Political de-radicalization: why it is no longer possible in the *wilāyāt* system of the Islamic State

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Abstract

The emergence of the Islamic State as a regional and ideological player deeply affected the mechanisms of radicalization witnessed worldwide. The article will compare a former instance of jihadism, the Egyptian al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya (Islamic Group, IG), with the phenomenon of the Islamic State and its *wilāyāt* system. The Islamic Group, which has been active during the last three decades of the Twentieth century, constitutes an ideal case study because it performed a process of political de-radicalization and disengagement that led its members to abandon violence. The hypothesis underlying the paper is that a similar process could no longer take place in the case of the Islamic State. Indeed, the transnational project of the Caliphate is likely to exclude every chance of undertaking a de-radicalization and/or disengagement process in which a group effectively negotiates with a nation-state, and this difference is likely to represent one of the major counter-terrorism challenges arising from the Syrian-Iraqi scenario. In order to complete its de-radicalization process, the IG issued four books of *murāğa'āt*, "recantations", in January 2002, under the general title of *The Correcting Conceptions Series*. The major one was titled *The Initiative for Ceasing Violence: a Realistic View and a Legitimate Perspective*. It was authored by two Shura Council members[2] and it generally addressed the practical and the ideological reasons behind the initiative. Unquestionably, this gradual process has been possible not only thanks to the new attitudes towards violence endorsed by al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya, but also to the perceptive reaction of the State. By contrast, the a-national nature of the Islamic State obstructs this process. Indeed, after the local-oriented attitude of the first *gam'iyāt* and the emergence of al-Qa'ida as the premium brand of global terror, aims, push factors and geographical horizons of jihadism deeply changed. It is therefore not a question whether jihad is a binding religious prescription: it unquestionably is. The fundamental issue is whether and how one is to conduct it by lawful and prudent means and it is precisely this question that profoundly and irremediably divides the national jihadi movements from the Islamic State. As an internal Islamist critique - one that relies on a common Salafi substratum - the *gam'iyāt* refutation of global jihad may shed a light over the role of Da'ish in the contemporary jihadi panorama.

Keywords *Egyptian Islamic Group, al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya, Islamic State, wilāyāt, de-radicalization, disengagement.*

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Introduction

In the last few months, the Islamic State has been experiencing some significant setbacks both in Syria and in Iraq. In April 2016 for instance, the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stated that IS had lost 40% of its territories. At the same time, on the Syrian front, Assad's army got closer to Raqqa, where the government troops have not being present since August 2014.

More recently, IS lost the city of Dabiq, a recurring symbol in the jihadi propaganda, according to which Dabiq will be the place of the final battle between the Caliphate and its enemies. Due to these recent defeats and territorial losses, an increasing number of foreign fighters is managing to go back to their motherlands in Muslim majority countries and, to a lesser extent, in the West.

The so-called returnees are likely to deploy not only new tactical and guerrilla skills, but also a renewed commitment to the Islamic State's project. Given these premises, dealing with the issue of the returnees is becoming increasingly urgent, and governments should be aware of the different traits that characterized the Twentieth century Egyptian Islamic Group – and allowed it to de-radicalize - compared to the Islamic State ideology and structure.

The present paper asserts that, in the case of the Islamic State, a process of political de-radicalization leading the members to abandon violence is extremely unlikely.

In order to verify this hypothesis, after a brief review of the literature on collective de-radicalization and two historical introductions on al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya and the Islamic State, the nucleus of the paper will be divided in three main sections. Each one of them will investigate one of the major differences occurring between the national jihad as exemplified by al-Gamā'a and the a-national project of IS.

Finally, in the conclusive section, some final remarks will be provided.

Al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya: radicalization and de-radicalization patterns

The Tanzim, literally "organization", which represented the precursor of both al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya and al-Jihad, had its origin in 1974, when some followers of the Islamic Liberation Organization (ILO) that was dismantled after its attack on the Military Technical Academy reorganized themselves.[3]

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[3] On 18 April 1974, 100 members of the Islamic Liberation Organization attacked the Military Technical College in Cairo. Their aim was to kill President Sadat and other top officials who were attending an institutional event

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By contrast, the first real success of Islamic militants in Egypt occurred when they took over Egyptian student politics in the 1970s.[4] Religious students established al-Gamā'a al-Dīniya (The Religious Group, RG), an inter-university club that aimed at promoting religious social and political activism on campuses.

