

Polemical and Fratricidal Jihadists: A Historical Examination of Debates, Contestation and Infighting Within the Sunni Jihadi Movement



While historical examples of internal tensions show that intra-Jihadi conflict is not unprecedented, the contemporary conflict between al-Qaida and the Islamic State is unique in terms of scope and impact



Since its emergence in the 1960s, the Jihadi movement has continuously experienced internal tensions harming the Jihadi project



The scale of tensions has varied with examples of peaceful competitive dynamics and military infighting



The sources of conflict vary too: Jihadists have contested one another for religious and ideological reasons, for power and for resources



Conflict has occurred on an intra- and inter-group level



Events in Afghanistan in the late 1980s and early 1990s had critical implications for the future development of the Jihadi movement



They disagree about scripture, strategy, political objectives, organisation and leadership

The 1989 military defeat at Jalalabad led to some Jihadists' retreat from the battlefield

The death of Azzam and the disappearance of bin Laden implied a leadership vacuum



Jihadists spend considerable efforts and resources handling intra-Jihadi relations and navigating their competitive internal dynamics

The result was an increasing dominance of the theologically rigid youth