The Salafi Jihadist concept of political order stands in stark contrast to the concepts that define the contemporary international system. The idea that the Islamic community is divided among varying sovereign states and not governed by their ideological understanding of sharia, is deeply problematic. More pressing to the central question that this book addresses is how this system is maintained, such that by its very character it prevents unity and legitimacy of the Salafi Jihadist variety. In part, as it has been argued in the preceding chapters, it is hegemonic power and increasingly other great and emerging powers that help to maintain the status quo order. This chapter investigates how this order emerged and observes how it presents significant obstacles to the Salafi Jihadists’ project that forces jihadists to develop international strategies to counter the international order.

Prior to the nineteenth century hegemonic power was dispersed, emerging from multiple competing centres. The structure of the international system was contested, with numerous actors seeking to exert influence over portions of it. Empires of varying sizes and material capabilities grew and contracted, challenging each other over geographical space and resources. Sovereignty was often flexible and borders porous. No international system as it is presently understood existed. There had yet to be developed a largely agreed upon idea of what the character of international should be. British imperialism, prior to, and American hegemony after World War Two, contributed to the making of an international order. This order more acutely defines and enforces the sovereignty of states than had been the case in previous eras. Equally, it permitted the emergence of a powerful hegemonic actor capable of underwriting the system and inviting others to participate in its management. All of which provide obstacles to the Salafi Jihadists’ objectives.
This has had the effect of taking the conflict over unity and legitimate governance out of the Islamic sphere and into the world at large, as the locus of power has shifted to a more central position.

The modern international system is the result of a long historical process understood as developing in the seventeenth century with the creation of nation-states in Europe. However, it is only recently that the system of sovereign states has been consolidated in such an unambiguous fashion. It was only at the end of the Cold War that sovereignty emerged in practice as well as theory. In this contemporary order there is an apprehension of the violation of state sovereignty regardless of its character. It was only at this time that formal empires ceased to exist, creating a state system that was absent of imperial organisation which had begun to break down in the twentieth century. The US as a powerful hegemonic actor is instrumental in aiding the existence of the contemporary world order. Salafi Jihadism can be understood to be seeking to achieve an alternative world order based on its ideological understanding of Islam. These influential non-state actors clearly play a powerful role in international politics. They resist the state and the international system in general. Salafi Jihadists by their rhetoric and action demonstrate the primacy of the state and the international system along with US power as an obstacle to the Salafi Jihadist enterprise. Since the failure of Pan-Arabism to unify the Middle East in the twentieth century, there has been no credible discourse or assertion for unity in the Arab/Islamic world. Additionally, since the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, there has been no effective leadership qualified through religious legitimacy. The current international system is characterised, in part, by nation-state sovereignty and US hegemony. It is argued that this presents significant obstacles to Muslim unity and religiously sanctioned governance.

The current impasse between the US, its allies and Salafi Jihadism, has less to do with values, globalisation, Israel-Palestine, economic disenfranchisement, despotism or a particular foreign policy. Without taking an apologist position, that ignores the realities of these issues and the severe impact they have on the region, the rise of Salafi Jihadism is better understood as related to the realities of the international system that the US aids in maintaining. The contemporary order impedes long-standing attempts at Islamic, particularly Arab, unity and efforts to establish God’s sovereignty in a manner that is more profound than in previous historical settings. There has been a long-standing search for unity in the Islamic, particularly Arab, world and a quest for legitimacy expressed in religious terms. Al-Qaeda has inherited the mantle of this drive and has effectively created an ideology for taking power and achieving this
through violent means. As was previously asserted, there are alternate Islamic concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy and indeed international politics, that do not necessarily correspond to Western IR approaches. Thus, the Jihadist concept of order differs from that of the contemporary Western understanding, and al-Qaeda’s vision of order is derived from Islamic concepts of the international, sovereignty, statehood and legitimacy.

Salafi Jihadism cannot be understood in the same manner as the various movements which challenge the neo-liberal world order. It is derived from long historical trends and deep ideological roots based on divine concepts of extra-rational agency that cannot be said to be the case for contemporary movements that challenge the status quo. The US maintains a powerful hegemonic position that aids in keeping the international system, characterised by nation-state sovereignty, in place. This is a major obstacle to a project which seeks Muslim unity and religiously legitimised governance. These Islamic notions of order have a broad church of followers with varying origins and local grievances, but al-Qaeda has successfully reduced their differences to the lowest common denominator: (1) A unified Islamic community ruled by religiously sanctioned governance is the solution to all grievances, and (2) The US and the international system are major obstacles to that realisation. It would be irrelevant which hegemonic power is currently helping to keep the status quo in place. Whoever maintains the system is a possible target for Salafi Jihadist aggression. China, Russia and the European countries as powerful states have come under attack by Salafi Jihadists, yet, none has been the subject of the degree of ire and pride of place in the Salafi Jihadist rhetoric as has the US. The result of 9/11 has been a strengthened resolve of the US, in contrast to the Salafi Jihadist strategy, to preserve the status quo of existing states and the international order. Indeed, the creation of an Islamist international has created a need for greater cooperation between powerful states in opposing a movement that threatens the current order. In this, it is evident that Salafi Jihadists will inevitably target any state that aids in maintaining the current order.

