roots tied to positions of power, some may have experiences on the opposite end of the spectrum. The Global South has a deep history that is heavily tied to imperialistic pursuits by the great powers of history. Unlike those that wish to return to their historical roots, these actors would likely wish to ensure that history does not repeat itself. Pursuits by current great powers, such as the United States, and their allies may be unwelcome, as are projections of their ideal international order, in this case the Liberal International Order. The aspects that drive this order (i.e., democratization and economic openness) may be thought as another form of imperialism.

State-to-Nation Imbalances

The state-to-nation balance has been stressed to be a key variable of revisionist orientation (Hinnebusch, 2019; Miller, 2009), especially considering actors that have hypernationalist ideologies (Miller, 2009, p. 94). The state and nation elements both play their roles in revisionist orientations. The *state* dimension refers to indicators of hard power, especially as it relates to institutional capacity and available resources (Miller, 2009, p. 94). The *nation* dimension refers to the degree of congruence between the political boundaries of the state and the identities and national aspirations of a states' population (Miller, 2009, p. 95). A states' revisionist orientation is determined by the balance that is struck between these two dimensions. It is argued that "strong states that

are nationally incongruent tend to generate revisionist policies” while “[s]trength and congruence lead to a *status-quo* orientation” (Miller, 2009, p. 87). Regional analyses utilize similar logic to explain sources of revisionism and status-quo orientations: in the Middle East, it is found that identity and state boundaries are often incongruent, becoming a “source of revisionism, contributing to high levels of regional conflict” (Hinnebusch, 2019, p. 148). Status-quo foreign policies are likely to be expressed when a states’ identity is satisfied, while a frustrated identity likely results in revisionist policies (Hinnebusch, 2019, p. 162). A specific driver of revisionist tendencies in the Middle East is caused by Arab or the larger Islamic identity, which has clashed with imperialism and the larger state system that has emerged in the region (Hinnebusch, 2019, p. 158).

Status

Status related to international hierarchy is another factor often explored when considering what drives states to pursue revisionism (Ward, 2013). Certain status dynamics, such as status inconsistency, are not key determinants of revisionism (Ward, 2013, p. 614). On the contrary, status immobility -- when a state’s elites and public believe that “successful status competition is impossible” -- has been identified as a potential variable that has potential to result in a state’s adoption of systemic revisionism (Ward, 2013, p. 615). Revisionism only occurs if they decide not to give up their claims to higher status recognition, which is not a likely response for rising great powers (Ward, 2013, pp. 614-615). While race was identified as the marker of status, and the reason behind the denial of status recognition, this marker may no longer be the case in contemporary international affairs. However, there are other status categorizations that

can still be used to understand this phenomenon as Western ideals are expressed at the international level (Ward, 2013, p. 639).

The Elite

Being major influencers in the formation of foreign policy orientation, the elite have often been considered important actors in revisionist literature (Aziz, 2016; Behraves, 2018; Cabestan, 2016; Lyall, 2005; Miller, 2009; Ward, 2013). Often these elites have opposing viewpoints on the orientation of their states' foreign policy. It has been suggested that to understand a state's shift towards revisionism one must consider the "outcome of a political contest over grand strategy" (Ward, 2013, p. 633). Ward (2013) is interested in the contestation that arises between moderates "who favor patience and reassurance" and expansionists "who favor harnessing the increasing capabilities of the state to pursue national objectives or particular interests" (p. 612). Other works have noted that elite contestation exists outside of the political realm itself, with elites being derived from other influential positions, noting academic and business realms amongst others (Cabestan, 2016; Dzarasov, 2017). The wide array of elites establishes that revisionist debate is multi-faceted, with strategies needing to consider political, military and business/economic concerns, amongst others.

The state is far from the only actor in which elite perceptions and desires matter. Insurgencies rely on their own elites to formulate their objectives and to determine the actions necessary to achieve those actions. However, like states, many insurgencies have multi-elite input, especially due to their fragmented nature and affiliate groups, which will not only will complicate the ability for these actors to create a coherent message and

strategy, but may frustrate analysts' ability to identify and understand their core intentions.

Types of Revisionism

Revisionism is far from being a one-size-fits-all phenomenon. As Goddard (2018) establishes, “[w]hile all states harbor some revisionist goals, not all revisionists are created equal” (p. 765). Various typologies and extents of revisionism have been discovered and conceptualized. The dynamics in which scholars based their typologies vary, with some developing a focus on: the objectives or goals of revisionist states (Buzan, 1983; Schweller, 1994), the extent of a state’s dissatisfaction (Cooley, Nexon, & Ward, 2019), the state’s institutional position (Goddard, 2018), the reasonableness of a state’s reaction after the failure of revisionist policies (Zionts, 2006), and whether a state has potentially hidden its revisionist orientation for a more opportune time (Taylor, 2007). However, how can typologies assist in explaining insurgent revisionism? To answer that question, it is necessary to first understand why scholars have found it useful to sort revisionist states into different categories.

States’ objectives have been used extensively as a way to categorize and, further, to gauge the extent of their revisionist orientations. Schweller (1994), while gauging a state’s “relative interests in the values of revision and of the status quo” finds that a state’s interest in revision outweigh the status quo a state adopts a revisionist orientation (p. 100). Revisionist typologies vary by the degree of revisionist orientation, with states having *limited* or *unlimited* aims (Schweller, 1994, p. 100). Limited aims revisionists are those that are “risk-averse and opportunistic” while unlimited aims revisionist “pursue

reckless expansion” finding themselves “willing to take great risks – even if losing the game means extinction – to improve their condition” (Schweller, 1994, pp. 103-104). These expansionists that gamble with their own existence are also known as suicidal revisionists (Zionts, 2006). This may help explain why despite the asymmetric odds, transnational insurgencies find themselves taking great risks, even if they are calculated, to achieve their goals.

Goddard (2018) establishes revisionist types based on their institutional network position, which in turn affects their strategic choice. Based on *brokerage*, that is, being an important actor and exclusive conduit between the various subgroups, and *access*, the extent of integration into a network, four types of revisionists are argued to exist: *integrated revisionists* will have no or limited revision as they lack the capacity to pursue a revisionist agenda and are bound to the existing international institutions; *bridging revisionists*, which will seek rule-based revolution within the current, dominant international order; *rogue revisionists* will seek to use unilateral force; and *isolated revisionists*, which will seek exit strategies, desiring to create their own “exclusive sphere” as they can “claim more prestige if they work within a new, exclusive domain” (Goddard, 2018, p. 775). While being completely dependent on the specific institution being examined, it appears that many transnational insurgencies will find themselves acting as rogue revisionists, as they will likely have “very little institutional or entrepreneurial power” (Goddard, 2018, p. 775), if at all. As alluded to in the *International Order* section, this may, in part, explain why these insurgencies rely on militant means and to achieve their goals: they have very few non-military means otherwise. Moreover, they will not be able to “legitimate revisionism to an international

audience” and will turn inwards, using “hypernationalist rhetoric to mobilize their populations” (Goddard, 2018, p. 775). Similarly, for non-state armed groups, extremist rhetoric may be used to mobilize fighters for insurgency and terrorism, which are the subjects of Chapter III.

CHAPTER III: INSURGENCIES

If insurgency studies were not of much interest in the 20th century, the early 21st century certainly sparked ample interest. While few academic journals (i.e., *Small Wars and Insurgencies*) have long been devoted to advancing the study, one would be hard pressed to find a large news media outlet, newspaper, or even Hollywood production company that does not produce news or consumer goods related to the subject. Once American televisions and theatres were displaying scenes of enemies with Eastern European accents. Now major productions are largely based around men who operate in the shadows, plotting attacks against innocent civilians.

While the average citizen's exposure to, and understanding of, insurgency may come from the various activities in the post-9/11 era, the truth is that insurgency is far from being a new phenomenon in international affairs. Written accounts of insurgent activities, recorded by Herodotus, have existed since 512 B.C., during the time of Persian King Darius (Asprey, 1994, pp. 3-4). However, despite the 2,500-year time span, insurgencies themselves are not fully understood. This is apparent when considering that the terms *insurgents*, *guerrilla fighters*, and *terrorist* are used interchangeably. Though they are closely related and often interconnect, the reality is that they are different. This chapter is dedicated to formulating a clear and concise understanding of the insurgent, and how they, and their militant activities, are related to revisionism.

A logical place to begin is to conceptualize insurgencies. An insurgency is the "struggle between a nonruling group and the ruling authorities in which the nonruling group consciously uses *political resources* (e.g., organization expertise, propaganda, and

demonstrations) and *violence* to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics” (O’Neill, 2005, p. 15). In this definition, and in its larger relationship with the ruling authorities, the nonruling group is deemed “insurgent.” The insurgent relationship with guerrilla warfare and terrorism, discussed further in sections to follow, is simple: these are the forms of violence employed by insurgents to achieve their goals.

Goals (and Types) of Insurgencies

Bard E. O’Neill has made some of the most considerable advances regarding understanding of insurgencies. Insurgencies are usually understood regarding their goals. Understanding the goals of insurgencies also helps analysts to establish distinct insurgent types, which have developed considerably over O’Neill’s career. O’Neill (1984, 2005) identifies nine types of insurgencies, which fit into two broad categories: *revolutionary* and *non-revolutionary*. Those that are revolutionary in nature are of particular importance. These insurgencies ultimately seek to change the political structures in place. Five insurgency types fit this category: anarchist, egalitarian, traditionalist, apocalyptic-utopian, and pluralist. The typing provided by O’Neill (1984, 2005) considers their revolutionary aims directed at the state. However, it is clear that these same revolutionary goals *may* extend beyond state-centric bounds and, in appropriate circumstances, may be directed at regional or international orders. By using the revolutionary typing providing by O’Neill (1984, 2005), not only are *revisionist* insurgencies realized in their pursuit to alter, disrupt, or destroy aspects of regional or international orders, but the aspects of the

status quo that are deemed dissatisfactory, driving them to act on their revisionist goals, are made clear.

Anarchists have the most extreme goals of any insurgent type. While similar to other revolutionary insurgencies that seek to eliminate existing political structures, these actors believe that any form of authority is illegitimate. Therefore, eliminated structures are not to be replaced. This particular desire for complete absence of political structures sets them apart from any other insurgent type. No contemporary anarchic insurgency has been significant, though examples include the Black Cells, Black Help, and the International Anarchist Organization (O'Neill, 2005, p. 20).

Egalitarians are those that seek to overthrow the current system and impose a system that is “based on the ultimate value of distributional equality and centrally controlled structures” (O'Neill, 2005, p. 20). This insurgency type is best represented by the familiar Marxist groups that proliferated during the larger Cold War era. However, non-Communist egalitarian insurgencies exist, with *Ba'athist* insurgency groups being one such example (O'Neill, 2005, p. 20). Interestingly enough, which will be explained further in a section that follows, such insurgencies are guided by ideologies that are supra-state in nature.

Traditionalists have proliferated in notoriety in the twenty-first century. These insurgencies seek to eradicate existing structures and impose a new system that emphasizes two features: 1) values and norms, generally those that are sacred or religious, and 2) passive, as opposed to active, involvement in politics as it relates to the general population. Many of these insurgencies strive to revive a political system that has

existed in the past, at times an ancient political system (O’Neill, 2005, p. 21). The most notable examples are those that are deemed “militant Islamic organizations,”⁵ which wish to emulate “what they consider the purest form of Islamic rule as practiced by Mohammad and his first three successors (caliphs)” (O’Neill, 2005, p. 22). Arguably the most recognizable organization that represents this typology is Al-Qaeda.

Apocalyptic-utopians are noted as being fringe insurgency movements, and are arguably the smallest insurgency type. These are religious cults that have political aims. As O’Neill (2005) assesses, “[e]ssentially, they envisage establishing a world order – in some cases, involving divine intervention – as the result of an apocalypse precipitated by their acts of terrorism” (p. 23). Theologians have established that *Aum Shinrikyo* of Japan and the *Mahdviyat* of Iran as prime examples of this typology. However, there exist a more nefarious and recognizable organization: the Islamic State.

Pluralists are the final insurgent type that subscribes to revolutionary change. They seek to establish a system “that emphasize the values of individual freedom, liberty, and compromise in which political structures are differentiated and autonomous” (O’Neill, 2005, p. 24).

As previously noted, O’Neill’s (1984, 2005) typing speaks to those insurgencies that seek to change structures as they relate to the state. However, recently there has been a development of transnational insurgencies that transcend state boundaries (O’Neill,

⁵ This work does not attempt to put forth the claim that Islam is inherently revolutionary, or violent in nature nor does it seek to understand “revisionism” as it relates to the understanding or tenets of Islamic practices. For the purposes of this work, this category is merely based on the fact that these organizations subscribe to and promote their pursuits on the basis of their respective understandings and interpretation of Islam.

2005). This work contends that some of these transnational insurgencies have goals to revise regional or global dynamics, altering the status quo. If it is indeed the case that some transnational insurgencies have revisionist aspirations, understanding their goals is of particular importance. Disparities between what may be an immediate goal, say the overthrowing of a political institution in a particular country, and a long-term goal, the establishment of a new world order that better aligns with their conceptualization of a proper order, must be explored.

A brief example is warranted. Consider those insurgencies that were part of the larger Communist movement. Being egalitarian insurgents, they are *revolutionary* in nature when considering their goals to alter state-level dynamics. However, these actors follow a theoretical paradigm which seeks to alter the status-quo at the global level. Therefore, these actors seek systemic change, with probable targets being international norms, institutions, and economic-hierarchical relationships that maintain the international order. As Marx and Engels would establish in *The Communist Manifesto*:

In short, the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

In all these movements they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time.

Finally, they labour everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

WORK MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE! (2008, p. 39).

The proletariat are challenged with overthrowing *all* social and political orders: a change being brought about at the global level. This is one example of an insurgency that is not only *revolutionary* in nature (O’Neill, 2005), but *revisionist* in orientation: they are openly dissatisfied with the status-quo, particularly those dynamics that the bourgeoisies use to maintain power, and seek to replace it with an order that offers greater degrees of equity.

