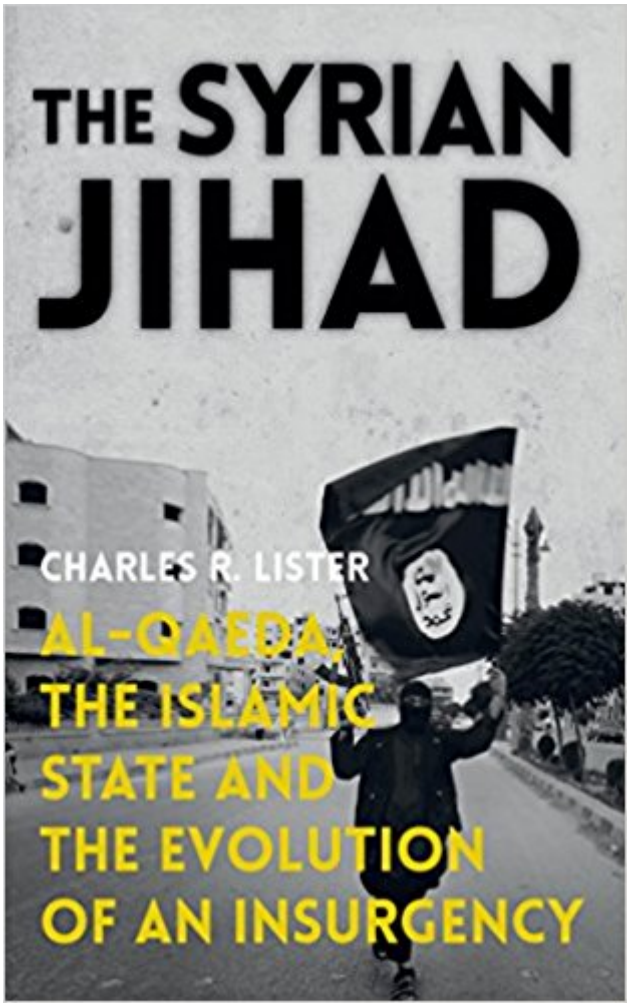
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The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, The Islamic State And The Evolution Of An Insurgency



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Synopsis

The eruption of the anti-Assad revolution in Syria has had many unintended consequences, among which is the opportunity it offered Sunni jihadists to establish a foothold in the heart of the Middle East. That Syria's ongoing civil war is so brutal and protracted has only compounded the situation, as have developments in Iraq and Lebanon. Ranging across the battlefields and international borders have been dozens of jihadi Islamist fighting groups, of which some coalesced into significant factions such as Jabhat al Nusra and the Islamic State.This book assesses and explains the emergence since 2011 of Sunni jihadist organizations in Syria's fledgling insurgency, charts their evolution and situates them within the global Islamist project. Unprecedented numbers of foreign fighters have joined such groups, who will almost certainly continue to host them. Thus, external factors in their emergence are scrutinized, including the strategic and tactical lessons learned from other jihadist conflict zones and the complex interplay between Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and how it has influenced the jihadist sphere in Syria. Tensions between and conflict within such groups also feature in this indispensable volume.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Having read 1/3 of the book so far, I can say it provides good details regarding the events that gave rise to the Syrian revolution, as well as the early emergence of the Al Nusra Front and eventually IS. I say "good" because I feel the author provides only a very brief summary of the economic and social issues that sparked the revolution, provides little discussion on the larger backdrop of the Arab Spring, and provides only a general summary of Al Nusra / IS's progenitor, AQI. Recommend this book be read in concert with Black Flags by Joby Warrick (which is more about AQI and how it eventually develops into IS) Black Flags focuses on AQI, but very little on Al Nusra/IS emergence in Syria, while The Syrian Jihad is the exact opposite.I also caution potential buyers that the author assumes the reader already has a general understanding of the socio-political and religious issues of the Middle East. Having studied the regional history and culture extensively, it was not difficult to follow the significance of the details written by Lister, i.e. Alawite / Shia vs. Sunni dichotomy; relationship of Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria in the 20th and 21st centuries; reasons behind intervention by countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar; etc. If you are not familiar with the region, then I recommend first reading books like Black Flags which require less background knowledge. Alternatively, a great book that will provide good understanding of the region is A Concise History of the Middle East by Goldschmitt. I suppose having "Google Search" available might alleviate this, but you may end up spending a considerable amount of time researching background information.

Overall, this is a very informative telling of the Syrian Civil War in relation to the role that jihadists have played. That said, it suffers from a total lack of concision. Parts of the story flow very nicely and others are bogged down in needless information that only serves to distract the reader. A solid editing could result in a 5 star rating. As it stands right now, a 3 star rating is generous considering how tedious the reading can be.To offer a few examples, I do not need the name of a suicide bomber who blew himself up in X location on X date in the body of the text. It is totally irrelevant to the "big picture" telling of the jihadist role in the war. If the author wants to include this factoid, put it in a footnote. The same goes for mentioning, by name, low to mid level jihadist functionaries. It's a 500+ page book, mentioning a person by name who does not re-appear or make some significant contribution to the story is irrelevant information which only serves to distract. Not only does it distract, it actively confuses. It is very hard to keep track of any major players when dozens of names are being thrown at you each time you pick up the book; the average reader simply doesn't need this information in the body of the text. The same goes for naming all the smaller scale militias which took part in an action. Repeatedly referencing names that are all very, very similar can only serve to confuse the reader who is not intimately acquainted with the breath of rebel groups which

have operated in Syria over the last 5 years. It's very hard to keep track of who is who. I find myself glossing over whole sections, only to find out that when I've finished a paragraph I have no idea who did what to whom.In short, the book is overwhelmed and overburdened with irrelevant information to only serves to distract and confuse. Moving large portions of information into the footnotes would make the story flow much better and serve to the purpose of furthering the understanding of the reader.

I read quite a bit of middle eastern politics and especially terrorism. Lister's book is the best treatment I've seen of the situation in Syria. Nothing else even comes close. Despite a hundred pages of references, notes and index, the truth is that Lister knows so much because he has exclusive interview access with hundreds of sources who have trusted him to tell their story. If you want to know what is happening in Syria, read this book. HOWEVER, the book comes with a high standard of expectation on the reader. If this is a new topic area for you, you will want to keep a Syrian map at your side and a notepad for sketching out the many dozens of jihadist groups that are mentioned.Lister's book really points out the hypocrisy of our undeveloped policy in Syria. Do we want the regime gone? Yes. But are we willing to spill our own blood to accomplish that? No. So how do we do it? Well, we could partner with the Saudis to fund jihadi organizations to fight the regime. Wait - didn't we try that in Afghanistan already? What was the result? Oh yes, the Taliban and al-Qaeda.Lister's book has all of the raw data necessary to understand the delicate framework of the on-again off-again alliances of the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, and of course the Islamic State. We say we are only funding and providing weapons to the "moderate" jihadists, but those weapons are being traded and bartered among groups with great liquidity as those and dozens of smaller organizations attempt to protect their families and towns from the Regime and to stave off the new pro-Regime forces from Russia, Iran, and Lebanon (Hezbollah). Each of the major players seems to have fought both with and against the others. Jabhat al-Nusra has been called al-Qaeda's branch in Syria by our own state department, and yet we simultaneously treat them as our great hope in defeating the Islamic State.Thank you, Charles Lister, for spending so much of your time and energy getting this story out to the rest of us!

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