9.1 Constructing world order: From the World Wars and Cold War to the new world order and 9/11

The present international order is a result of two order building projects. The first, the creation of a nation-state system and the associated principles of sovereignty and legitimacy. The second, the construction of a liberal world order by the US and UK. Building upon the liberal
principles established through the power of the British Empire, the US has aided in building an international order characterised by state sovereignty, and it is American power, both soft and hard, that has been essential in maintaining the existing status quo. The nation-state system that was created in Europe has since encompassed the globe and self-determination along with mutual recognition of sovereignty among states has enforced the primacy of the state itself. Despite the occasional violation of the norms of state sovereignty, the state remains the most agreed upon component of international order. In the post-colonial period the state has been the compulsory model for independence and this has helped to shape the contemporary international system.

However, what best characterises the US is the concept of an informal empire where the dominant power limits self-determination and forces states to act within the principles of the emerging world order. The US in this context is a hegemon. It is recognised that hegemony may be defined by different qualities in various historical settings and that each case is unique. In the contemporary era this hegemony is characterised by a liberal world order and part of this order is the division of the world into nation-states. This order limits the freedom of action of both states and non-state actors. Salafi Jihadists who seek to establish an idealised unified Islamic state find the US, as a key provider of the status quo, to be an obstacle to this objective. The post-World War Two order is a consolidation of the nation-state system that has been organised under US dominance. It is this dominance or, as it is understood here, hegemony of the US in this period that has increasingly insisted on the maintenance of the status quo system of nation-states.

The US has sought to support and maintain the liberal world order since World War Two and is still engaged, if not more so since 9/11, in ensuring the continued existence of this system. Following the World War Two, international order was provided by the cooperative efforts of the victorious powers, whereby they attempted to supervise and police the world. However, the onset of the Cold War quickly changed the nature of international politics, dividing the world into two ideologically opposed camps, the capitalist West and the Communist East, and as well the non-aligned world. During this time the US proclaimed itself to be the ‘leader of the free world’ and a ‘shining city on the hill’ that inspired those to democracy and freedom. Beyond this politicised terminology, however, that attempted to provide a good versus evil discourse, the US was a hegemonic power that sought to counter the Soviet Union and communism, in general, aggressively with its own ideology that promoted a democratic liberal international order.
The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in a dramatic unexpected shift in international politics. The bipolar structure that had been the defining feature of world politics for nearly half a century was swiftly reduced to a structure where the US emerged as the sole remaining superpower. Nye asked, ‘if the old order has collapsed what will be the new distribution of power?’ For realist theorists of IR, two main ideas developed following the Cold War in response to this question. The first, that the US would withdraw from international engagement as its foreign policy makers could no longer demonstrate clear reasons for expending blood and treasure to act as a global securitising force. The opposing view insisted that the ability of the US to influence world politics would be dramatically increased and that the international order would witness a unipolar moment where the US could act unrestrained in the absence of a balancing power. The unipolar moment was short lived. The US would still act, in the post-Cold War period, as a securitising force. However, the growth of other powers would require it to play the role of a leading actor within the system that invites other powers to play within the rules and aid in supporting the international order.

For some in the Middle East the demise of the Soviet Union represented the tragic loss of a powerful patron that could not be replaced by another state. For others, however, it was a great victory over a powerful non-believer actor, which was a crucial moment in the long historical struggle between the Muslim believers led by the various caliphs and the non-believers led by imperial forces. The end of the Cold War had significant effects on the evolving nature of the Global Jihad. First, inspiring the Mujahedeen Myth, and second, leaving the US as the lone superpower. A superpower that could effectively project its power globally, and more importantly unchallenged, in its efforts to preserve the liberal international order.

The Mujahedeen Myth suggests that a band of poorly equipped but determined fighters aided by God had expelled the powerful Soviet Union from occupied Afghanistan, and this had resulted in the ultimate demise of the Soviet Empire. The Soviet Union was viewed to be the stronger of the two superpowers in terms of fighting capabilities and political will for a protracted war. Therefore, if the Mujahedeen had defeated and ultimately caused the destruction of the Soviet Union, it followed logically that the defeat of the US could be achieved as well. Bin Laden observed, ‘Russia was the head of the Communist bloc. With the disintegration of Russia, Communism withered away in Eastern Europe. Similarly, if the United States is beheaded the Arab Kingdoms
will wither away. Americans are afraid of death. They are like mice. If Russia can be destroyed the United States can also be beheaded.15

During the 1990s the Salafi Jihadist strategy began to shift. Groups prior to this had been largely nationally bound as opposed to international in their outlook, with specific grievances that could conceivably be negotiated.16 Evidently, there were numerous instances of international ‘terrorism’ prior to the end of the Cold War, however, they were directed for the most part towards their immediate targets and had yet to establish a global strategy. Following the Soviet collapse, international Islamic ‘terrorism’ began to emerge as a significant global force. The change in the organisation of the international system shifted the strategic orientation of the Global Jihad. There were no longer two superpowers to play against each other. As previously mentioned, the situation in Afghanistan is significant, not just in the promotion of a myth but equally in geostrategic and material terms. Nearly a decade of fighting in Afghanistan created a network of trained and ideologically indoctrinated Salafi Jihadists who were now free to be redeployed elsewhere. The objectives of the Salafi Jihadists to build a formidable fighting force through the Hijra had been achieved.