Means to an End: Non-State Warfare

Following the work of Crenshaw (1981, 2007) and Fearon and Laitin (2003), one key premise of this thesis is that insurgents are rational actors. Like states, non-state actors are concerned with their own survival (Langdon, Sarapu, & Wells, 2004), and they must contend with challenging dilemmas of balancing complementary goals. In the case of insurgents, they must balance: 1) action versus secrecy; and 2) success versus longevity (Frisch, 2011, p. 2). The challenge to the insurgents is that action draws attention, while inaction may inadvertently have a weakening effect on the actor’s internal communication, making it more difficult to organize for future operations (Frisch, 2011, p. 3). Closely related to dilemmas regarding action versus secrecy is that of success versus longevity. One point should be made now: insurgent organizations strike this balance of success versus longevity by “setting both easily attainable short-term goals . . . and virtually impossible long-term goals” (Frisch, 2011, p. 6).

Traditionally, there have been two means for insurgents to achieve their desired goals: politically based means and warfare (O’Neill, 2005, p. 32). Taking into consideration Goddard’s (2018) typing of revisionists, the insurgent’s lack of access to

institutional mechanisms suggest that they will rely on more militant means to achieve their goals. Therefore, developing a focus around the violent means that insurgents may use to achieve revisionist goals is of particular importance. Analysts have identified two forms of warfare that insurgents may seek to employ: guerrilla warfare, and terrorism. Purely based on asymmetries that inherently exist when comparing states and their non-state counterparts, it is clear as to why these forms of warfare are effective and attractive. First and foremost, due to the asymmetries that exist, direct military confrontation is often suicidal (Merari, 1993). “Suicidal” consequences should not be assumed to remain limited to military matters. If non-state actors that employ such warfare methodologies and are subjected to a military defeat, political goals may also be jeopardized in the process. Non-state actors must choose an effective warfare strategy to ensure survival. Second, when considering the dilemmas associated with insurgency goals (Frisch, 2011), these two strategies of warfare, if used rationally, are seemingly the most effective at striking a balance.

Terrorism

The same negative connotation that is associated with revisionism (Buzan, 1983) is found in the study of terrorism. This especially true when concerning the political discourse surrounding the phenomenon. Almost a decade prior to the post-9/11 era, when terrorism would become a priority of both Western states and international organizations (Jackson, 2007), Merari (1993) would argue that terrorism was “merely another derogatory word, rather than a descriptor of a specific type of activity” (p. 213). The problem is that just as scholars and analysts may deem states “revisionist” due to its

negative connotation, scholars have done the same with insurgencies: rather than examining militant groups' use of a specific type of insurgent activity, many insurgencies that employ violence are reflexively labeled as "terrorists." This only serves to make the term murkier, rather than leaving its meaning clear. To provide a clear understanding of terrorism, this section seeks to explore the definition(s) of terrorism, and consider why it is employed, and by whom.

Conceptualizing Terrorism

Understanding terrorism from an objective standpoint has faced various challenges. As briefly discussed, there is a negative connotation associated with terrorism. One of the most obvious challenges to the discourse of terrorism is that conceptualizing and defining terrorism carries with it a potential reflection of political or ideological biases (Gibbs, 1989; Jackson, 2007; Rubenstein, 1987). This bias is apparent when considering that there are few non-state actors that are generally accepted by the international community to be "terrorist organizations." States have deployed the term with different intentions. Some states may designate actors as terrorists following what they perceive to be an act of terror, say the indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians. Others may deliberately label an organization "terrorist" for political purposes, either to further secure themselves (whether it be their own person, party, or state), or to further construct the "other." The conceptualization of terrorism is found in a larger body of academic and political discourse that is continuously being developed as society changes (Jackson, 2007). In this sense, terrorism as a concept is fluid.

This fluidity is apparent when one considers how to define terrorism. It is not very surprising that terrorism, much like other international relations phenomena, has multiple, competing definitions, with academics, analysts, governments, and intergovernmental organizations proposing their own conceptual definitions. A discussion on the various competing definitions in the field is warranted. Consider O'Neill (2005) as providing the basis of a concise and simplistic conceptual definition of terrorism: “[t]errorism is herein defined as the threat or use of physical coercion, primarily against noncombatants, especially civilians, to create fear in order to achieve various political objectives” (p. 33). If one finds that O'Neill's (2005) definition is too broad, they may much prefer Gibbs' (1989) conceptualization, provided well before the proliferation of terrorism discourse, in which five distinct criteria must be met in order for an action to be considered an act of terror: 1) the act must seek to alter or maintain at least one punitive norm in at least one particular physical area; 2) it must be secretive or clandestine in nature; 3) it must not sought in the permanent defense of a particular area; 4) it must not be conventional warfare; and 5) its use must be believed to contribute to a normative goal by introducing fear of violence to individuals that are not the actor's immediate target (p. 330).

Despite the various definitions of terrorism, they often share common elements. Research conducted by Schmid and Jongmann (1988) establishes 109 competing academic and official definitions of terrorism and three common elements were found: 1) the element of violence (found within 83.5% of definitions); 2) political objectives (found within 65% of definitions); and 3) infliction of fear and terror (found within 51% of definitions) (as cited in Merari, 1993, p. 214). Two additional elements represent a minority as it relates to commonality: 1) the additional constraints of arbitrariness and

indiscrimination (found in 21% of definitions); and 2) victimization of civilian or innocent populations (found in a mere 17.5% of definitions) (Schmid & Jongmann, 1988 as cited in Merari, 1993, p. 214). While it is clear that there is variation, the common elements that emerge establish an understanding of what constitutes terrorism, according to the conventional wisdom of informed observers – at least prior to the 9/11 attacks.

An additional problem is encountered with labeling an organization as a “terrorist organization.” As Schanzer (2017) argues, there is an inherent problem with this labeling practice as it may “give the inaccurate perception that these groups exist and are motivated primarily by the use of violence” (p. 38). This work tends to view terrorism as a strategic mechanism, or a tactic, to achieve desired goals. As discussed in detail below, these actors do not pursue violence for the sake of violence.

Terrorism and Strategy

Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition of terrorism, studies on the subject are vast and varied, furthering the knowledge on the phenomenon considerably. Terrorism has been argued to be a strategic mechanism employed by actors to achieve a larger goal (Fromkin, 1975; Kydd & Walter, 2006; Merari, 1993; O’Neill, 2005; Pape, 2003; Schanzer, 2017). Just as some actors may choose to use diplomatic means to achieve their goals, more nefarious actors may choose to turn to terrorism in an attempt to achieve similar ends. In this sense, this work considers those terrorist acts that are used to achieve larger, political goals. Terrorism serves as a means to an end. While it is reasonable to assume that there exist actors that employ terrorism as an end itself, those

instances are likely small and not representative of the majority of cases, nor will it be explored in this study.

Terrorism has long been thought to be a “strategy of the weak” (Fromkin, 1975, p. 686), especially when juxtaposed with the methods and mechanisms of traditional warfare. There is merit to this claim. It has been viewed as the easiest form of insurgent activity (Merari, 1993). However, “weak” should not be confused as a passing of judgement on those organizations that utilize terrorism, and should be understood operationally as it relates to relative capacity and capabilities. There are significant asymmetries that exist between the most powerful actors and non-state actors that employ terrorism. At best, such actors enjoy capabilities relative to a weak or failing state.

Every organization, state and non-state alike, has strategic goals. Why is it that non-state actors would employ terrorism as a means to achieve those goals? Once again, one of the most significant factors that should be considered is that there is a lack of diplomatic means at the disposal of non-state actors, especially those that have limited or no access to institutional mechanisms. The proliferation of these institutional mechanisms is one aspect that reduces conflict, according to the Kantian view of international society (Quackenbush, 2014). States have a plethora of diplomatic means to employ to achieve their goals or to express their grievances, hoping to alleviate their discomforts. Therefore, violence does not need to be pursued. One of the most easily recognizable platforms for diplomatic engagement, giving a voice to even the smallest of recognized states, is the United Nations. What such organizations exist for non-state actors, especially if their grievances are with other states, or other aspects, in the international order? Currently,

only two non-state actors are permitted observer status in the UN, including the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

Perhaps it is that the end goal cannot seemingly be achieved through those more formal means, even that of traditional military instruments of power. It may be that terrorism is an attractive alternative that allows actors to work outside of existing norms to achieve their goals. The consequences of the terrorist act may actually benefit the organization that carries out the act. Indeed, there is a logic to this claim. Terrorism has long been deployed to cause levels of damage that psychologically impact and intimidate its targets (Fromkin, 1975; O'Neill, 2005; Merari, 1993; Schanzer, 2017;), and provides the opportunity for the organization to leverage its weak position (Fromkin, 1975; Kydd & Walter, 2006; O'Neill, 2005), in essence increasing its bargaining power in demanding concessions (Pape, 2003). How is this so? Consider the argument put forth by Fromkin (1975):

Clearly [terrorism] can do so in many ways. Fright can paralyze the will, befuddle the mind, and exhaust the strength of an adversary. Moreover, it can persuade an opponent that a particular political point of view is taken with such deadly seriousness by its few adherents that it should be accommodated, rather than suffering casualties year after year in a campaign to suppress it (p. 686).

Is Terrorism Logical?

Utilizing terrorism as a tactical or strategic mechanism demands the attention of its target audience and seeks a desirable outcome in line with the insurgent group's demands. However, is there a logic to the use of terrorism? In short, yes. The fact that it contains strategic elements, detailed below, assists in its claim to be logical. Even suicide

terrorism, understood to be the most extreme form of terrorism, in which both the targeted audience and the insurgency organization itself are damaged, is argued to be logical, and even strategic (Pape, 2003).

Kydd and Walter (2006) outline “five principal strategic logics of costly signaling” as it relates to terrorism (p. 51). These logics not only expose the logics behind terrorism, but some offer explanatory power regarding how terrorism may be an effective means to achieve revisionist goals. First, is that of *attrition*, wherein insurgencies attempt to persuade their enemies that their organization has the capacity to impose “considerable costs” if their enemies do not deviate from their current policies (Kydd & Walter, 2006, p. 51). Abadie and Gardeazabal (2008) find that despite the fact that terrorism only has a small impact on capital stock of a country, the ripple effects as it relates to foreign direct investment (FDI) are devastating. On average, and due to complex interactions caused by globalization, a “one standard deviation increase in the intensity of terrorism produces at 5% fall in the net FDI position of the country” (Abadie & Gardeazabal, 2008, p. 21). In this sense, states can either deviate or suffer considerable economic losses. Therefore, an insurgent group may use terrorism as means of imposing intolerable costs on states, furthering their revisionist goals by intimidating their targets into altering their policies, or harming target states’ capacity indirectly by causing significant damage to their economies.

Second is that of *intimidation*, in which insurgents seek to convince the population that they are both capable and willing to continue utilizing terrorism as a form of punishment, and that governments are not capable of stopping them (Kydd & Walter,

2006, p. 51). In cases where the insurgency group(s) share the same domestic realm as the population, this may serve as a reason as to why there is sometimes a rallying effect around the insurgency themselves. However, this same logic projected transnationally may indicate the insurgents' goals of forcing policy changes via domestic politicking from fearful citizens and elites.

Third is *provocation*, in which insurgents drive a government to respond with indiscriminate violence (Kydd & Walter, 2006, p. 51). This process of "overreacting" on the part of government has been identified to be a process in which the government's use of its own strength becomes self-defeating (Fromkin, 1975). Historical examples of this phenomenon largely revolve around domestic insurgency or in cases where territory was subjected to foreign rule, as is the case with Mandate Palestine under the auspices of Great Britain. The *Irguan Zvai Leumi*, a Jewish insurgency group, would go on to attack property interests of the British, with the desire to drive the British to overact by garrisoning the entire country (Fromkin, 1975, p. 687). However, the British realized that the strategy of garrison would not work as they could not financially afford a prolonged military presence. Contemporary examples exist. The United States' heavy involvement in the "endless wars" of the MENA region and Afghanistan is leading to a similar realization that prolonged military conflict is problematic.

The fourth logic is that of a *spoiling* effect. This is the attempt to spoil a potential peace process by persuading the government forces that attempting to negotiate with moderates within the insurgent organization will not work as they are weak and untrustworthy (Kydd & Walter, 2006, p. 51). This underlines one of the most troubling

aspects with certain insurgencies: decentralization and fragmentation. We can see this particular dynamic in play with the peace process in Afghanistan as the United States sought to reach a peace agreement with the Taliban, with some senior members who refuse to make peace alongside their moderate counterparts creating a “rebel Taliban party” called the “Islamic Governorate Party” (Dozier, 2020). However, in this case, it is apparent that the spoiling effect works both ways, with both the Taliban and United States feeling the direct impacts of spoiling.

The final logic proposed by Kydd and Walter (2006) is *outbidding*. This is similar to the logic of intimidation, in that it strives to convince the population to rally around the insurgents as they have the greatest resolve to fight against the “enemy” (Kydd & Walter, 2006, p. 51). This particular logic would be important for those *traditionalist* insurgency groups, which may try to form the argument that the “enemy” of the population is not limited to the far enemy, but also there also exists a near enemy, those regional states that abide by certain international norms which are not seen as compatible with their traditional form of rule that they are trying to reinstate. For those regional revisionist pursuits, this ability to outbid those state actors in the region is key to achieving their goals.

The insurgents use of terrorism has long been misunderstood, and the insurgents that utilize violence have been reflexively labeled as “terrorists.” However, this is far from the truth, as terrorism refers to a specific type of activity that insurgencies can utilize to achieve their goals. Not only is the insurgents use of terrorism strategic in nature, but it can be logical as well, even in its most extreme forms. However, this is only

of the violent means that insurgents can employ. The other violent mean is that of guerrilla warfare. The next section provides a concise overview of guerrilla warfare, and offers insight as to how insurgents may use it to achieve their revisionist goals.

Guerrilla Warfare

Ibrahim (2004) argues that guerrilla warfare is employed by “small bands of irregulars fighting a superior invading army or to weaken the latter’s hold over conquered territory by a weaker side, or as a supplementary means in a conventional war; and in the preliminary stages of a revolutionary war that aims at overthrowing the existing political authority” (p. 112). The *irregular force* component that Ibrahim speaks of should be understood as militarized forces that are not official state organizations which engage in warfare. However, guerrilla warfare should not be limited to cases involving *revolutionary* conflicts, as Ibrahim’s (2004) conceptualization allows for the possibility of guerrilla warfare that extends beyond the scope of the civil conflicts. For example, the inclusion of the “irregulars fighting a superior invading army” component of the definition is an important development, allowing the inclusion and study of wars such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, or even the more recent wars that have engulfed the United States in the post-9/11 era. Whether the irregular forces in question were the Mujahedeen, the Taliban, or Al-Qaeda, it is clear that some of their activities in Afghanistan were guerrilla tactics seeking to oust the invading force, amongst other objectives.