By the mid-1970s, the clubs had been transformed into a nationwide organization and each university had a *shura*, "consultative council", and an emir. In 1977, the Muslim Brothers were able to recruit the emirs of Cairo, Alexandria, and al-Minya universities.[5] However, the Brotherhood was not able to recruit the leaders of al-Gamā'a al-Dīniya in Assyut University, Nagih Ibrahim and Karam Zuhdi, who will emerge later as co-founders of al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya. The Religious Group's horizons broadened in the 1980s, and while still in control of the campuses, they moved out into slum neighbourhoods such as Cairo's Imbaba and the rural backwaters of Upper Egypt.

From an organizational perspective, the new-born al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya was divided in cells and it had separate military and *da'wa* wings.[6] The military wing has been increasingly strengthened by the return of Egyptian volunteers from the war against Soviets in Afghanistan, who enlarged the so-called group of Afghan Arabs.

As far as *da'wa* is concerned, the Islamic Group largely occupied the vacuum left by the repressed Muslim Brotherhood, providing citizens with Koranic schools, Islamic-licit loans, health clinics and religious literature.

The ideological principles were divulgated through a network of thousands of unofficial mosques and using cassettes, pamphlets, and booklets.

The Upper Egyptian-dominated IG had numerous contacts with other like-minded, small Salafi-Jihadi factions in Cairo and the Delta region.

The most notable of those factions was that of Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Farag, which later came to be known as the principal organizer behind President Sadat's assassination on

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nearby in the Arab Socialist Building, seize radio and television buildings and announce the birth of the Islamic Republic of Egypt. Ninety-five ILO members were arrested and tried, thirty-two were convicted, and two were executed.

[4] Stanley Reed, (1993). The Battle for Egypt. *Foreign Affairs*, 72(4), 94.

[5] Omar Ashour, (2007). Lions tamed? An inquiry into the causes of de-radicalization of armed Islamist movements: the case of Egyptian Islamic Group. *Middle East Journal*, 61(4), 598.

[6] *Da'wa* is one of the fundamental concepts of Islamist ideologies, and translating it with the term "proselytizing" is simplistic and ineffective. It literally means "issuing a summons" and "making an invitation", and refers to the duty of a true believer to call people to enter Islam and living it according to its principles.

October 6, 1981. Along with Farag, several leading members of the Egyptian jihadi movement including Ibrahim, Zuhdi, 'Abbud al-Zummur, and Khalid al-Islambuli participated in the assassination. 'Abbud al-Zummur was the senior military officer in the group and a major in the military intelligence. Later, he held several leading positions in the broader Egyptian jihadi movement including the leadership of al-Jihad group, while Khalid al-Islambouli was the leader of the cell that carried out the assassination. In the major crackdown that followed Sadat's death, more than 300 Egyptian Islamist activists and suspects were imprisoned. This prison phase was crucial in transforming the essence of al-Gamā'a. In this phase, the official split between the Islamic Group and al-Jihad occurred, with al-Jihad being then led by 'Abbud al-Zummur and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qa'ida.

Another development was the production of a large literary corpus regarding the Islamic Group ideology, included in the so-called *fiqh al-'unf*, "jurisprudence of violence".[7] During the 1980s, al-Gamā'a militants numbered around 10,000, with hard-core support several times that, and of the total 46,000 mosques in Egypt in 1981, only 6,000 mosques were under the control of the Ministry of Awqāf (Religious Endowments)[8], which clearly demonstrates the ideological ferment in the Egyptian Islamist panorama of the period. The increasing cultural influence of IG activism began to alarm authorities, and between 1987 and 1989, the regime started a crackdown on al-Gamā'a activists. By early 1989, the IG attempted to stop the crackdown by issuing appeals invoking, among other conditions, the release of all detainees who were not charged; the improvement of prison conditions for IG activists who were sentenced by civilian courts; the suspension of the policy that used to renew detention indefinitely.

The regime ignored these demands, thus contributing to the creation of a vicious circle, which culminated with the Luxor massacre on November 17, 1997, in which IG terrorists killed fifty-eight tourists at the site. Few months before, on July 5, 1997, during one of the military tribunals for IG activists, Muhammad al-Amin 'Abd al-'Alim, an IG member, read a statement signed by six of the IG historical leaders declaring a unilateral ceasefire and calling on IG

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[7] This literature included books like *Mithāq al-'Amal al-Islami* [Islamic Action Charter] (1984); *Kalimat Ḥaqq* [A Righteous Word] (1984); *'Ilahun ma' Allah? I'lān al-Ḥarb 'ala Maǧlis al-Sha'ab* [Another God with Allah? Declaration of War on the People's Assembly] (1990); *Hattmiyat al-Muwāǧaha* [The Inevitability of Confrontation] (1990).

