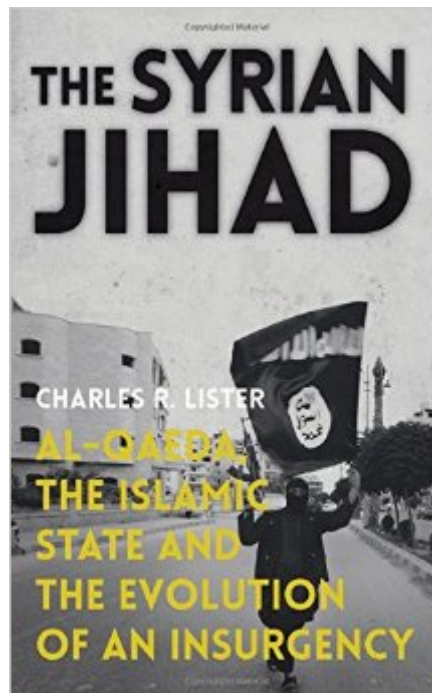


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The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, The Islamic State And The Evolution Of An Insurgency



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

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.

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.

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