The tactics employed by the insurgents that utilize guerrilla warfare strategies – known simply as guerrilla tactics – are vast and varied, composing of raids, ambushes, hit

and runs, amongst others (Guevara, 2002; Jalali & Grau, 2010; Merari, 1993; Nagl, 2005; Zedong, 1989). The choice of these tactics makes perfect sense for the asymmetric underdog who must “compensate for their inferiority in manpower, arms and equipment” (Merari, 1993, p. 221). Direct and prolonged military confrontation is suicidal. Being militarily inferior, these actors rely heavily on the use of non-traditional military methods, such as the utilization of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), child soldiers, and civilian attire, which allows them to blend in with the local population (Merari, 1993, p. 221). The use of such tactics complicates the ability for the regular forces to directly engage with combatants (Merari, 1993), which ultimately undermines existing military asymmetries. Further, due to the difficulties of separating the enemy from the local population, it is not uncommon for military forces to inadvertently kill innocent civilians, ultimately complicating their ability to achieve political victories.

The question may be: how is guerrilla activity relevant to revisionist goals aimed at the regional or international levels? Aside from the aforementioned argument that violence is by default pursued due to the lack of available political options the actor’s disposal, guerrilla warfare tactics can be part of a strategy used to further insurgents’ revisionist goals. Insurgents may be capable of disrupting or destroying the status quo by utilizing guerrilla warfare campaigns to target and topple regional regimes, allowing them to impose a regional order of their own liking. Actors such as the Islamic State indicate that this ability to disrupt or destroy the status quo is possible. This is especially true when considering their ability to annex territories in the MENA region. With this pursuit, not only was ISIS seeking to revise territorial integrity norms, but also the foundations of

the Westphalian state system that have emerged in the MENA region, both aspects of the international order that have largely been internalized in the region.

Beyond Revolution and Towards Revisionism

Insurgencies have long been misunderstood. This misunderstanding is not only related to the insurgent's use terrorism and guerrilla warfare to achieve their goals, and the tendency to use those terms interchangeably, but it is also related to the *goals* these insurgents have. The previous chapters have provided the theoretical foundation needed to explain the logic of insurgents taking issue with the international order, or its various components, and utilizing militant means to revise it. The international order guides the behavior between state and non-state actors alike, via its components such as the various international norms and laws, institutions, and hierarchical relationships. However, not all actors are satisfied with the status quo. The revisionist seeks to alter, disrupt, or destroy the international order. The insurgent also has strategic goals that it wishes to achieve. The *revolutionary* insurgent seeks to change political and social structures of the state. The *revisionist* insurgent transcends the state-centric focus, seeking to change aspects of the regional or international order. Chapter IV is dedicated to providing a detailed case analysis of three contemporary insurgency organizations to infer the plausibility of this claim.

CHAPTER IV: CASE STUDIES IN THE MENA REGION AND BEYOND

It is this thesis' purpose to not only to explore the theoretical proposition of revisionist non-state armed groups, but also to conduct a plausibility probe to: 1) identify contemporary cases of *revisionist insurgencies*; and 2) demonstrate how these revisionist actors are distinct from those *revolutionary insurgencies* that seek state-level changes. This chapter proceeds in the following manner. First, this study's methodology is explained, as are case selection and the questions that guide the plausibility probe. Second, the cases that are to be explored will be concisely outlined. Third, a discussion of fundamentalism, a control variable specific to these cases, will be provided. Fourth, a detailed explanation of the development of the Greater Middle East region will be provided to offer insight to those factors that these insurgents may find dissatisfactory. Finally, the comparative case studies will be conducted and detailed findings on Al-Qaeda's and ISIS's *revisionist* orientations, and Boko Haram's *revolutionary* orientation, will be provided.

Methodology

To facilitate this plausibility probe, this study relies on a simple, but academically proven, methodology: structured, focused comparison. Coined by Alexander L. George, the method is *focused* as it deals with "certain aspects of the historical case," and is *structured* as it "employs general questions to guide the data collection and analysis" in those historical cases (George, 1979, pp. 61-62; Mahoney, 2011). With this approach, similar cases in a particular time period may be compared to confirm or falsify this assertion that non-state actors may be understood to be revisionist with respect to the

established international order. This plausibility probe should be viewed as a strong foundation for this study of non-state revisionism, specifically insurgent revisionism, and future studies should incorporate different methodologies and additional cases to further our collective understanding of this phenomenon.

Two questions will guide this plausibility probe, and both relate to *indicators* of revisionism. In isolation, each indicator offers an incomplete diagnosis of the revisionist phenomenon. However, the two-pronged approach taken here works seeks to show that together these indicators are capable of identifying revisionists. First, analyzing the rhetoric of the actors clarifies which aspects of the status quo insurgents are *dissatisfied* with, a passive component related to, but distinct from, revisionism (DiCicco, 2017); analyzing rhetoric helps to reveal preferences and intentions. Second, considering how these actors utilize violent insurgent strategies, one can understand how they *actively* engage in revisionist behavior to forcefully express or alleviate those dissatisfactions expressed in their rhetoric.

The first question concerns itself with the revisionist *rhetoric* that scholars have identified and examined in their studies of revisionist states (Allison, 2017; Goddard, 2018; Piontkovsky, 2015). This particular indicator is useful in these cases as they all utilize rhetorical devices not only to voice their dissatisfaction, but as a means of calling for action to alleviate that dissatisfaction, and to attract and recruit militants willing to fight for the cause. Like the example in Chapter III of the egalitarian insurgents who ascribed to communism, examining the rhetoric of insurgent leaders may indicate what aspects of the status quo the actors are dissatisfied with, and offer insight as to how they

will challenge the status quo. For the specific cases analyzed here, several types of sources are used: sermons, speeches, *fatwas*, and magazines will be considered, as well as their perceived meanings. A subsidiary question is whether *all* of the cases use rhetoric to express dissatisfaction with regional or international orders, or if there are actors whose dissatisfaction is expressed at the state level. Therefore, *Q1: Do the insurgents utilize rhetoric to express their dissatisfaction? And, if so, are insurgents dissatisfied with the international or regional order, or with state-level governments and policies?*

The second question seeks to determine whether insurgent use of terrorism and guerrilla warfare, especially those violent campaigns that are carried out transnationally, are used to alleviate the actor's expressed dissatisfaction and to further their revisionist goals. Recall that indicators of revisionism focused solely on militarization are problematic due to analysts' inability to definitively conclude if military preparations and actions are offensive or defensive. This particular argument seems less salient when considering non-state actors, as they are not afforded the same privileges as the state, which has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Further, recall that violence is one of the principal means that insurgents utilize to achieve their desired goals (O'Neill, 2005), especially as they lack the high institutional access to challenge the international order via political means (Goddard, 2018). However, it remains important to separate violence that may be utilized to further one's *revisionist* goals from the violence used to further one's *revolutionary* goals directed to challenge the state. Therefore, to the extent that the evidence permits inferences linking intentions with purposive action, this thesis seeks to answer a second question: *Q2: Do the actors employ violent insurgent strategies intended to alter, disrupt, or destroy the status quo?* Qualitative evidence as well as

quantitative data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) on violent attacks by the insurgent actors are used for this part of the investigation.

Cases

Three contemporary Islamic extremist organizations that exist in the Greater Middle East region will be considered in this study: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS, IS, Daesh), and Boko Haram. These non-state armed actors have carried out various violent operations across multiple states, and therefore can be identified as transnational insurgencies. Due to their various similarities, their potential dissatisfaction with regional or international orders may stem from similar dynamics. This is due not only to their broadly similar geographical location, but also their adherence to a fundamentalist interpretation, and practice, of Islam which at times appears to conflict with international norms and principles that the international community has come to value. This “Westernization” is incompatible with the values they wish to instill in their domain (Hashmi, 2014; Knapp, 2003).

Al-Qaeda is one of the most recognizable insurgencies in modernity due to both their regional and international campaigns of violence. Al-Qaeda’s initial organization formed during the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, wherein founder Osama Bin Laden and his counterparts debated in what ways their volunteer network could continue to operate in the future (Rollins, 2011). Bin Laden’s initial goal was to utilize Al-Qaeda to topple secular and pro-Western leaders in Arab states (Rollins, 2011). However, it remains clear that the organization has gone well beyond its initial regional goals, with various attacks being carried out in more distant foreign lands. Complicating

the analysis of Al-Qaeda as an organization is the fact that it has various affiliate organizations which are active in their own regions. Some of the groups include Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). These affiliate groups have established formal relationships with Al-Qaeda core and, in varying degrees of capacity, accept the authority of Ayman Al-Zawahiri (Byman, 2015; Rollins, 2011). This dynamic allows Al-Qaeda to truly have significant international reach, despite the realities of having low levels of capacity when compared to states and having individuals and cells pursuing their own goals in tandem with the overarching goals established by Al-Qaeda core.

The *Islamic State* (IS; Daesh; herein identified as ISIS) has befuddled many due to their surprisingly successful military campaign, which sought to establish a de-facto Islamic State and Caliphate in the Middle East (Byman, 2015; Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016). A conglomerate of former Iraqi military officers and members of the Al-Qaeda in Iraq, ISIS became a formidable foe in the wake of internal strife in the Middle East Region brought upon by the United States' War on Terror (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016; Solomon, 2016). Formed under the auspices of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, once the self-proclaimed Caliph of the Islamic state (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016), the insurgency took advantage of the political vacuum caused in the wake of the war in Iraq and the larger Arab Spring uprisings, allowing them to control large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria from 2014 through 2017 (Blanchard & Humud, 2018; Byman, 2015). Ascribing to apocalyptic-religious narratives, it ultimately sought to reestablish the Islamic Caliphate. It relied on a network of foreign fighters, estimated at its peak to be over 40,000 fighters from over 110 countries (Blanchard & Humud, 2018). Due to this emphasis on

reestablishing the Caliphate, ISIS has not developed a focus on carrying out transnational attacks on the West, with most attacks on Westerners being those that happen to cross their path (Byman, 2015).

The final case explored here is *Boko Haram*, which translates as Western education is sinful, also known as the *Sunni Community for the Propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad* (Taylor, 2019). Formed by Muhammad Yusuf in 2002, the organization desires to establish a “local caliphate” in Nigeria (Cook, 2020, p. 190; Pieri & Zenn, 2016; Windrem 2014), though a caliphate has long been established in northwestern Nigeria since the early 1800s (Cook, 2020), and began by declaring and enforcing sharia law in various states of northern Nigeria (Taylor, 2019). However, Boko Haram also has been active in multiple states in Western Africa, including Chad, Cameroon, and Niger (Pieri & Zenn, 2016; Taylor, 2019; United States Department of State, 2013), engaging them through Nigeria's porous borders. Assisting them with their campaign is the rampant corruption that persists in Nigeria, and the fact that the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has often performed extrajudicial killings of Boko Haram's forces, leading to decreasing public trust in government forces (Taylor, 2019). Further, a Joint Task Force of various Nigerian police, military, and security forces have engaged both Boko Haram and civilians alike, strengthening Boko Haram's narratives that they are countering an oppressive government (Taylor, 2019).

Important to note, and discussed in greater detail in the case analysis sections, is the often-misunderstood connection between Boko Haram and ISIS. In 2015, Boko Haram pledged its allegiance to ISIS and merged with the organization to form the

Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Cook, 2020; Kassim, 2018). This merger lasted approximately one year, after which ISWAP fragmented and Boko Haram reemerged as a distinct movement (Cook, 2020; Kassim, 2018; Onuoha, 2016). This thesis explores Boko Haram as distinct from ISWAP, as there are clear differences between the goals of these nonstate actors (see Cook, 2020).⁶

The Essentials: Fundamentalism, Fatwas, and *Lesser Jihad*

Though it is not this work's goal to argue that Islam itself (or even Islamic extremism) is inherently revisionist or status-quo, it is clear that all three of these actors are Islamic insurgencies. This shared trait does not mean that these non-state armed groups necessarily share the same goals. To add nuance, a discussion of three important dynamics -- Islamic fundamentalism, fatwas, and *lesser jihad* -- is in order.

Islamic Fundamentalism

It would be incorrect to consider that Islam is homogenous. The most simplistic division is sectarian, between the adherents of Sunni and Shi'a schools of thought (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016; Hashmi, 2014). However, the heterogeneity of Islam extends well beyond this simplistic binary, with divisions being drawn between ethno-national lines, class, and various ideological schools of thought (Hashmi, 2014).

Certain Islamic schools of thought stress a rejection of modernization and desire puritanical interpretations of Islam (Byman, 2015). This rejection of modernization

⁶ The analysis of Boko Haram's rhetorical discourse as distinct from ISWAP will be discussed in detail in the *Findings and Discussions: Rhetorical Discourse* section. Further, the complexities of distinguishing the attacks of Boko Haram as distinct from ISWAP will be discussed in the *Findings and Discussions: Nonstate Warfare* section.

should not be glossed over. The Arab world was once the dominant global force in not only in military and economic terms, but of all aspects of academia. However, with the collapse of Muslim empires, some ultra-orthodox scholars looked inwards, believing that their failures were brought about by desires for modernization (Hashmi, 2014). The result of these various failures would be the formation of *ideological* schools of thought that desire to return to a more literal interpretation, and practice, of Islam. These schools of thought are those that find Islam and certain practices incompatible, and thus are not capable of dismissing their “longstanding national understandings of appropriate behavior” (Cortell & Davis, 2005, p. 4), which stands to complicate acceptance of certain international norms, such as those regarding state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and even diplomatic norms with the West. All three of the aforementioned cases adhere to principles of *Salafism* or *Wahhabism*, if not both. While both Salafism and Wahhabism are related, some would stress that they are distinct movements (Stanley, 2005), as Salafism rejects not only modernization, but Westernization and modern Islamic practices that are seen as digressions from true faith (Olidort, 2015). Nevertheless, both stress a puritanical interpretation and adherence of Islam and a rejection of modernism (Byman, 2015; Olidort, 2015).