[8] Hamed Ansari (1986). The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *16*(1).

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affiliates to stop all military operations at home and abroad. It was this declaration that heralded the beginning of the de-radicalization phase. After two years of internal debate among imprisoned and free IG members, the group reached a full consensus about the unilateral ceasefire only on March 28, 1999, when the leaders in Egypt and abroad declared their unconditional support for the initiative. In fact, as far as this first phase of de-radicalization is concerned, speaking about disengagement seems to be more correct. Indeed, the notion of de-radicalization implies ideological, emotional and relational changes in the individual's attitudes towards violence, while the concept of disengagement mainly relates to the behavioural and pragmatic dimension.[9]

A true process of collective de-radicalization represented the second phase of the dialogue with the State, and featured a comprehensive attempt to legitimize ideologically the transformation, as well as to publicize the doctrinal developments. In order to reach these goals, the IG issued four books of *murāğa'āt*, "recantations", in January 2002, under the general title of *The Correcting Conceptions Series*. Unquestionably, this gradual process has been possible not only thanks to the new attitudes towards violence endorsed by al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya, but also to the perceptive reaction of the State. More exhaustively, disengagement and de-radicalization of the Islamic Group have been realized through an unprecedented synergy of three intertwined conjunctures: the national dimension of IG interests, the response of the State, the organizational and collective structure of the process.

The Islamic State: a historical overview

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a Jordanian-born terrorist who started to radicalize while in prison for drug possession and sexual assault. He travelled to Afghanistan in the late 1980s with the intention of joining the fight against Soviet occupation. Back to Jordan during the 1990s, Zarqawi was arrested for his plots against the Hashemite dynasty. During that decade, al-Zarqawi met Osama bin Laden, who, despite al-Zarqawi's strong hatred for Shiites that bin Laden did not agree with and other differing perspectives,[10] asked him to join AQ.

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[9] Alex P. Schmid (2013). *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review.* The Hague: International Centre for Counter-terrorism (ICCT), 14.
[10] Muhammad J. Kirdar (2014). AQAM Futures Project Case Studies Series: *Al Qaede in Iraq.* Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C.

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At that time, al-Zarqawi organization was Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (JTJ), Tawhid[11] and Jihad Group. JTJ's first operation was in Jordan, when it organized the murder of USAid officer Laurence Foley in 2002.[12]

Soon after its birth, JTJ began to actively recruit Iraqis coming from different social and geographical backgrounds.[13] In October 2004, Zarqawi came to an agreement with bin Laden and formally joined al-Qa'ida, renaming his organization al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI). Despite the official pledge of allegiance to Osama bin Laden, Zarqawi and the AQ leadership still disagreed on some key tactical issues, such as AQ's willingness to cooperate with other groups against enemies.[14]

Less than two years later, on June 7, 2006, Zarqawi was killed by an American airstrike. After Zarqawi's death, AQI announced that his successor would be Abu Ayub al-Masri, an Egyptian bomb maker who, as many key-figures of that jihadi landscape, had trained in Afghanistan.[15] However, many Iraqi Sunnis continued to criticize AQI for the foreign presence in its leadership and fighting forces. Therefore, to brand the group as more Iraqi, Masri convinced several other groups to merge when he declared the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, although the group also continued to be known as AQI). Masri installed an Iraqi, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, as the head of the Islamic State of Iraq and the efforts to unify the jihadi action provided ISI attention and support from the global jihadi community. Both Masri and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi were killed in a joint U.S.-Iraqi raid on April 18, 2010 and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi assumed control of an AQI severely weakened by local backlash and coalition and local security forces. AQI continued to struggle to maintain relevance through 2011, when Coalition forces withdrew.

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[11] The concept of *taḥwīd* represents one of the pillars of the Islamic theology. It refers to the uniqueness, the oneness of God. The strong emphasis over the oneness of God implies that *shirk*, "polytheism" (literally "association"), is one of the major sins, second only to apostasy. For an influent perspective on *taḥwīd* see: Abduh, M. Tr. by Ishaq Musa'ad and Kenneth Cragg. The Theology of Unity. George Allen & Unwin, London. 1966.

[12] Richard Boucher (2004). *Foreign Terrorist Organization: Designation of Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wa'al-Jihad and Aliases*. Archive. U.S. Department of State.

