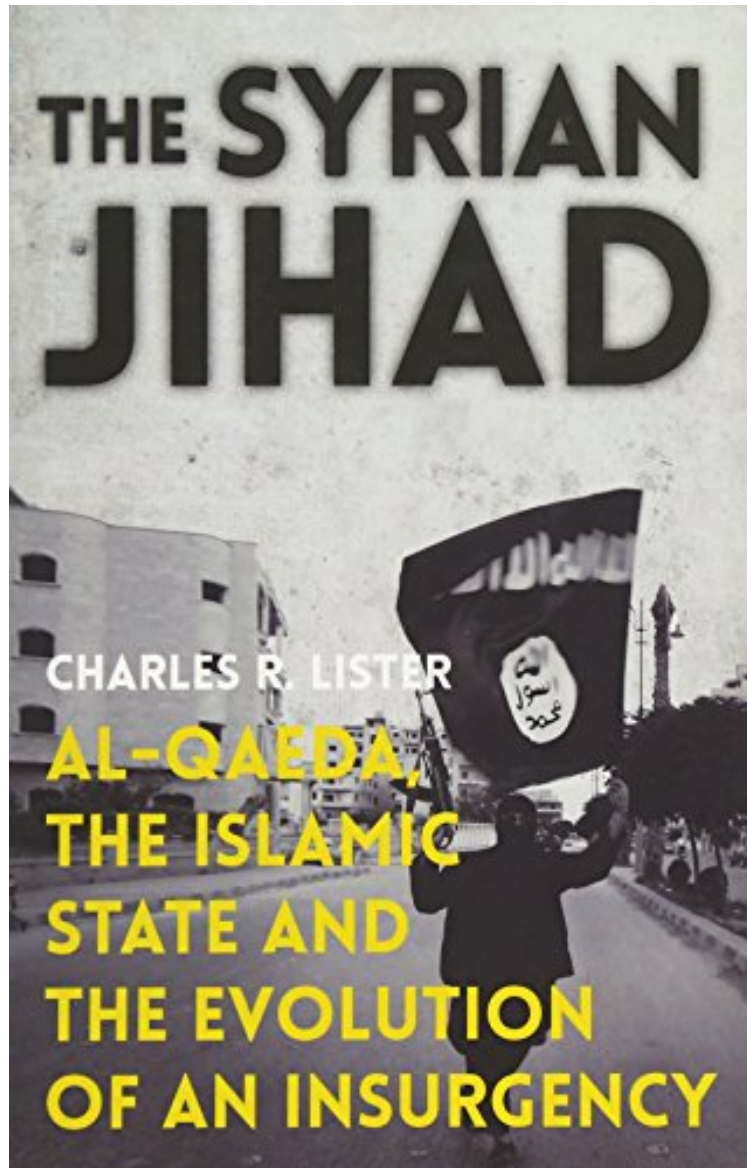


[Free] The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency

The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency

Charles R. Lister

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Charles R. Lister : The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Overall, very good book. But, there are some issues to consider....By NSHaving 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.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A very informative book which is dire need of ruthless editing. By JamesOverall, 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.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Sunni jihadists - the enemies and the allies By Gary Warner 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!

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.

"Lister's knowledge of the various groups is impressive ... [The Syrian Jihad] is an indispensable guide to the different jihadi factions." -- New York Times
"Lister has done yeoman's work in tracing how the peaceful uprising that began in 2011 was hijacked by an Islamist insurgency that now threatens global security ... as [he] persuasively argues, ISIS is itself a product of Mr. Assad's evil regime." -- Wall Street Journal
"He wants to tell the story of the emergence and evolution of the struggle of Sunni jihadists and their Syrian Salafist allies against President Bashar al-Assad, and he tells it with exceptional erudition and lucidity... [Lister's] wide-ranging access gives the book a vitality that combines with the author's comprehensive analysis of Syria, its political structures and its history to give the most detailed account yet written of how Sunni jihadists have come to dominate an (admittedly loose) anti-regime movement... Lister has produced a work that is required reading for both experts and the general reader alike."--Prospect Magazine
"The Syrian Jihad is an insightful and comprehensive account of Syria's violent descent into civil war and the rise of Al-Qaeda's offspring in that war. This is essential reading for understanding the most difficult and complex international crisis facing the world community today." -- Bruce Riedel, Brookings Institution Intelligence Project, and author of *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of the Global Jihad*
"Lister ably illuminates the jihadist labyrinth, tracing the roles of Chechens and Uzbeks, and crucially, of the Iraqi groups preceding ISIL ... The Syrian Jihad is at once the definitive guide to such groups and the most comprehensive blow-by-blow military account of the war thus far." -- The National
"Charles is the Syria expert whose work other Syria experts read. He uniquely combines strategic insight and forensic analytical skills to tell it like it is on the ground and -- crucially -- foretell what will happen next. On something as complex as the Syrian crisis, Lister's voice is authoritative." -- Gareth Bayley, UK Special Representative for Syria
"There can be few people better qualified than Charles Lister to describe and explain the evolution of extremist groups in Syria and the complexities of the insurgency. He does so with great skill and authority in *The Syrian Jihad*, an invaluable aid to understanding what will surely be a defining conflict of our age." -- Richard Barrett, former Director of Global Counter Terrorism Operations for the British Secret Intelligence Service, and coordinator of the United Nations Al-Qaeda-Taliban Monitoring Team
"A wonderful book which sets the standard for our understanding of the course and implications of Syria's war. Lister's writing is detailed and reliable, and captures the complexity of the conflict as well as its broad themes. *The Syrian Jihad* ranges more broadly across Islamist rebel landscape than other books currently available on the topic and will make an enduring contribution." -- Marc Lynch, author of *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy Across the Middle East*
"Charles Lister's book answers urgent questions about the modern Levant: where did the Syrian uprising come from, who have been its key actors and how has the revolutionary movement, especially the Islamist elements, evolved under the enormous pressures of violence and external powers? Lister himself knows the Islamist factions very well, and his book will become a standard reference." -- Robert Ford, former US Ambassador to Syria
"Lister's book will certainly become a classic of the literature on the Syrian civil war. This richly-documented study actually consists of two intertwined histories, as the account of the Jihadi insurgency, a tour de force in its own right, is complemented with in-depth analysis of the broader military developments."- Thomas Pierret, Lecturer in Contemporary Islam, University of Edinburgh and author of *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama from Coup to Revolution*
"Charles Lister offers compelling arguments woven together in a convincing and readable narrative. Drawing heavily on first-hand interviews, this ambitious and superbly organised account of the trajectories of Syria's various jihadi groups ranks it among the best books on how ISIS and Al Qaeda metastasized in the brutal chaos of the Syrian war." -- Andrew Tabler, Martin J. Gross Fellow in the Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute
"The sheer volume of [Lister's] research, interviews, field visits and intimate familiarity with the various Syrian players leave no stone unturned." --PassBlue.com
"The Syrian Jihad is a comprehensive and authentic history of the Syrian jihad, month by month. It gives an unprecedented insight into this violent world. With his unmatched scholarship, Lister has written the best book on the Syrian jihad." --The Washington Book About the Author
Charles R. Lister is a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution's Doha Center. He was formerly head of the Middle East and North Africa section at IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre. From January 2016, he will be based in Washington, DC.