Fatwas

This study will explore both primary and second resources as it relates to the rhetorical discourse of each insurgent group. Not only do words matter as it relates to the intended meanings behind their actions, but in these particular cases it can be argued that rhetoric, especially from a figure of authority, is *performative*: “it announces and makes

happen” (Austin, 1962, as cited in Toguslu, 2019, p. 96). Non-state actors have their own modes of employing performative language, and this study will engage with multiple forms of rhetoric that are capable of being performative in nature. However, *fatwas*, which are legal pronouncements by Islamic religious scholars (muftis), are of great importance and warrant a detailed explanation. Depending on the particular sect of Islam, a *fatwa* may follow a strict set of rules, or it may be fluid (Siegel, 2005). In most cases, one must have a significant amount of education, and religious and clerical training to issue a legal judgement or opinion. Further, a Mufti relies on having enough followers to allow their *fatwa* to carry merit, often making it that those with more followers are considered more influential (Siegel, 2005). This fluidity and lack of hierarchy often leads to *fatwas* contradicting each other. Therefore, Muslims may follow a *fatwa* issued by their Mufti or clerical leaders and ignore others. This dynamic makes it important for the *fatwa* to be tailored for specific audiences. Actors such as Osama Bin Laden knew that this was important, and he knew “how to speak to the wealthy, but he also knew how to address volunteers whose religious education was more primitive, if indeed they had received any: men who were disinclined to follow Azzam’s demonstrations, but were dazzled by the luminous pedantries put forth by this autodidact” (Saghi, 2005, p. 20). As it is tied to the faith of Muslim audiences, it is easy to see how a *fatwa* is viewed as more than mere rhetoric.

Lesser Jihad

Various leaders have issued *fatwas* that justify extreme actions and extraordinary privileges (Hashmi, 2014), but fewer actions are more extreme than the justification of

lesser jihad. Specifically, *jihad* is to “struggle in the way of God” (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, p. 41). However, *jihad* is a concept that is believed to be “far removed from violence” (Post, 2009, p. 382), that was transformed by Muslim theoreticians so that it may be seen as an obligation to defend Islam (Post, 2009). *Jihad* is conceptualized in two distinct ways. *Greater jihad* refers to the internal struggle of the individual and the *umma* to live a life free of evil (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, p. 486; Post, 2009), while *lesser jihad* refers to the external struggle in defense of Islam (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, p. 486; Post, 2009). Globalization dynamics have complicated the assertion as to what an “attack” on Islam is. To the fundamentalist, aspects of globalization, such as the rapid spread of postmodern ideas and economic integration (Hashmi, 2014), are potentially perceived as attacks on Islam itself. As Hashmi (2014) explains: “[g]lobalization is a process as well as a revolution, and revolutions affect religions” (p. 99). Fundamentalists have been effective in their reframing of *lesser jihad* and martyrdom, influencing their followers to utilize militant means such as guerrilla warfare and terrorism. However, the most troubling aspect is their successful reframing of *lesser jihad* to incorporate suicidal terrorism (Post, 2009). *Lesser jihad* is one specific instance where performative language is at work. As will be discussed, individuals in these insurgencies that are seen as religious authorities call for the use of *jihad*. This call for violence stretches beyond simple rhetoric, is viewed as a religious legal pronouncement, one that must be followed.

Considering these particular dynamics, and even the cases themselves, in isolation would be a great disservice. Understanding particular historical developments of the Greater Middle East is warranted. This brief historical survey will not only provide insight to the impact that the international order has had in the Greater Middle East, but

will also provide context regarding what these insurgents are dissatisfied with and why some may seek to revise the regional or international order to alleviate that dissatisfaction.

The Greater Middle East Regional *Dis*-order

When examining non-state actors in the Greater Middle East, it is important to consider that the region has been subjected to, and developed alongside, the larger international order that has emerged since the 16th century and that has taken on liberal characteristics in the 20th and 21st centuries. To clarify, the Greater Middle East encompasses the Middle East and Northern Africa, regions of Asia, and other countries with predominantly Islamic populations (Kissinger, 2018, p. 4).

One of the most durable dynamics that was imported from the West was that of national identity, especially as it relates to the state. The origins of the state model, and various dominant components of the international order, stem from the Peace of Westphalia (Kissinger, 2014; Nathan, 2002; Otte, 2018). Bringing about an end to the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), the Peace of Westphalia was carried out in such a fashion that would bring forth the conditions of the modern international community: "a multiplicity of political units, none powerful enough to defeat all others, many adhering to contradictory philosophies and internal practices, in search of neutral rules to regulate their conduct and mitigate conflict" (Kissinger, 2014, p. 3). The era of the feudal system, in which personal authority was emphasized, would soon be replaced by a new era of where war is fought between sovereign states (Huntington, 1993; Kissinger, 2014; Nathan, 2002). Hill's (2010) understanding of the Westphalian system is key to

understanding its relationship with the international order: “a new state comes into being, enters the international system as a member state of the United Nations, and is given diplomatic recognition as legitimate, even permanent, and sovereign, with commitments by all to adhere to the norms of the established world order” (p. 247). In this sense, not only is the Westphalian system one important piece in the *architecture* of the international order, but its existence serves to adhere to current, and proliferate future, international norms.

However, the Westphalian state model would not remain limited to Europe or the West. Focusing on the development of the Middle East region, Goldschmidt and Boum (2016) define nationalism as “the desire of a large group of people to create or maintain a common statehood, to have their own rulers, laws, and other governmental institutions” (p. 164). It becomes clear from their definition that not only is the conceptualization of *nationalism* limited to those ideological constructs that a group of people share, but includes key aspects of sovereignty and statehood that had become a guiding principle in the West. The actors in the Middle East desired nation-states. These principles, especially that of the state and the subsequent adherence of norms established by the world order, are foreign to Islamic practices. In Islam, the *umma*, the community of believers of the Islamic faith, was deemed to be the focal point and “sole object of political loyalty” (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, p. 164). However, national sentiments worked their way into the ranks of the Muslims. An early indicator of this is the Arab discontent under the Ottoman Empire, whose rulers were Turks, and other non-Arabs (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, p. 183). Arabs would soon blame their “backwardness” on their non-Arab rulers (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, p. 183), aiding in the development of Arab identity.

However, the Ottomans were not the only empire in the region causing the swell of national sentiment. None need look farther than the Egyptians under British rule. Under charismatic leaders such as Khedive Isma'il, Ahmad 'Urabi, and 'Abbas II Helmy Bey a strong sense of Egyptian national identity would be internalized (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, pp. 166-174). The roots of Arab nationalism, among others, began to spread.

While there was a call from stakeholders in the Greater Middle East to form their own nation-states, it would unfortunately take a response from the external actors to see this vision realized. The First World War is where the global powers would take advantage of the growing desire for statehood and *force* this specific aspect of the international order upon them. Seeking to counter the Ottoman Empire's alliance with Germany, the British turned to the Arabs to support their cause. While they simply declared Egypt a protectorate state, they would seek out the help of Sharif Husayn, a descendant of Muhammad and protector of Mecca and Medina, whose history with the Ottomans was tumultuous (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016; Rogan, 2013). This resulted in the *Husayn-McMahon correspondence*, a series of letters between Husayn and Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner who sat over Egypt, to encourage Husayn's revolt against the Ottomans, promising support for Arab independence in exchange (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016; Hollis, 2009; Rogan, 2013, p. 42). However, unbeknownst to the Arabs, the British sought out two additional post-war partition plans: the *Sykes-Picot Agreement*, which outlined the division of the Middle East between British and French spheres of influence, and the *Balfour Declaration*, a document that expressed and realized British support for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016; Hollis, 2013, p. 348; Keylor, 2003; Rogan, 2013, p. 42).

Despite all they had done in the First World War, the Arab delegations that fought for their independence would struggle with a conditional aspect of the international order: “admission to international society was conditional on recognition of sovereignty,” which was only granted by other states in the international system (Bull, 1984, p.122 as cited in Rogan, 2013, p. 38). These actors would not be granted recognition. The new states that were formed in the Greater Middle East region suffered from a weak bargaining position and had little choice but to surrender their sovereignty to their colonial rulers (Rogan, 2009, p. 38). A distaste for the Western security and economic hierarchies would be instilled across the region.

The Cold War era would be equally as tumultuous for the Greater Middle East. The French and British undertook a state-building challenge as a response their desire to end their formal colonial rule in the Greater Middle East. The French granted independence to Lebanon and Syria, and eventually would do the same for Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia (Halliday, 2010, p. 110). Yet, the most troubling aspect of transferring independence in the Cold War system was not the formation of a specific Arab state, rather a Jewish one. British withdrawal from Mandate Palestine spelled disaster. In 1947 the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, developed a partition plan which drew out a binational Palestine with an independent Jerusalem (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, p. 265). The Zionists would accept the partition plan, while the Palestinians rejected it. Nevertheless, on 14 May 1948, the Jewish Agency leaders would declare Israel as an independent state. The United States, with Truman’s previous decision to support the establishment of a Jewish state, would offer *de facto* recognition, followed by the Soviet Union who offered *de jure* recognition (Goldschmidt & Boum,

2016; Hudson, 2013; Keylor, 2003). With the formal recognition from other sovereign states, Israel now had all of the components necessary to establish statehood.

The Greater Middle East region suffered immensely in its attempts to adapt to the aspects of the international order that was forced upon it. While many of the states in the region have accepted key aspects of the international order, even whilst attempting to keep alive Islamic ideals, it is clear that a vast list of grievances has been drawn up by various nefarious insurgencies in the region: the poorly constructed state borders that ultimately defy Islamic tenets of the *umma*; being subject to, and suffering under, security and economic hierarchies; the establishment, and continued support, of Israel; the push for democratization in the region stemming from the Liberal International Order; and the diminishing roles of religion and tradition in the region in the pursuit of modernity. These grievances are also representative of the various *sources* of revisionism discussed in Chapter II: issues of identity related to deep historical roots; state-to-nation imbalances caused by fundamentalist national identities' clash with both imperialism and the larger state system that has emerged in the region (Hinnebusch, 2019, p. 158); and, as we will soon discuss in great detail, elites which desire to challenge these social and political structures.

Through their respective fundamentalist ideologies, actors such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram would conclude that there are inherent incompatibilities between Islam and these developments. These developments are a source of dissatisfaction, and these insurgents act to alleviate this dissatisfaction and “backwardness,” which has been forced upon them not only by foreign actors, but their own leaders. The *revolutionary*

insurgent seeks to challenge the social and political structures at the state level, while the *revisionist* insurgent aims bring about a more significant, overarching change, seeking to alter, disrupt, or destroy aspects of the international or regional status quo.

The relevant historical context briefly discussed above helps to provide a broad appreciation of incompatibilities between key features of the regional or international status quo, on the one hand, and the preferences of non-state actors motivated by adherence to fundamentalist Islamic beliefs and practices, on the other. This information sets the stage for the case studies, which appear below.

Findings and Discussion: Rhetorical Discourse

Again, the case studies begin with a central question: *Q1. Do the insurgents utilize rhetoric to express their dissatisfaction? And, if so, are insurgents dissatisfied with the international or regional order, or with state-level governments and policies? One specific dynamic that has the potential to exposes an actor's revisionist orientation is that they openly express their dissatisfaction and, at times, their revisionist agenda (Aziz, 2016; Chan, Hue, & He, 2019; Piontkovsky, 2015; Ward, 2013). These are generally expressed by elites, especially those who are in positions of power, whether they be political, business amongst others (DiCicco & Sanchez, 2021). However, unlike most state leaders, insurgents do not cloak their dissatisfactions or revisionist desires. They are open and definitive in their declarations. This difference may be due to the fact that states cannot simply express their true intentions without fear of punishment. Due to this openness, insurgencies have provided a wide array of documentation that express their revolutionary and revisionist aims.*

All three of these cases employ powerful rhetoric that can be found in *fatwas*, videos, speeches, and even extremist magazines tailored for Western audiences. Further, each of these organizations' leaders has developed, and capitalized on, aspects of religious authority, providing them the ability to generate language that is performative in nature. Dependent on the case, they implore their followers to carry out actions in pursuit of *revolutionary* goals (to upset and replace the state's political or social structures), or to carry out actions directed at dissatisfactory aspects of the regional or international status quo, exposing their *revisionist* aims.

While a detailed examination of each particular case will be discussed below, *Table 1* provides a brief overview of each case's rhetorical discourse. Summarized are the particular features that each actor expresses dissatisfaction with (the passive component), and how each actor plans to alleviate this dissatisfaction.

Table 1. *Summary of Rhetorical Discourse across Cases*

Actor	Dissatisfied With (Passive Component)	How They Discuss Alleviating Their Dissatisfaction
Al-Qaeda	International Order Security and Economic Hierarchies; International Institutions; International Norms	<i>Lesser Jihad</i> directed at the West and the various states in the Greater Middle East.
ISIS	International Order The Westphalian state system; International Norms; <i>Infrastructure</i> of the International Order	<i>Lesser Jihad</i> directed at the various states in the Greater Middle East; Territorial annexation and state formation
Boko Haram	State-Level Dynamics Socio-Economic Variables; Social and Political Structures	<i>Lesser Jihad</i> directed at the Nigerian government and ethnic minorities

Al-Qaeda: Dissatisfaction with the International Order

Al-Qaeda has a rich tradition of employing powerful rhetoric that not only indicates its dissatisfaction with the status quo, but further lays out a course of action to address those grievances. Al-Qaeda's dissatisfaction is two-fold. First, it is dissatisfied with Western powers and their continued policies in the greater Middle East, likely perceived by Al-Qaeda as a mixture of security and economic hierarchies -- dynamics that, from their perspective, mirror the imperialistic pursuits of the past. Second, it expresses dissatisfaction with the various states in the Greater Middle East, which are seemingly servants to those Western powers.

Al-Qaeda's revisionist rhetoric is best exemplified in its leadership's speeches and fatwas, which were distributed via the media, which was no longer controlled by state actors in the Great Middle East, with the television network space being particularly important (Saghi, 2005). In order to better understand Al-Qaeda's revisionist orientation, it is key to examine two of its founders, which have not only been instrumental in its formation, but have labored in laying the foundations of Al-Qaeda's purpose and mission: Osama Bin Laden, and Ayman Al-Zawahiri.

Osama Bin Laden – Bin Laden is easily the most prominent leader in Al-Qaeda's history, having been the mastermind behind various attacks on the United States and the West, most notably being the September 11th attacks. However, Bin Laden also was a powerful orator who knew how to use his poetic poise to not only express his group's various dissatisfactions, but as a means to motivate his followers to act on his behalf.