[13] Joseph Felter – Brian Fishman (2007). Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records. Combatting Terrorism Center, West Point.

[14] For an in-depth analysis of the first stages of the relationship al-Qaida - ISIS see Fawaz A. Gerges (2016). *ISIS: A History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press and Denis N. Baken – Ioannis Mantzikos (2015). Iraq and Syria: The Evolution of al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers. In: *Al Qaeda: The Transformation of Terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 131-142.

[15] Eben Kaplan (2006). Abu Hamza Al-Muhajir, Zarqawi's Mysterious Successor (aka Abu Ayub Al-Masri). Council on Foreign Relations, June 13, 2006.

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Meanwhile, AQI used the ongoing Syrian Civil War as a training ground and tool for expansion, thus compensating the difficulties it was experiencing in Iraq. In April 2013, Baghdadi officially announced AQI operations in Syria and changed the group's name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). He also claimed that AQI had created al-Nusra in Syria, and that the two groups had merged into one. Both al-Nusra leadership and Al Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri disputed the merger. As a reaction, Ayman al-Zawahiri dictated that ISIS should limit its operations to Iraq,[16] but on June 14 al-Baghdadi publicly rejected al-Zawahiri's statement. ISIS continued to operate in Syria, often clashing with other Islamist groups and ignoring calls for mediation. Therefore, AQ officially renounced any connection with ISIS in February 2014.

On June 29, 2014, after significant territorial gains in Iraq and Syria, the group changed its name again to become known as the Islamic State (IS), declaring a Caliphate and naming its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi the Caliph. In late September 2014, as ISIS continued to expand its borders, the U.S. announced that it would begin to carry out airstrikes against the organization. By November 2014, the group's territorial gains had slowed considerably and, as mentioned before, the process of territorial loss is ongoing.

Collective de-radicalization: a brief literature review[17]

As far as the academia is concerned, there seems to be a clearly recognizable lacuna in this field of research, as the overwhelming majority of works are ascribable to a structural-psychological approach instead of a political-process one.

Unquestionably, the study of radicalization at the individual level, which has always been faced with the former approach, produced some valuable insights, in particular by enhancing the understanding of radicalization as a process, an *in fieri* concept and not merely a succession of events.

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[16] Basma Atassi, "Qaeda chief annuls Syrian-Iraqi jihad merger." *Al Jazeera America*, 9 June 2013. [http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/06/2013699425657882.html].

[17] For a detailed literature review on collective and individual de-radicalization, which lies outside the scope of the paper, see Angel Rabasa – Stacie L. Pettyjohn – Jeremy G. Ghez – Christopher Boucek (2010). Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists, RAND Corporation. Arlington, Virginia and Alex P. Schmid (2013). 'Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review', *ICCT Research Paper*, International Centre for Counter-terrorism, The Hague.

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Nevertheless, this perspective has proved to have more than one shortcoming. For instance, it often does not take into adequate consideration historical and geographical variations, claiming to be valid in every context and historical horizon. Moreover, the structural-psychological approach implies that, as radicalization is supposed to be determined by structural factors, structural changes are required for de-radicalization to occur. The case of the Egyptian Islamic Group largely confutes this hypothesis. In this respect, Omar Ashour was one of the first scholars who have underlined the operative differences between the two approaches.[18] Furthermore, Ashour's work is highly relevant from at least three other perspectives. Firstly, studying the case of the Egyptian Islamic Group and, to a lesser extent, of al-Jihad, he pointed out four prerequisites for a successful de-radicalization process, namely charismatic leadership, state repression, interactions with the "other"[19] and selective inducements from the state.[20] Nevertheless, other authors (El-Said, 2012) have added what has been called "the general environment" as a factor that may promote organizational de-radicalization.

Beside the classification of the four major prerequisites, Ashour's definitions of de-radicalization and moderation are highly valuable and have been largely adopted throughout this paper. Indeed, de-radicalization is a process of relative change within Islamist movements, in which a radical group reverses its ideology and begins to de-legitimize the use of violent methods to achieve political goals as well as accepting gradual social, political, and economic changes within a pluralist context. Moderation, on the other hand, is a process of relative change within Islamist groups that can take place on two levels. On the ideological level, the key transformation is the acceptance of democratic principles and the de-legitimization of violence. On the behavioural level, the key transformation is participation in the democratic process and the practical abandonment of violence as a method to achieve

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[18] Omar Ashour (2007). Lions tamed? An inquiry into the causes of de-radicalization of armed Islamist movements: the case of Egyptian Islamic Group. *Middle East Journal*, *61*(4), 596-625.