His disdain for Western influences were established early in his life, during his years of strict education, where his wealthy schoolmates who had easy access to the world outside of Saudi Arabia, began to flirt with Western lifestyles (Saghi, 2005). Bin Laden “expressed his concern about the deleterious effects this could have on the faith and religious practices of his schoolmates; then he extended his analysis (and his fears) to encompass all society” (Saghi, 2005, p. 14). However, Bin Laden’s engagement with the outside world is not limited to the “West” as he has supported the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in their coup attempt in Syria as to assist “Islamist movements against a secular regime” (Saghi, 2005, p. 16).

Bin Laden’s various statements have shown that future action was to be taken against the United States and the West at large. In 1998 Bin Laden issued a fatwa titled *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders*, which was the first official order of the World Islamic Front (Al-Qaeda) (Federation of American Scientists, 1998). In his statement Bin Laden orders his followers to use *jihad* against the United States in order to alter their current policies in the Greater Middle East Region. He and his administration assert that:

Killing the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can carry it out in any country where it proves possible, or order to liberate Al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy sanctuary [Mecca] from their grip, and to the point that their armies leave all Muslim territory, defeated an unable to threaten any Muslim (as cited in Kepel & Milelli, 2008, p. 55).

At first glance, one may question how this statement indicates Al-Qaeda’s dissatisfaction with the status quo, and with which particular features he is dissatisfied. Bin Laden’s dissatisfaction likely stems from the security relationship established between the United States and Saudi Arabia during the Persian Gulf War of 1991, in

which the United States established a significant military presence in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Recall that Lake (2007) argues that in a hierarchical relationship, “[a]ctors with political authority are empowered to use coercion legitimately, but the adjective makes all the difference in separating rulers from bullies and subjects from victims” (p. 177). The challenge in Lake’s assessment is that one must consider how this hierarchical relationship is perceived by all parties. The security relationship may have been formed between the United States and Saudi Arabia, but clearly there were various actors that fall outside of that immediate relationship that had strong opinions, Bin Laden included. While it is certainly possible that Saudi Arabia was satisfied with their relationship with the United States, it is clear that actors such as Bin Laden considered themselves victims to the West under the status-quo.

Further, in his *Tactical Recommendations*, with poetic poise Bin Laden argues to his followers:

“The myth of America the great crumbled!
 The myth of democracy crumbled!
 People realized that American values are misguided.
 The myth of the land of the free collapsed.
 The myth of American national security collapsed.
 The myth of the CIA crumbled, thanks be to God”
 (as cited in Kepel & Milelli, 2008, p. 63).

This statement may seem to be targeting the United States directly. However, it extends beyond the United States and speaks to the push of ostensibly universal norms associated with the Liberal International Order. In that statement, the first three lines are dedicated

to the dynamics related to democratic institutions, and similar values, promoted by the United States following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The pursuit of these norms may have been viewed by the West as noble due to the perceived moral value of self-determination, not to mention the potential of reduced conflict between democratic states (Quackenbush, 2014). However, universal acceptance of norms such as democratization may be difficult to achieve, especially if they are in conflict with one's social belief or value system (Cortell & Davis, 2005). Members of Al-Qaeda would argue that “[d]emocracy is a new religion. In Islam, legislation comes from God; in a democracy, this capacity is given to the people” (Al-Zawahiri as cited in Kepel & Milelli, 2008, p. 184). States in the Greater Middle East may have initially resisted and dismissed these norms, but they would eventually be adopted, at least temporarily or in part, by the governments of many such states. However, these norms, and those that promoted them, have long been rejected by fundamentalists such as Bin Laden and his followers, who see these ideals as incompatible with their strict interpretation of Islam.

Ayman Al-Zawahiri – While Bin Laden is likely the most recognizable figure of Al-Qaeda, it is Ayman Al-Zawahiri “who best illustrates the story of contemporary radical Sunni Islamism” (Lacroix, 2008, p. 147). At the age of 15, he joined the Egyptian jihadist movement and sought to establish an Islamic State for decades to come (Lacroix, 2008, p. 148). Zawahiri would soon befriend Bin Laden, though he would disagree with other prominent members of Al-Qaeda regarding their lack of interest in engaging regional states, as he believed “that the struggle against the Muslim world’s ‘apostate’ regimes – especially the Egyptian and Saudi governments – was one of the movement’s priorities” (Lacroix, 2008, p. 155). This internal debate shows the challenges

of multi-stakeholder input, a complexity that has challenged the formation of a coherent grand strategies of great powers, such as China (Aziz, 2016). Zawahiri would sign the joint declaration, alongside Bin Laden, that created the “World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders” (Lacroix, 2008, p. 158). In his work *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*, Zawahiri argues that their battle is universal:

[Western forces] have adopted a number of tools to fight Islam, including the United Nations; the servile rulers of the Muslim peoples; multinational corporations; international communications and data exchange systems; international news agencies and satellite media channels; international relief agencies and intergovernmental organizations . . . It is a growing force that is rallying under the banner of jihad, against the scope of the new world order. This force is free of servitude to the dominant Western imperialism and promises destruction and ruin to the new crusades against the lands of Islam. This force thirsts for revenge against the heads of the global gang of infidels, the United States, Russia, and Israel. This force is anxious to seek retribution for the blood of martyrs, the grief of mothers, and the wounds of tortured people throughout the lands of Islam, from Eastern Turkistan to Andalusia (as cited in Kepel & Milelli, 2008, pp. 193-194).

It is clear that Zawahiri seeks to revise and counter what he deems “the new world order,” and he is very specific when calling out the particular aspects of the international order he is dissatisfied with. He calls into question various components of the international order, discussing both institutions and hierarchies. Like Bin Laden, Zawahiri views the security and economic relationships between the West and the various states in the Greater Middle East as problematic. However, Zawahiri’s use of the word “imperialism” strikes an important chord, indicating how he views the various hierarchical relationships that have developed in the region: he believes that they are being subjected to imperialistic pursuits much like that of the past. However, his concerns extend beyond hierarchical aspects of the international order, as he directly engages with various international institutions, and the organizations those institutions are incorporated into.

Zawahiri also formulates an argument that those “servile rulers of the Muslim peoples” were part of the fight against Islam, calling into question the regional status quo. He posits that their movement “would not triumph against the world coalition unless it possesses an Islamic base in the heart of the Muslim world,” specially speaking to the reestablishment of the Caliphate (as cited in Kepel & Milelli, 2008, p. 199). Zawahiri makes it clear that while some of the leaders of Al-Qaeda turned their attention towards the West, part of alleviating the dissatisfaction stemming from the status quo involves overturning regimes in the Middle East. The question will be if Al-Qaeda acts on Zawahiri’s rhetoric.

Bin Laden and Zawahiri’s rhetoric indicates that Al-Qaeda’s dissatisfaction stems from the international status quo, particularly related to all of the aforementioned components of the international order: institutions, international norms, and hierarchies. However, Zawahiri directly engages with the regional status quo as well, discussing those international norms that have been internalized at the regional level. Further, both actors call on members of Al-Qaeda to act on this dissatisfaction, seeking to employ *lesser jihad* as a means to alter, disrupt, or destroy the international and regional orders that have developed and fostered a sense of “backwardness” that had led Islamic society astray in the past. The question is whether Al-Qaeda and its affiliates intentionally utilize violent means permissible under *lesser jihad* to see these revisionist goals through.

ISIS: Dissatisfaction with the International Order

ISIS has also found itself utilizing rhetoric which exposes their opposition to various international norms that have been internalized in the Greater Middle East region,

specifically related to the Westphalian state system and territorial integrity norms. As Al-Qaeda sought to take advantage of the media, specifically that of the television, ISIS would aspire to make themselves present in media's digital age, establishing a heavy online presence by taking advantage of social media platforms. Though it is hard to stomach, scholars and analysts alike admit that ISIS's social media campaigns are impressive and effective (Gambhir, 2016; Ward, 2018). ISIS took advantage of the various social media platforms, allowing them to communicate in near real-time with their constituency, and more importantly, their target audiences (Solomon, 2016). Further, ISIS established dedicated magazines to reach their international audiences: *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*. Released in upwards of eight languages (Gambhir, 2016), it becomes clear that their magazines were not limited to targeting sympathizers within the Greater Middle East. As will be discussed further, ISIS would use its rhetoric to convince foreigners to emigrate from their own states and settle in the "Islamic State" to fight on behalf of the Caliphate. There are various themes found in their magazines, including that of crusade, *Caliphate*, *State*, *hijrah*, and *jihad* (Toguslu, 2019; Welch, 2018), which are argued to be performative in nature (Toguslu, 2019). One of the most prolific is that of labeling common enemies in order to create "unity with the reader" (Welch, 2018). The content found *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* expose ISIS's dissatisfaction and revisionist orientation, and it acts as a medium of communicating how they are to address these grievances.

O'Neill (2005) calls ISIS an *apocalyptic-utopian* insurgency, in which they "envisage establishing a world order. . . as the result of an apocalypse precipitated by their acts of terrorism" (p. 23). This apocalyptic vision, and narrative, is important. In

Dabiq ISIS quotes a hadith referring to Armageddon in which the Muslims and “Rome” will clash. This clash indicates that there will be an eventual conflict with the West, though ISIS believes that they must first reestablish the Caliphate to see this apocalyptic narrative through (Gambhir, 2014; Toguslu, 2019). It is here in which ISIS breaks from Al-Qaeda on the basis of its strategic sequencing (Gambhir, 2014). While both desire the return of the Caliphate, ISIS believes this should be prioritized before engaging with the West, while Al-Qaeda believes the return of the Caliphate should follow the ousting of Western influence. Nevertheless, reestablishing the Caliphate requires not only the rejection of territorial integrity norms and the Westphalian state system, but also requires the domination and annexation of significant territories in the region.

The ISIS narrative is that they must reestablish those Islamic beliefs that are correct, and must reject pursuing the “far enemy” that Al-Qaeda targets and instead focus on eliminating the “near enemy”: the apostate regimes Middle Eastern regimes that conspire with the West (Byman, 2015; Toguslu, 2019; Welch, 2018). This focus on the “near enemy” is found ISIS’s rhetoric. While Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made limited physical appearances during his tenure as “Caliph Ibrahim”, his rhetoric explicitly calls for action against the “apostate tyrannical rulers” in the Middle East:

O Muslims, the apostate tyrannical rulers who rule your lands in the lands of the Two Holy Sanctuaries (Mecca and Medina), Yemen, Shām (the Levant), Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, Khorasan, the Caucasus, the Indian Subcontinent, Africa, and elsewhere, are the allies of the Jews and Crusaders. Rather, they are their slaves, servants, and guard dogs, and nothing else. The armies that they prepare and arm and which the Jews and Crusaders train are only to crush you, weaken you, enslave you to the Jews and Crusaders, turn you away from your religion and the path of Allah, plunder the goods of your lands, and rob you of your wealth. This reality has become as obvious as the sun in the middle of the day (as cited in Smith, 2015).

Baghdadi initially speaks of the Islamic state and its enemies in abstract terms. However, over his tenure as Caliph, he shows a transition in his clarification of the enemy in more definitive terms, identifying key opposition, including that of Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Israel, and Sudan, all countries located in the Greater Middle East, going as far as stating that they “showed the true colors of the ‘enemies of Islam’” (Ingram, Whiteside, & Winter, 2019). Al Baghdadi’s labeling those states that actively engaged with the West as apostate and tyrannical is arguing that the international order’s *infrastructure*, the day-to-day interactions and practices between and amongst states, is incompatible with ISIS’s interpretation of Islam, and that it must be revised.

Not only was Baghdadi clear when devising rhetoric about who the enemy was, he was clear on how he would address those issues: he would reestablish the Caliphate. In doing so, he would explicitly call for the formation of an Islamic State, a clear rejection of both the Westphalian state system and territorial integrity norms, and the return to a religious understanding of the “nation-state.” He would seek to utilize territorial control and annexation to see this objective through. Baghdadi constantly refers to the pursuit of state formation, asking his followers:

O Muslims everywhere, has the time not come for you to realize the truth of the conflict and that it is between disbelief and faith? See on which front the rulers of your lands stand and to which camp they belong. Has the time not come O Ahlus-Sunnah for you to know that you alone are the targets? This war is only against you and against your religion. Has the time not come for you to return to your religion and your jihad and thereby bring back your glory, honor, rights, and leadership? Has the time not come for you to know that there is no might nor honor nor safety nor rights for you except in the shade of the Caliphate? (as cited in Smith, 2015).

Baghdadi not only offers his followers a return to normalcy under the Caliphate, but in doing so he questions various dynamics as they exist *outside* of the Caliphate. He calls for them to “bring back [their] glory, honor, rights and leadership”, dynamics which he argues can only be afforded to them under the auspices of the Caliphate. While it may well never be fully understood what exactly Al Baghdadi was referring to, it is certainly possible that he is speaking of the Islamic communities’ failures as they have found themselves adhering to principles that run counter to strict interpretations of Islam (Welch, 2018). Given Al Baghdadi’s propensity to push back on notions such as democracy and nationalism, which he argues are un-Islamic (Almohammad & Ingram, 2019), it is probable that he would take issue with the region’s adoption of aspects of the Liberal International Order. His solution to this the formation of the Caliphate, and the rejection of norms that adhere to non-Islamic principles.

While not explicitly revisionist in nature, one of the most important requests that Baghdadi makes of his followers is that they emigrate, or perform *hijrah*, to the Islamic State (Colas, 2017): “[a]nd we call upon every Muslim in every place to perform hijrah to the Islamic State or fight in his land wherever that may be” (Smith, 2015). This particular dynamic will be of utmost importance when understanding the violent strategy that ISIS utilizes to accomplish its revisionist goals.

ISIS’s dissatisfaction with the status quo stems from various components of the international order, namely the international order’s infrastructure and the various international norms that have been internalized in the Greater Middle East region. ISIS’s rhetoric also calls for various actions to alleviate these dissatisfactions. The most

apparent is the call for the reestablishment of the Caliphate and the formation of a single Islamic State. However, ISIS also calls for their followers to perform *hijrah* to the Islamic State, and request that they perform *jihad* to see these goals through. However, it must be determined whether ISIS as a non-state armed group deliberately acts on this revisionist rhetoric.

Boko Haram: Dissatisfaction with State-Level Governance

Boko Haram's leaders, like the leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIS, were powerful orators and delivered various sermons that indicated both Boko Haram's dissatisfactions and ideological direction. Boko Haram's dissatisfactions are with socio-economic variables (Solomon, 2014; Thurston, 2016), issues of ethnic identity (Cook, 2020; Solomon, 2014), and the Nigerian government itself, which is seen as oppressive and secular (Adesoji, 2010; Apar, 2015; Thurston, 2016). However, unlike the cases of Al-Qaeda and ISIS, Boko Haram does *not* seek to revise the international or regional orders to alleviate its dissatisfactions; rather, Boko Haram aims to consolidate governance by Sharia law in Nigeria in the form of a local caliphate (Cook, 2020; Taylor, 2019). Boko Haram's rhetoric engages with the social and political structures of Nigeria, better reflecting O'Neill's (2005) conceptualization of a *revolutionary* insurgency, rather than a revisionist one. To adequately discuss Boko Haram's rhetorical discourse, two of its leaders will be examined: Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau. However, as will be detailed in Shekau's portion, this study takes care to examine the discourse of Boko Haram as distinct from its brief merger with ISIS to form ISWAP.

Mohammed Yusuf – Two dissatisfactions underpin Yusuf’s rhetoric: “accusations against an oppressive, secular government” and “exploitation of Muslims and people’s feelings of injustice or victimization” (Apard, 2015, p. 45). Aparad (2015) finds that Yusuf engaged the international context within his sermons to stoke hatred, but admitted he used them sparingly as they were “far removed from the northern Nigerian experience” (p. 48). However, he was able to rein in those messages that incorporated international contexts and “relates them to local injustices” (Apard, 2015, p. 48). In the wake of the global outcry regarding the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in cartoons in Denmark, Yusuf preached a sermon in Maiduguri, a major city in Nigeria, but did not focus on the international crisis. Rather he decried the “terrible events that befell Nigerian Muslims in Onitsha, then mentions policing operations, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial police and army abuses in northern Nigerian towns” (Yusuf as cited in Aparad, 2015, p. 47). Yusuf asserted that:

Once [the infidels] have power, once they have control, they show no mercy, they show no forgiveness. In Onitsha, they killed everyone. In Maiduguri, there have been skirmishes. They burned down houses, but it was nothing compared to what happened in Onitsha. That’s why we can’t put down our arms (as cited in Aparad, 2015, p. 45).

This sermon pins both of the aforementioned dissatisfactions that are found in his rhetoric. Constant in Yusuf’s sermons are his examples of injustices, such as corruption in Maidurguri, which ultimately serves to benefit the political elites at the expense of the Nigerian people (Apard, 2015; Solomon, 2014). Boko Haram’s rhetoric prioritizes state-level dynamics. Consequently, it is difficult to conclude that Yusuf’s rhetoric is revisionist in nature; rather, it appears to be revolutionary as it relates to addressing injustices at the domestic level.

It is true that one central idea underpinning Yusuf's rhetoric as it relates to the actions needed to alleviate these dissatisfactions is the "promotion of jihad and glorification of martyrdom" (Apard, 2015, p. 45). Yusuf often calls for his followers to "arm themselves, kill, and take up jihad" (Apard, 2015, p. 45). However, when speaking in terms to justify violence, the external (international) enemies are deemed "theoretical" while the local enemies are "real" (Apard, 2015, p. 48). In one of Yusuf's sermons in Maiduguri he argued that:

Allah said: 'The rulers of the infidels, their leaders, must be killed. They must be killed because they doubt your religion.' If you kill the leaders, they will subside. Among those who doubt your religion, you must find the highest leaders and cut their throats because they don't keep their word. Find the leaders and kill them because they doubt your religion. Allah said: 'That's how they will stop doubting your religion' (as cited in Aparad, 2015, p. 46).

Here, one must contend with who are the "infidels" that Yusuf speaks of. Once again, domestic authorities lend themselves as the probable immediate targets. Not only is this a reference to the secular Nigerian government, but it may also be a reference to the Christian community in Nigeria, including that of the *Igbo* people, whom Boko Haram has been in conflict with to address issues of ethnic identity (Solomon, 2014).

Abubakar Shekau – Succeeding Yusuf following his death in 2009, Shekau led Boko Haram through two distinct modalities (Cook, 2020). The first was manifested by Shekau in 2014, in which he openly expressed his desires to establish "a local caliphate" in Nigeria (Cook, 2020, p. 190; Pieri & Zenn, 2016; Windrem 2014). The second followed Boko Haram's merger with ISIS, forming the ISWAP in 2015 (Cook, 2020; Kassim, 2018), during which a more "global consciousness" was incorporated by Shekau (Cook, 2020, p. 191). This specific merger between ISIS and Boko Haram would last

approximately one year, eventually resulting in a split in ISWAP, with Shekau reviving Boko Haram once again in August 2016 (Cook, 2020; Kassim, 2018; Onuoha, 2016). Following the return of Boko Haram, Shekau's rhetorical discourse and strategic orientation returned to its original modality, though he no longer exercised rhetoric calling for a local caliphate (Cook, 2020, p. 91). Due to the complications related to the merger of Boko Haram and ISIS it is difficult to definitively say if his rhetoric while involved with ISWAP was representative of Boko Haram's ideologies or that of ISIS, especially as deep ideological differences are among the most probable causes for the eventual split in ISWAP (Onuoha, 2016, p. 6). Therefore, this study will engage directly with the two modalities of Shekau's rhetoric, to show how his rhetoric while leading Boko Haram is distinct from his time in ISWAP.

Shekau's rhetorical discourse in its first modality, like that of Yusuf, primarily engaged with state-level social and political structures in Nigeria. For example, Shekau would continue Yusuf's themes of denouncing the secular political system that has emerged in Nigeria. In 2012 Shekau, in response to then Nigerian president Goodluck Bele Azikiew, argued that:

The disease is unbelief, and as Allah says, "Disorder is worse than killing" (Qur'an 2:191)...Everyone knows democracy is unbelief, and everyone knows the Constitution is unbelief, and everyone knows that there are things Allah has forbidden in the Qur'an, and that are forbidden in countless hadiths of the Prophet, that are going on in Western schools...We ourselves haven't forbidden anything, we haven't told the Muslim community to abandon anything, we simply stand on the path of truth (as cited in Thurston, 2016).

Shekau cited the Quran in his rhetoric, arguing that "disorder" has ultimately "come in the form of a heretical system" of government in Nigeria (Thurston, 2016, p. 16), and that

violent opposition to the government is the only valid response (Thurston, 2016). Shekau reinforces this thought process of government opposition when he argued: “[k]now, people of Nigeria and other places, a person is not a Muslim unless he disavows democracy and other forms of polytheistic unbelief” (as cited in Thurston, 2016, p. 16).

As mentioned before, the second modality of Shekau’s rhetorical discourse, which established a “global consciousness” (Cook, 2020, p. 191), would come with the formation of ISWAP. For example, in 2015 Shekau spoke of his larger transnational audience:

After expressing gratitude to my brethren, I will proceed to discuss the second point which is about the apostates, the polytheists, the hypocrites and the vigilantes. A great deal of work is ahead and we are still on the battlefield. O Nigerians! O Nigériens! O Chadians, Idriss Déby! O Cameroonians! O people who have joined the alliance against the Mujahidin, you are not worth God’s finger. You absolutely know that your actions are antithetical to the actions of the prophet. You know your actions are emblem of falsehood . . . Our Islamic caliphate is extant. We implement Sharia of Allah in it (as cited in Cook, 2020, p. 191).

In this sense, the “real enemy” (see Apard, 2015) that was initially established by Yusuf was no longer limited to the local context with the establishment of ISWAP. According to Shekau the “real enemy” of the ISWAP included regional actors, including those apostates, polytheists, and hypocrites that exist not only in Nigeria but also Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Further, Shekau’s rhetoric suggests the desire to establish a caliphate was reimagined during his tenure in ISWAP to include those various states in Western Africa, a transition away from the local caliphate that had previously been emphasized during his time in Boko Haram. This is eerily similar of ISIS’s rhetorical discourse, in which

discussing the caliphate and Islamic State was clearly prioritized. In this modality Shekau's dissatisfactions transcended state-level boundaries.

Following the fracturing of ISWAP, and the reestablishment of Boko Haram, Shekau's rhetoric transitioned back into its original modality, transitioning away from the regional context back to the local, though he no longer spoke of the caliphate (Cook, 2020). For example, following the attacks at the University of Maiduguri, Shekau defended Boko Haram's actions and denounced the adoption and practice of Western education and democratization:

They regard their Constitutions and their books as more sacred than the Qur'an. The proof is that their rules are given precedence of Allah's rules. So the masses in the religion of democracy do not accept Allah's ruling. This is an explicit renunciation of faith (as cited in Barkindo, 2018, p. 58).

This targeting of democracy on the part of Shekau is indicative of Boko Haram's assertion that democracy is "the rejection of Allah's supreme leadership over his creation . . . which in Nigeria is reflected in its multi-party democracy and the constitutional affirmation of its secular identity" (Barkindo, 2018, p. 58). This discourse is emblematic of the rhetoric found in Yusuf's sermons, as well as Shekau's first modal rhetoric, in the early years of Boko Haram in which their dissatisfactions were directed at Nigeria's social and political structures.

The two modalities of Shekau's rhetorical discourse allows this study to consider his time in each insurgency as distinct. During his time as leader of Boko Haram, his rhetoric was representative of dissatisfaction with state level dynamics in Nigeria, namely social and political structures, while his brief involvement with ISWAP suggested that the dissatisfaction transcended Nigerian state boundaries and, like ISIS, was directed at

aspects of the Westphalian state system. But Shekau's involvement with ISWAP was short lived, and after splitting from ISIS, Shekau's rhetoric re-emphasized pre-ISWAP themes. Therefore, this study maintains that his first modal rhetoric is representative of Boko Haram's dissatisfaction.

Boko Haram's rhetoric suggests that they are more *revolutionary* in nature as opposed to *revisionist* in orientation, though it is clear that Boko Haram's brief merger with ISIS, forming ISWAP, does indicate that Shekau flirted with revisionist rhetorical discourse. This judgment is based both on what Boko Haram, as distinct from ISWAP, is dissatisfied with – namely, the secular Nigerian government and the economic and social issues found in the state – and on how their rhetoric calls for their followers to act. However, an obvious question remains: with Boko Haram's militant activities being transnational in nature, does their rhetorical discourse align with their actions?

All three cases openly express their dissatisfactions and their desires to alleviate that dissatisfaction by utilizing *jihad*. Al-Qaeda and ISIS's rhetoric suggest that they are dissatisfied with aspects of the international order that have become adopted in the Greater Middle East. In contrast, Boko Haram's rhetoric indicates their dissatisfaction with Nigerian social and political structures. This trend is consistent with their calls to utilize *jihad* to alleviate their dissatisfactions: Al-Qaeda and ISIS seek to confront aspects of the international order, while Boko Haram seeks to confront aspects of Nigeria itself. However, rhetorical devices only offer an incomplete diagnosis of revisionist phenomenon. The second question in this survey seeks to understand the actions taken by these insurgents to alleviate their dissatisfactions.

Findings and Discussion: Nonstate Warfare

While rhetoric expresses the insurgent's dissatisfaction with particular dynamics, and offers insight to how they will use *jihad* to alleviate this dissatisfaction and challenge the status quo, the question is whether insurgent warfare is a strategy used to achieve their revisionist goals. Due to the lack of institutional access, these actors are likely to resort to militant means to achieve their goals (Goddard, 2018). While other non-violent indicators of revisionism, such as institutional mirroring (Cabestan, 2016), UN Security Council vetoes (Chan, Hu, & He, 2019), can be used to identify revisionist states, the insurgent lacks the ability and capacity to achieve revisionism in these ways. In the case of the non-state actor their violent means must be considered. In these cases, it is important to deduce if their transnational violence is used as a means to achieve their revisionist goals, and how. Therefore, a second question guides the remainder of the case study *Q2. Do the actors employ violent insurgent strategies intended to alter, disrupt, or destroy the status quo?*

Al-Qaeda: A Challenge to the Liberal International Order

There is no questioning that Al-Qaeda's infamy is associated with terrorist attacks carried out on foreign soil, especially when considering both the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and the September 11th attacks. However, the question is why did Al-Qaeda resort to the militant means against the United States and its Western allies? In retaliation of the Al Saud regime's decision to host 250,000 American troops following the Gulf War, Al-Qaeda would begin to carry out significant terrorist attacks against the United States (Saghi, 2005). The series of attacks included the 1993 World Trade Center

attack, the attack on the *USS Cole* and the bombings of two US embassies in Africa in 1998, which killed 224 people.

Though the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon would be unparalleled in modern history regarding the lethality of terrorist attacks, their significance here is to demonstrate that Al-Qaeda was acting on their revisionist desires. The attacks on the World Trade Center were not only attacks on the monuments of Western capitalism (Kerr, 2001), but the center of global commerce, signifying Al-Qaeda's attempt to disrupt or destroy the global economic hierarchies that emerged following the collapse of the Cold War system. The attack on the Pentagon was not only an attack on the United States military command, but an attempt to disrupt or destroy the security hierarchy formed between the United States and Saudi Arabia, which was constantly voiced by Bin Laden to be unwelcome (Saghi, 2005). Attacking both the World Trade Center and the Pentagon indicate that Al-Qaeda was willing to utilize *jihād*, as expressed in their rhetorical discourse, to alleviate their dissatisfaction with the status quo. These attacks served as a way to disrupt the institutions important to the function of the economic and security hierarchies that have come to form in the Greater Middle East region. These attacks also served as a means of *intimidating* the West. Recall that Kydd and Walter (2006) argue that intimidation was one of the principal strategies of terrorist attacks, wherein the insurgency seeks to convince their target population that they will continue to carry out acts of terror until their demands are met, and that government entities are not capable of stopping them.

Figure 1 displays time series data on the number of attacks Al-Qaeda carried out in specific regions each year from 2000 to 2019. Initially, Al-Qaeda’s attacks were largely directed at international targets outside of the MENA region. However, in 2008, and onwards, not only did the focus of their attacks transition to the MENA region, but the frequency of these attacks proliferated exponentially. Why does this transition happen, and what does it say about Al-Qaeda’s use of violent actions in pursuit of revisionist goals?