[19] In the present paper, the author chooses not to carry out an in-depth analysis of this prerequisite, the interaction. Indeed, due to its complexity and transdisciplinarity, it would deserve a dedicated analysis.

[20] See for instance: Omar Ashour, 2009. *The deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements*. London: Routledge.

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goals. Different levels of moderation can occur within both radical and moderate Islamist movements.[21]

Finally, even though the Egyptian jihadi landscape has always been Ashour's main research focus, he also studied the Libyan de-radicalization process, thus suggesting a domino effect that may be triggered by previous positive de-radicalization experiences.[22]

A remarkable effort to close the gap between collective/organizational and individual de-radicalization has been performed by Clubb through the analysis of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).[23] Building on the morphogenetic approach - a social movement approach – Clubb distinguishes between structure/culture and agency over time in order to analyse the causal influence between the two. Two main objects are analysed: how actors change attitudes to violence and factors ensuring that changes resonate with audiences. Support for terrorism and political violence may continue within a movement and inter-generationally, and subsequently, any attempt to explain its demise must be holistic and cannot be found solely in theories and strategies that focus on how groups *or* individuals disengage.[24] As far as the domino effect hypothesized by Omar Ashour is concerned, Gordon Clubbs adds that it not only diffuses to other groups: it diffuses throughout the movement, thus affecting the radical milieu and the next generation.[25]

Previously, Gunaratna and Ali (2009) have been among the first scholars to assess the de-radicalization processes of the Egyptian Islamic Group and al-Jihad.[26] In addition, they effectively underline the differences between these cases and other extremist de-radicalization programs in the world, which are normally a direct initiative of governments and not of terrorist groups.[27] Gunaratna and Ali also largely contributed to the debate on the conciliation initiative, which raised the question of whether it was merely a tactical move by the IG to win a mass release of its imprisoned members and, later, resume violence. This question—whether the initiative was tactical or strategic, was asked to Karam Zuhdi, who responded that "the

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[21] Omar Ashour (2007). Lions tamed? An inquiry into the causes of de-radicalization of armed Islamist movements: the case of Egyptian Islamic Group. *Middle East Journal*, *61*(4), 599-600.

[22] Omar Ashour, Ex-Jihadists in the New Libya, *Foreign Policy*, August 29, 2011.

[23] Gordon Clubb (2016). *Social Movement De-Radicalisation and the Decline of Terrorism. The morphogenesis of the Irish Republican movement*. London: Routledge.

[24] G. Clubb (2016), 2.

[25] G. Clubb (2016), 9.

[26] Rohan Gunaratna, R. – Mohammed B. Ali. (2009). De-Radicalization Initiatives in Egypt: A Preliminary Insight. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 32*(4), 277-291.

[27] R. Gunaratna – M. B. Ali (2009), 278.

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question was out of place and that temporary truce with the Jews might be acceptable, before returning to war, but reconciliation among Muslims must not be signed with the intention of betrayal".[28]

Wheatley and McCauley[29] adopt a different perspective, focussing on the popular reaction to the activity of the Egyptian Islamic Group. Indeed, they examine how various levels of Egyptian society responded to years of Islamist terror, culminating in the Luxor massacre – a watershed event in the loss of sympathy and support for extremist Islamism. Through their pyramid model of terrorism and support for terrorism[30], they highlight that a terrorist group aiming for political power is competing with the government for the sympathy or at least the passive acquiescence of the base of the pyramid. Changes over time in this competition can be represented as shifts in the numbers of sympathizers and supporters for the terrorists, and likewise shifts in sympathizers and supporters for the government. The same competition plays out among audiences in other countries, who may sympathize with terrorists, justify terrorist violence, or even act in support of terrorists in a country not their own.

These fundamental contributions produced valuable insights in the field of collective and organizational de-radicalization. Nevertheless, highlighting the differences between the parabolas of the first *gam'iyāt* and the Islamic State is becoming increasingly imperative. Particularly, the dichotomies national *vs* transnational interests, response *vs* absence of the State and collective *vs* individual de-radicalization will now be contextualised.

The national interests of IG as opposed to the Islamic State's transnational ideology
During its whole history, al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya in general and its leadership in particular maintained an essentially national perspective. In some respects, the focus has been even narrower. For instance, an extraordinary connection between al-Gamā'a militancy and the territory of the Upper Egypt and the Sa'idi society has always been a characteristic of the organization. This is not to say that the first *gam'yiāt* did not use to prioritize *dīn*, "religion", over *dawla*, "State". On the contrary, their greatest ideal was the restoration of the Caliphate.