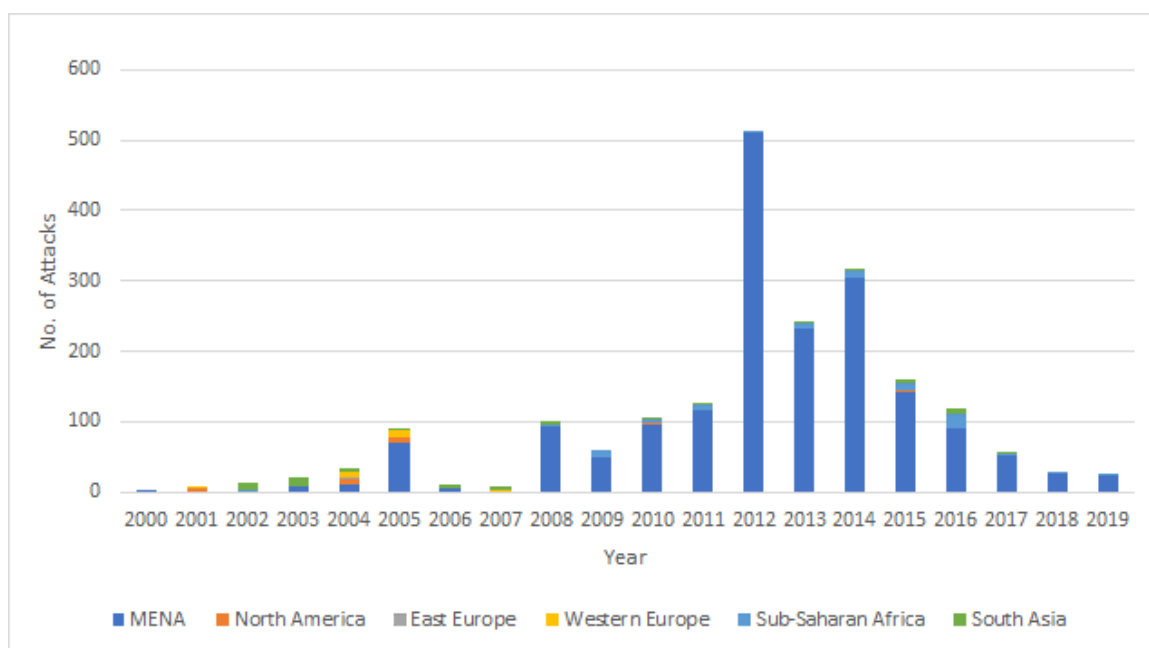


Figure 1. *Al-Qaeda Terrorist Attacks by Region, 2000-2019 (Global Terrorism Database, 2021)*

One possible explanation is that Al-Qaeda transitioned from engaging the “far enemy” of the West to that of the “near enemy” in the Greater Middle East. As previously noted in the earlier section on Al-Qaeda’s rhetoric, leaders such as Zawahiri,

desired to carry out actions against regimes in the Greater Middle East. As Byman (2015) notes, “[Al-Qaeda] was meant to defend Muslims everywhere, [it] had no single priority” (p. 14). From this perspective, these actions indicate that Al Qaeda would utilize violence to engage the “servile rulers of the Muslim peoples” (Al-Zawahiri, as cited in Kepel & Milelli, 2008, pp. 193-194), transitioning from passive dissatisfaction to the active component of revisionism. Another possible explanation is that due the United States’ War on Terror, which became one its top priorities following the attack on 9/11 (Liepman & Mudd, 2016), Al-Qaeda would find itself having to wage a war against the West in their own territory. The United States sought to deny these insurgencies their customary safe havens in the Greater Middle East region, and would dedicate military operations in various theaters around the world to see this goal through (Liepman & Mudd, 2016). Therefore, it is likely that even in the Greater Middle East, the insurgent campaigns used by Al-Qaeda included a mixture of attacks against the apostate regimes in the Greater Middle East, and the military forces of the West.

How is Al-Qaeda capable of utilizing regional violence to achieve their revisionist goals directed at the international order, namely destroying the imperial relationship between the West and the Greater Middle East, and challenging the norms of the Liberal International Order? Al-Qaeda utilized *provocation*, the third principal strategy of terrorism outlined by Kydd and Walter (2006), and caused the United States to overreact with what some would characterize as indiscriminate violence. This overreaction resulted in the United States destroying aspects of the Liberal International Order -- the very order it created and projected on the world, including the Greater Middle East region. For example, the United States’ reliance on torture, rendition, and subsequent reconstruction

of the torture norm (McKeown, 2009), as well as the use of drone warfare (Liepman & Mudd, 2016) called into question the United States' commitment of upholding human rights norms accepted as key elements of the status quo. Further, under the Trump administration, the United States has denounced nation building (Schweller, 2015), a pursuit heavily tied to the Liberal International Order since the end of the Second World War (Lind, 2017). The transformational grand strategy pursued by the United States, that sought to spread liberal ideals, would slowly come to a halt. These developments have even led to the debate as to whether the United States itself is revisionist actor (Chan, 2020; Lind, 2017; McKeown, 2009; Schweller, 2015). In this sense, Al-Qaeda's ability to engage the United States for over two decades has proven to be extremely effective as a means of disrupting the various components of the Liberal International Order, and if this order does not make a full recovery, a seemingly effective means of altering or destroying it.

ISIS: Formation of the Islamic State

ISIS did not shy away from expressing its dissatisfaction with the various aspects of the international order's infrastructure and norms that had been internalized in the Greater Middle East region, especially those dynamics that were seen as incompatible with their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam: namely, the Westphalian state system. Equally as troubling was not only their willingness to utilize *lesser jihad* and territorial control and annexation in an attempt to challenge these norms, but their success at doing so.

One of ISIS's most effective strategies involved utilizing guerrilla warfare to challenge territorial integrity norms. By pursuing territorial annexation ISIS was capable of carving out and controlling territories in various failing states so as to establish a *de facto* Islamic State. Generally, states have used territorial annexation as a revisionist tactic, though their annexations have largely been limited in scope (Altman, 2020; Piontkovksy, 2015). Not only is ISIS's ability to mirror this strategy used by states surprising, but its *success* at doing so is impressive. While ISIS's control of territory has significantly diminished, at their peak they effectively controlled 40% of Iraq's territory, and approximately 33% of Syria's territory (Wilson Center, 2019). Even now ISIS has begun to spread into Afghanistan and Western Africa (Ostaeyen, Winter, & Rolbiecki, 2020). The consolidation of attacks in the MENA region from 2007 to 2019, displayed in *Figure 2*, are representative of its prioritization of waging war in the region to establish the Islamic State. The annexation of portions of Syria is of particular importance. In order to accomplish its apocalyptic narrative ISIS must control Syria as "the conflict in Syria is the battle between the forces of God and His enemies" (Byman, 2015, p. 171).

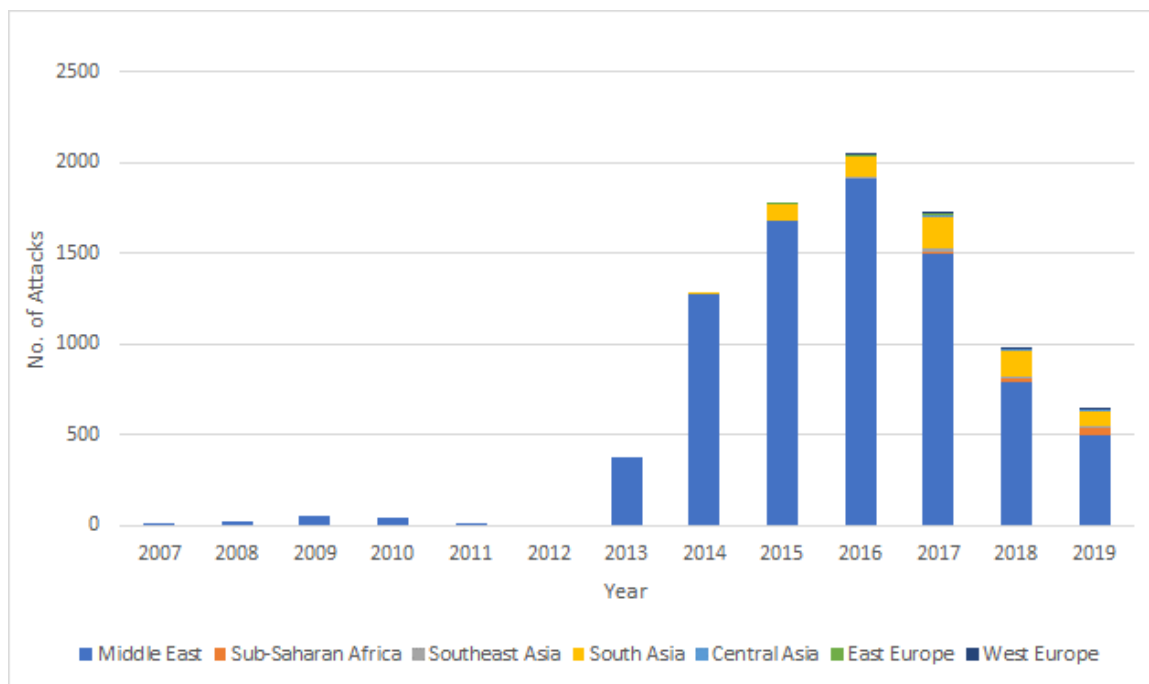


Figure 2. *ISIS Terrorist Attacks by Region, 2007-2019 (Global Terrorism Database, 2021)*

Annexing the territory to form the Islamic State was only one piece of the puzzle for ISIS to challenge these components of the international order, as they would also need citizens to identify with the newly formed state to successfully revise the international order. While Al-Baghdadi would urge his followers to perform *hijrah* to the Islamic States to bolster its legitimacy, it also sought to force the local populations to accept the leadership of the Caliph. ISIS would *intimidate* the local populations into submission. ISIS is a fearmonger that utilizes campaigns of terror against those individuals which find themselves in ISIS’s territory, including its own citizens, resorting to brutal tactics such as “religious cleansing, public killing, and sexual violence against women and children” (Goldschmidt & Boum, 2016, p. 428). Goldschmidt and Boum (2016) explain that ISIS “proselytize and use violence to restore the early Islamic caliphate and its religious

foundations” (p. 428), speaking not only to the violence utilized to annex the territories necessary to found the state, but to the intimidation of the local population into to accept the Islamic State’s existence and strict interpretation of Sharia law. For ISIS, this serves as a preliminary part of their strategy to reestablish the Caliphate that will ultimately transcend and eliminate the artificially established borders that divide the *umma*.

Boko Haram: Transnational-Revolutionary Actor

Boko Haram’s rhetoric suggests that it is a *revolutionary* actor that will utilize militant means to challenge its dissatisfaction with the Nigerian government and the state’s social and political structures. While the early stages of political violence in Boko Haram’s past contained elements of ethnic violence between Christians and Muslims (Onuoha, 2010; Solomon, 2014; Thurston, 2016), Boko Haram has transitioned to targeting the Nigerian government itself (Onuoha, 2010; Solomon, 2014) and Muslims that are argued to be apostates (Cook, 2016; Onuoha, 2016). Boko Haram’s attacks have primarily targeted Nigerian security forces, especially the Nigerian National Police Force (Adesoji, 2010; Onuoha, 2010; Okpaga, Chijioke, & Innocent, 2012), with the main aim of humiliating the Nigerian government (Okpaga, Chijioke, & Innocent 2012), and imposing religious ideologies on its secular society (Adesoji, 2010; Cook, 2016). This targeting of the “rulers of the infidels” (Apard, 2015, p. 46) is representative of Boko Haram utilizing militant means to accomplish its revolutionary goals to remove the secular government in the hopes of addressing the socio-economic challenges of the Nigerian people.

However, one challenge to the inference that Boko Haram is *revolutionary*, and aims to challenge the Nigerian political and social structures, is that it has engaged in violent activities in various states in Sub-Saharan Africa. One may assume that this organization's transnational militant activities suggest that it is a *revisionist* actor, at least with respect to the regional status quo. This assumption is incorrect. *Figure 3* displays all of the attacks that Boko Haram has carried out from 2009 to 2019.⁷ The reality is that the vast majority of Boko Haram's attacks are located in Nigeria. Moreover, while there is a significant number of transnational attacks, those attacks overwhelmingly occur in provinces that border Nigeria (United States Department of State, 2013): using the data from the Global Terrorism Database (2021), as noted in *Figure 3*, 92% of attacks in Niger are in provinces bordering Nigeria; this is also the case for 89% of the attacks in Chad; and 98% of the attacks in Cameroon.

⁷ Note that the GTD does not contain data of attacks carried out by ISWAP. Depending on the coding rules of the GTD, the Boko Haram attacks from 2014-2019 *may* include those attacks carried out by ISWAP.

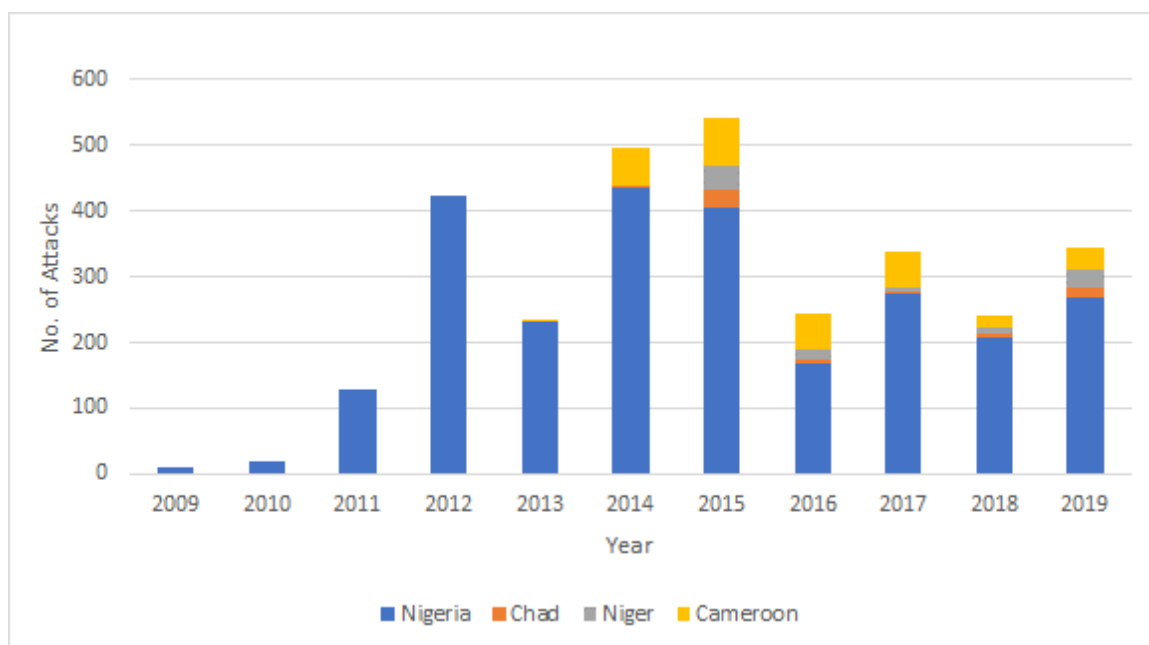


Figure 3. *Boko Haram Terrorist Attacks by State, 2009-2019 (Global Terrorism Database, 2021)*

Why is it that Boko Haram carries out transnational operations if it primarily aims to provoke change inside, not outside, of Nigeria?⁸ Boko Haram is using strategies that insurgents engaged in civil conflict have used throughout history to enhance their fighting capacity: taking advantage of remote and absolute distance (Buhaug, Gates, & Lujala, 2009); taking advantage of low relative distance due ethnic similarities in neighboring states (Buhaug, Gates, & Lujala, 2009; Pieri & Zenn, 2016, p. 71); building safe havens for their forces in bordering states (Kittner, 2007; Williams, 2008); and taking advantage of porous borders to ensure survivability (Kittner, 2007). The transnational nature of the organization provides them the ability to evade pressure from Nigerian and international

⁸ Note that ISWAP has primarily engaged Niger and Cameroon (Cook, 2016), and this may be represented in the GTD data. Nevertheless, studies have shown that Boko Haram under Shekau's leadership, distinct from ISWAP, does act transnationally (see Onuoha, 2016; Thurston, 2016).

forces that seek to disrupt their operations (United States Department of State, 2013). Further, they have found this transnational activity useful as a recruitment tool (Thurston, 2016). In all of these civil war strategies, it will likely be necessary for Boko Haram to use military force to ensure that these tactics remain both effective and viable.