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[28] Rohan Gunaratna – Mohamed Bin Ali (2009), 287.
[29] Joseph Wheatley – Clark McCauley (2008). Losing your audience: Desistance from terrorism in Egypt after Luxor. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict. Pathways toward terrorism and genocide*, *1*(3), 250-268.
[30] J. Wheatley – C. McCauley (2008) 251.

Nevertheless, it remained a vague utopia, and IG interests and push factors were located in an Egyptian horizon.

The primary and immediate targets of al-Gamā'a were the Egyptian rulers, the beneficiaries of *da'wa* were their Egyptian compatriots and, above all, they were aware that the militant cause was part of a historically and geographically *situated* process. Indeed, the Egyptian groups – here lies an analogy between al-Gamā'a and al-Jihad - did not focus their activity on global jihad: they were primarily concerned with the overthrow of the apostate regimes of Anwar al-Sadat first and Hosni Mubarak later. On the contrary, in both Islamic State's actions and narratives, the national dimension has been completely overcome, multi-ethnicity of fighters and constituency is a value and the concept of territoriality has been revisited in unprecedented ways. Unquestionably, Al-Qa'ida brought terrorism in a transnational dimension, but it performed this task focussing on international targets and enemies. The Islamic State has gone a step forward, crushing the national boundaries in their narrative, hierarchies, propaganda and, most importantly, by establishing what in this paper is called the *wilāyāt* system. After the leader of the Islamic State (IS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared a caliphate on June 29, 2014, his spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, stated that "pledging allegiance (*mubaya'a*) and giving assistance to the caliph […] has become incumbent upon all Muslims." Such pledges of allegiance (*bay'a*) have since been given by numerous radical Islamist groups from around the world.[31]

So far, the Islamic State has proclaimed the creation of many *wilāyāt*, "provinces" in Muslim majority countries. Nevertheless, very few of them imply actual territorial control (Wagemakers, 2015). Today, Islamic State provinces are: Wilāyāt Barqa, Fezzān, and Tarābulus (Provinces of Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripolitania), in Libya; Wilāya Sinā' (Province of Sinai) in Egypt; Wilāya al-Yaman (Yemen Province); Wilāya Gharb Afriqiyah (West Africa Province); Wilāya Khorasān (in Afghanistan and Pakistan); Wilāyāt Haramayn, Najd, and Hijaz, in Saudi Arabia; Wilāya al Jaza'ir (Algeria Province); Wilāya Qawqāz (Caucasus Province). Moreover, with IS's expansion, the Umma utopia has gained new significance, and the charisma has come to be most concretely located in words and in the ability to speak for the transnational Muslim community. Another difference between the last

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[31] Mokhtar Awad – Samuel Tadros, 2015. Bay'a Remorse? Wilayat Sinai and the Nile Valley. *CTC Sentinel, 8*, 6.

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century's *gam'iyāt* and the rhetoric of the Islamic State lies in the concept of *hijra*, "migration", which is now used as a notion of removing oneself, literally or metaphorically, from the present corrupt *jāīhly* society, 'ignorant of the Revelation', to live among true believers.

On the contrary, according to the ideology of the Twentieth century's Egyptian groups, the decision of bringing jihad abroad was not only a religious duty, but it also responded to the pragmatic need of protecting those youths by sending them in Afghanistan (Mubarak - Shadoud - Tamari, 1996, p. 42). This is not to say that the Islamic State lacks in pragmatism and vision. Indeed, it has been able to replace al-Qa'ida as the jihadi premium brand and overcome its predecessor from strategic, financial and communicative perspectives. Nevertheless, the Islamic State project ignores and deliberately violates national through its Islamic statehood propaganda, thus totally distancing itself from the former national jihadi groups. IS's worldview consists of a set of binary images on which the whole *dunya*, "the earthly world", relies. According to Andrew Craig[32], some images have a fundamental function. The images with harmful intentions are the Barbarian image (Arab Monarchies), which has a superior capability but inferior culture; the Degenerate image (the West), which is similar to the Barbarian image but with superior capability; an Enemy image (Iran) with relatively equal capability and culture; a Dependent of the Enemy image (Shias) that has inferior capability and culture but are under the protection of a very capable Enemy Image (Cottam, 1994).