Findings Across Cases

Comparing the cases is important in determining whether one can reasonably label these actors as revisionist, or if the distinction between revisionist and revolutionary insurgencies is unwarranted. *Table 2* displays all of the indicators explored and the findings associated with each.

Table 2. *Summary Assessment of Insurgent Groups*

Actor	Revisionist Rhetoric?	Violent Insurgent Strategies Used to Alter, Disrupt, or Destroy the Status Quo?	Revisionist? (Towards What?)
Al-Qaeda	Yes (Dissatisfaction with various components of the international order; Urges use of <i>jihād</i> to alleviate these dissatisfactions)	Yes (Directed at disrupting or destroying aspects of the international order and as a strategy of <i>intimidation</i> and <i>provocation</i>)	Yes (International Hierarchy and Diplomatic Norms)
ISIS	Yes (Dissatisfaction with various components of the international order; Urges use of <i>jihād</i> , territorial annexation and state formation to alleviate these dissatisfactions)	Yes (Used to see through territorial annexation and a strategy of <i>intimidation</i>)	Yes (Diplomatic Norms, Westphalian State System, and Territorial Integrity Norms)
Boko Haram	No (Dissatisfied with state-level dynamics; Urges use of <i>jihād</i> to alleviate these dissatisfactions)	No (Operating transnationally as a strategy of survival, not explicitly seeking regional impact)	No (State-Level Social and Political Structures)

All of the cases utilize rhetoric that provides insight to what particular dynamics they were dissatisfied with, whether they were aspects of the international order or state-level dynamics, and how they sought to alleviate that dissatisfaction. All were explicit in expressing how they would utilize violence to achieve their goals. Al-Qaeda stands out as the exemplar of what it means to address the international community regarding perceived injustices and putting forth not only their demands for those injustices to change but declaring their intent to directly engage the “new world order.” ISIS was persistent in its calls to legitimize its Caliphate and the formation of the Islamic State, a clear rejection of the Westphalian state system that has come to dominate the region. In contrast, Boko Haram stands out as a case that employs powerful rhetorical devices but did not address aspects of the regional or international order, instead focusing on state-level issues in Nigeria.

Similar trends exist when considering the use of warfare as to alleviate those dissatisfaction. In all cases, the insurgent groups use purposive violence as a means of alleviating dissatisfaction and furthering their strategic goals. However, not all violent attacks should be seen as tools of revisionism. In the case of Al-Qaeda, their use of violence carried out against the West is an attempt to disrupt or destroy organizations that foster the hierarchical relationships between Western great powers and Muslim-majority countries, like the United States and Saudi Arabia. Admittedly, their campaigns of violence in the Greater Middle East are challenging to simple distinctions, as they clearly have long engaged U.S. forces, but have also targeted the “apostate” regimes in the region. However, these violent campaigns are still used to further their revisionist strategies, especially when considering their ability to *provoke* the United States into

destroying components of its own Liberal International Order. ISIS clearly used violent insurgent strategies to achieve territorial control and annexation, allowing the group to upend territorial integrity norms and establish a *de facto* Islamic State. However, they also utilized violence to further cement their legitimacy by *intimidating* their domestic audience into submission. Based in Nigeria, Boko Haram's use of violent insurgent strategies is largely directed at the Nigerian government, and at Nigeria's social and political structures. While it does carry out transnational attacks, it is the case of Boko Haram utilizing strategies to achieve sanctuary and increase their fighting capacity, actions commonplace in civil wars (Salehyan, 2007).

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Given these findings, Al-Qaeda and ISIS accurately reflect *revisionist* actors that seek to alter, disrupt, or destroy aspects of the Liberal International Order, while Boko Haram reflects the *revolutionary* actor as typed by O’Neill (2005).

Therefore, there is indeed a case to be made regarding the existence of non-state actors, particularly transnational insurgencies, that have revisionist aims. This investigation attempts to push the literature on revisionism forward by considering insurgents as potential revisionists. Two tentative conclusions stand out. First, Al-Qaeda and ISIS share with their state counterparts some indicators used to identify revisionism, with both relying on rhetoric. Because all three of the insurgencies investigated here rely on various forms of rhetorical communication, analysts must take care to understand the intended audience in order to assess the significance of their rhetoric. Unlike their state counterparts that may be “masked revisionists” – quietly pursuing revisionist aims while trying to appear to be supporting the status quo (Taylor, 2007) – these non-state actors are more likely to be demonstrative in their actions and explicit in their demands and claims (though there are instances of speaking in abstraction, as the case studies demonstrate).

Second, this study maintains that the use of purposive violence, terrorism and guerrilla warfare, can be indicative of revisionist tactics. However, as with rhetorical discourse, all three insurgencies utilize warfare to pursue their goals, whether *revisionist*, as in the case of Al-Qaeda and ISIS, or *revolutionary*, as in the case of Boko Haram. Studies must concern themselves with drawing distinctions between insurgencies that utilize violence that is transnational in nature, as the violence taken in bordering states

may be reflective of survival strategies commonplace in civil wars. One helpful dynamic that can differentiate *revisionist* violence and *revolutionary* violence is to take into consideration their rhetorical discourse, and to determine if their violence is reflective of their rhetoric. This study is an attempt to show how these two indicators are related.

The Challenges Faced by This Study

However, this study is not without challenges. Because revisionism is a latent variable, and actors consequently cannot be authoritatively determined to be revisionist, one must consider some potential issues with the analysis. First, these insurgent actors may be acting as a “pufferfish”, trying to create a public image of their organization as larger and more capable than it really is. This factor complicates revisionist identification, because ambitious rhetoric often exceeds the capabilities of the perceived revisionist actor (DiCicco & Sanchez, 2021). In this case, it may be that these actors want to be perceived as revisionist, but they may not ever be capable of actions that would achieve their goals. However, given not only the success of ISIS’s territorial annexation and the psychological toll of terrorist actions carried out by Al-Qaeda following the September 11th attacks, but also Al-Qaeda’s ability to provoke the United States to take actions that has served to undermine its own Liberal International Order, it is clear that these actors have been capable of carrying out significant damage and are more of a threat than some might have considered prior to 21st-century developments.

Second, as revisionism carries a negative connotation (Buzan, 1983; Turner & Nymalm, 2019), there is the inherent challenge of ensuring that this study does not classify these actors as revisionist only because they embody values that are non-Western

(Turner & Nymalm, 2019). This study hopes to make it clear that there are various actors within the region, such as the political regimes leading Muslim-majority states, that either adhere to status-quo norms and dynamics, or do not seek to disrupt the status quo. Often these insurgents openly voice opposition to such regimes. Further, this study as attempted to ensure that the assessment of the cases is not value-based, meaning the use of terrorism or guerrilla warfare is not itself the justification for applying the revisionist label to non-state armed groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, nor is it the fact that they adhere to fundamentalist, ultra-orthodox ideologies, including Salafism and Wahhabism. By controlling for this variable, this study has shown that there was no uniform pattern to their revisionist (or, in the case of Boko Haram, revolutionary) orientations. If scholars or analysts are to argue that this ideological outlook is indeed revisionist in itself, they will need to contend with the reality that either due to capacity or to remote or proximate goals, the purposive actions of these insurgencies are not uniform, and should not be lumped together as if they were identical.

Finally, the merger between ISIS and Boko Haram, resulting in the formation of ISWAP, complicated the analysis. Both organizations wished to establish a caliphate, whether it be local or global; the difference in the desired caliphate's scope is consequential for how we understand the nature of each group. The fact that Shekau was the leader of Boko Haram and pledged his allegiance to ISIS, only to renege on the merger, calls into question whether Shekau's rhetorical discourse during his time in ISWAP was representative of ISIS's broader agenda or of Boko Haram's more locally focused strategic orientation. For example, did his idea of the caliphate transition from local to global during his time in ISWAP (see Cook, 2020)? Having acknowledged this

uncertainty, this study sought to control for it by considering the two distinct modalities of Shekau's discourse during his time in each of the organizations (Cook, 2020). As will be discussed in the next section, this particular phenomenon offers ample opportunities for future studies to address the complexities related to insurgent mergers and unions as it relates to revisionism.

Future Directions

While this study developed a focus on insurgent use of unconventional means of warfare, particularly the use of terrorism, this is not to say that insurgents are the only actors to employ such tactics. Considering the various definitions of terrorism and reasons behind its use, it should be of little surprise to find that both state and non-state actors utilize terrorism as their principal strategy, or as a tactic, to achieve their goals. Contemporary emphasis has primarily viewed terrorism as a non-state actor phenomenon. However, states have employed terrorism as well (Law, 2015; Schanzer, 2017). While terms such as "terrorist group" or "terrorist organization" have proliferated in academic and policy discourse, there has been a lack of discourse around parallel terms such as "terrorist states" (Schanzer, 2017, p. 47). There are contemporary examples of states employing terrorism to further their own goals. While states do enjoy a theoretical monopoly on the use of physical force and have standing militaries for armed conflict abroad, they are expected to comply with laws of armed conflict and human rights (Schanzer, 2017, p. 44). However, because states too may be responsible for acts that violate norms and international law, complexities arise as to what the actual differences are between an act of terror on one hand, and a war crime on the other (Schanzer, 2017

45). Perhaps terrorism is not merely a strategy of the weak, but the strategy of the desperate. With this in mind, Iran's sponsorship of terrorism, if directed at aspects of the regional order such as the balance of power, is in itself a revisionist strategy that has not been adequately explored.

Relying on revisionist indicators that are ascribed to states raises important issues for scholars seeking to apply this frame to non-state actors. There are likely more indicators that exist in the non-state realm that should be considered. For example, perhaps Al-Qaeda's use of affiliate groups is similar to the concern of alliance formation and expansion as a revisionist tool. For actors such as Russia, the United States' pursuit of expanding NATO into its region of influence is seen as problematic (Allison, 2017, p. 543), as it has been associated with the spread of the Liberal International Order (Ikenberry, 2018; Lind, 2017), arguably a revisionist pursuit (Lind, 2017). Al-Qaeda may be effectively mirroring this strategy, seeking to establish affiliate organizations and offshoots to not only spread their own fundamentalist ideals, but to maximize their ability to take military across states and regions.

Closely related to alliance formation is that of unions and mergers. To some of the states in the MENA region, and possibly the larger Arab world, unions are viewed as "nothing more or less than political alliances or bloc formations" which are established to protect security interests in the region (Deeb, 1989, pp. 21-22). The merger between Boko Haram and ISIS, forming ISWAP, is representative of this type of phenomenon. However, this particular dynamic provides ample opportunity for future studies to engage with complex questions, namely: how do insurgent goals change due to unions or

mergers? For example, in the case of Boko Haram, did its revolutionary goals expand beyond state-centric boundaries, transitioning to revisionist goals at the regional or global levels? Perhaps during Shekau's time in ISWAP, in which he adopted a "global consciousness" his rhetoric regarding the "Islamic caliphate" (Cook, 2020, p. 191) speaks not to the local caliphate he wished to establish in Nigeria, but rather a regional one, if not global. While not used in this study, such an approach could prove valuable in future analyses.

Policy Implications

There has been a growing interest regarding the importance of non-state actors in political, security, and economic landscapes of world politics. With the surge of globalizing dynamics, technological advancements, and increasing operational capacity, the various non-state actors in the international system will not only become more integrated into these international and regional orders, but their capacity to contribute to these orders or revise them, will increase as well.

The challenge is that no desired international order is safe. Regardless if the order is being pursued by one state, or a coalition of states, or if the values of that order are Western or Eastern, insurgents such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS will be desirous of challenging them. As Sayun and Phillips (2009) find, "[s]tates that are actively involved in international politics are likely to create resentment abroad and hence more likely to be the target of transnational terrorism than are states that pursue a more isolationist foreign policy" (p. 878).

Scholars and analysts must also consider the endless variations of non-state actors that will take issue with international and regional orders, and their components.

Insurgents that adhere to fundamentalist ideologies associated with Islam is only one such type of non-state actor. What of the multi-national corporations and non-governmental organizations, amongst others, that are desirous of altering aspects of the international or regional orders to better align with their goals? Their ability to challenge these orders will vary significantly, and will break from the violent means that insurgents pursue.

Therefore, it will become increasingly important to understand the revisionist and status quo orientation of non-state actors. As this study indicates, even insurgencies are not bound to revolutionary goals. Non-state actors can become dissatisfied with the international or regional status quo to the point where they decide to take action, becoming revisionist in orientation. Only time will tell how effective they will be at altering, disrupting, or destroying aspects of the status quo.

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