The recourse to sets of opposition like *muʾmin/kāfir*, *taqwā/fasad*, *muslim-murtad*[33] is a shared characteristic among both national and transnational jihadi groups. Nevertheless, the Twentieth century jihadists tend to locate these antonyms on the national horizon, while the Islamic State uses them in the framework of the communicative battle against both the near and the far enemy.[34]

On the contrary, the set of images of the Egyptian Islamic Group and the other Twentieth Century's *gam'iyāt* was much more limited and focussed on the apostate regimes that ruled

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[32] Andrew Craig (2014). *The Smiling, Scented Men: The Political Worldview of the Islamic State of Iraq, 2003-2013*. Pullman, Washington State: Washington State University, 38.

[33] Respectively: believer/unbeliever, piety/corruption or decadence, Muslim/apostate.

[34] It is worth noting that each couple of antonyms has its origins in the classical Islamic doctrine, but the contemporary jihadi discourse seized them in unprecedented ways.

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they own countries. In this respect, even in the case of attacks on tourists, the primary aim was always to weaken the economy of the State. In order to attract social allies, jihadists articulate their worldview in a language akin to Hungtington's "clash of civilization", whereby mobilization is regarded as a response to insidious Western desire to undermine the culture of Muslim societies.[35] Nevertheless, they do it differently in different periods and analysing this variation could shed light on the evolution of the multiple jihadi narratives.

The response of the State

Beside the national perspective of the group, the second component of the abovementioned synergy, which made it possible for IG to undertake a process of disengagement and de-radicalization, was the perceptive reaction of the Mubarak regime. Indeed, the national horizon of the Twentieth century Egyptian jihadi wave found a correspondence in the reaction of the Egyptian government, which activated a balance of repression, dialogue and selective inducements. When the imprisoned leaders declared the unilateral ceasefire in 1997, there was no coordination with the State, which in fact gave several negative signals and showed a high degree of suspicion. By 1998, the state started interacting with the IG, and this was the beginning of the de-repression period (Ashour 2007). Security officials begun to soften the measures targeting IG members inside most of prisons. In the period 1999-2000, prison visits, which had been banned since 1993, were gradually allowed, and detention conditions slowly improved. Nevertheless, it was only in December 2001, after the turning point of 9/11, that the regime's policies towards al-Gamā'a took another level and the State inaugurated an unprecedented coordination with the IG leadership. Indeed, the IG leaders were allowed to tour the prisons to spread their revised ideology, the state media gave extensive coverage of the transformations, and the regime went as far as funding and disseminating the IG books of recantation. Despite these initiatives, some scholars argued that the Egyptian government in fact missed several opportunities to foster the process, and welcomed the new attitude of the IG only after a prolonged period of hesitation.[36]

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[35] Hisham Kandil (2011). Islamizing Egypt? Testing the limits of Gramscian counterhegemonic strategies. *Theory and Society*, *40*(1), 41.

[36] Jane Harrigan – Hamed El-Said (2013). *Deradicalizing Violent Extremists: Counter-Radicalization and Deradicalization Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States*. Abingdon Oxford and New York: Routledge.

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Unquestionably, however, after 9/11 the message that the regime of Hosni Mubarak wanted to send to the United States and the West was that it was successful in co-opting a former ally of al-Qaida, making it innocuous and removing 15,000 to 20,000 potential supporters from its camp. On the contrary, this is extremely unlikely to happen in the case of the Islamic State. Indeed, not only Dai'sh fighters and constituency are not nationally or ethnically homogeneous, but also do not have a sufficiently strong and farsighted nation-state interlocutor ready to undertake the set of initiatives that Egyptian government undertook in the Nineties.

The importance of the collective and organizational level

Beside the national dimension of group's interests and the response of the State, the third conjuncture that made the de-radicalization process possible was that they occurred at the organizational and collective level, and not at the individual one. Indeed, what is likely to occur at the individual level is merely disengagement derived from disillusionment[37], especially because IS leaders seem to have abandoned the fundamental Islamic norm of *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa alnaḥi 'an al-munkar*, "Command the good and forbid the evil", whereas the collective dimension is a prerequisite for a complete process of political de-radicalization.

In this respect, leadership's influence plays a major role. The Islamic State organization has had several leadership changes over time, experiencing three primary leaders over the past decade. The founding leader of al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was a personalized and charismatic (i.e., attention seeking, malleable goals) leader. For this reason, AQI/ISIL suffered following his death in 2006 due to his lack of information sharing and succession planning among top commanders.

Organizations led by personalized leaders tend to suffer following the removal of that leader, as they have failed to adequately plan the succession within their top management team.[38] This did not happen in the case of the Islamic Group, in which each emir followed the orthopraxis of consulting the *shura* and effectively dissimulating the gap between top ranks

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[37] Anne Speckhard – Ahmet S. Yayla (2015). Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *9*(6), p. 101.

[38] Gina Ligon – Mackenzie Harms – John Crowe – Leif Lundmark – Pete Simi, (2014). The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant: Branding, Leadership Culture and Lethal Attraction. Final Report prepared for the Department of Homeland Science and Technology Directorate's Office of University Programs, award number #2012-ST-061-CS0001. College Park, MD: START.

and new recruits. Indeed, for a process of organizational and collective de-radicalization to be effective, it must occur in a top-down perspective. As far as the effects of collective de-radicalization are concerned, in 2009, after some major corpuses of recantations had been published. Abu Qatada[39] commented on these transformations by saying in an interview: "The impact of these retreats on us is worse than 100,000 American soldiers".[40] In addition, several Islamist leaders and ideologues have argued that without the IG's de-radicalization process, there would not have been an al-Jihad one, which ended in 2010.

Moreover, the case of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) shows that it has been largely influenced by the two Egyptian examples, thus demonstrating that a national process has the potential to impact on different socio-political scenarios in neighbouring countries. This suggests a domino effect hypothesis that can be a subject of future research.

Conclusions

The comparison between the Egyptian al-Gamā'a al-Islāmiya, which has been active during the last three decades of the Twentieth Century, and the *wilāyat* system of the contemporary Islamic State, revealed that a de-radicalization process similar to that undergone by al-Gamā'a is no longer conceivable in the case of the Islamic State. This depends on three main reasons, the same that made it possible for al-Gamā'a.

Firstly, the Islamic Group, along with al-Jihad and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, had specifically national interests and expectations, which is no longer true for IS.

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[39] Abu Qatada al-Filastini is a Jordanian Salafi cleric Qatada accused of having links to terrorist organizations and repeatedly imprisoned in the United Kingdom and Jordan, where courts found him innocent of multiple terrorism charges.
He was deported to Jordan on 7 July 2013, after the UK and Jordanian governments agreed and ratified a treaty satisfying the need for clarification that evidence gained through torture would not be used against him in his forthcoming trial.
On 26 June 2014, Abu Qatada was found not guilty by a Jordan court of terrorism charges relating to an alleged 1998 plot. He remained in prison pending a verdict that was due September 2014 on a second alleged plot. Furthermore, on 24 September 2014, a panel of civilian judges sitting at Amman State Security Court cleared him of being involved in a thwarted plot aimed at Western and Israeli targets in Jordan during the millennium celebrations in 2000. Since February 2012, Abu Qatada has become *persona non grata* in the United States, Belgium, Spain, France, Germany, Italy and Algeria.
In more than one occasion, he expressed extremist views. In October 1999 for instance, he gave a sermon to his congregation at London's Finsbury Park mosque in which he told his congregation that American citizens "should be attacked, wherever they were" and that "there was no difference between English, Jewish and American people". See: The sayings and sermons of Abu Qatada al-Filistini, The Week, February 7, 2012: [http://www.theweek.co.uk/abu-qatada/45114/the-sayings-and-sermons-of-abu-qatada-al-filistini].
[40] Adel Majid, 2009. Ḥiwwār Ma' al-Sheikh Abu Qatada min Dākhil al-Suǧun al-Britanniya ["An Interview with Sheikh Abu Qatada from within British Prisons"]. *Minbar al-Tawhid*, June 5.

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Secondly, the Twentieth Century *gam'iyāt* had a definite interlocutor, a State, be it Egypt or Libya, which had been able to react to the cease-fire announced by the groups through an effective management of selective inducements, while the Islamic State could not rely on the same kind of institutions.

Finally, in the framework of the Islamic State's influence, de-radicalization – or, more frequently, disengagement - happens only at an individual level, whereas in order to be politically effective it should happen in a collective and organizational dimension.

For all these reasons, rulers of Muslim-majority countries should understand the potential boomerang effect of letting their own jihadists go abroad to fight with the Islamic State. Indeed, by doing so, they may well distance the immediate danger, but a potential ground for dialogue - the national one - will disappear simultaneously. Like a boomerang, foreign fighters are likely to return to their motherlands with unprecedented tactical and operational skills.[41]

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[41] For an extensive analysis of the risk embodied by the returnees, see: Byman, D. (2015). The Homecomings: What Happens when Arab Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria Return? *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 38*(8), 581-602.

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