The modern Middle East has been subject to four distinct eras in contemporary history.17 The first era was that of the Ottomans ending after World War One and the collapse of the caliphate in 1924.18 The second era was a period of colonisation with British and French management of the region, coming to an end after World War Two and the relinquishing of colonial control.19 The third era was defined by the Cold War and Arab nationalism, ending abruptly with the collapse of the Soviet Union.20 The fourth contemporary era is defined as the period of American influence and hegemony.21 Salafi Jihadism which began to develop during the first era, in a response to increasing encounters with European powers, has changed the focus of its aggression in each of these stages. During the colonial period the message from the Salafists observed European powers as the obstacles to unity and religiously sanctioned governing. During the early part of the Cold War Salafi Jihadists focused more intently on the internal leadership of the states of the Middle East. Nasserism and the Pan-Arab discourse succeeded in limiting this aggression as it provided a concept of unity, though not legitimized through religious means. With the passing of Pan-Arabism Salafi Jihadism arose as a militant force employing the old anti-colonial discourse, not only in opposition to the superpowers, but against the indigenous leadership as well. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and continued failed efforts to remove the secular leaders of the Middle East,
Salafi Jihadism has followed with the times, attacking the guardians of the contemporary order that prevents both unification and the realization of God’s sovereignty.

9.2 Resisting world order

Much of the academic discourse regarding hegemony and resistance to the dominant hegemonic power is rooted in the study of political economy. Hegemonic stability theorists regard the US as maintaining a liberal economic world order based on largely agreed upon norms of economic practice and sovereignty. A structure that is unappealing and exploitative to some, particularly in Global South. It is conceivable to become deeply engaged in the economic and critical aspects of the conflict between Salafi Jihadism and the US by suggesting that the major opposition to US hegemony, as presented by the Salafi Jihadists, is a resistance to unequal economic practices and the cultural and materialistic aspects that accompany the liberal international world order. This deprives the Islamic world of its spiritual compass and serves as a tool of oppression by the hegemonic power. These assertions cannot be entirely dismissed. Cultural imperialism and economic hardship exist around the various parts of the world but have not produced the unique response that characterizes the Salafi Jihadist resistance to the international system and its hegemonic benefactor.

Salafi Jihadists object to the cultural contamination of the Islamic world and the economic practices that follow the liberal world order, but the resistance is less to a particular order that is described here as liberal, but rather, to any order that does not conform to their ideological understanding of Islam and prevents the emergence of such an Islamic order. Communism, as was clearly demonstrated in the origins of the Global Jihad in Afghanistan, was not acceptable as an alternative paradigm of international order. This is not just in reference to its economic principles, but more simply because the model did not fit with Salafi Jihadist prescriptions of order.

Theorists of International Political Economy (IPE) have done a great deal to advance research on counter-hegemonic movements that resist the liberal international order on the basis of unequal economic practices, and challenge the hegemonic power and the international order that it maintains. Along with this, the ‘Mcdonaldisation’ of non-Western countries and cultural imperialism are argued to disrupt societies and generate alienation from and corruption of indigenous cultural norms. These arguments are not without merit. However, Salafi Jihadism must
be conceptualised through a different lens than the other prevailing counter-hegemonic movements.

System-challenging groups reject the legitimacy of the international system and act to replace the sovereignty based system with an alternative organising principle. Violent non-state actors challenge the international system primarily by rejecting the rules on which the international system is founded and those institutions that are active in maintaining order, which manifests as a rejection of the state as the premier political unit of the system. Therefore, ‘al-Qaeda poses a challenge to the sovereignty of specific states but it also challenges the international society as a whole’. Steve Smith argues that the events of 9/11 demonstrated that states are no longer the key actors in international relations. Though it is agreed that al-Qaeda is ‘a very different kind of organisation to the state both in identity and structure’, and that this structure is the ‘antithesis of the hierarchical modern state’, it is still maintained that the state is the key actor in international relations.

Al-Qaeda is a powerful non-state actor, but its actions indicate quite the opposite of Smith’s assertions. Al-Qaeda challenges the state overtly through an aggressive militant process, not ambiguously and organically in the way the processes of globalisation and transnational corporations and institutions do. The state is an obstacle to Salafi Jihadist objectives and they have spent significant energy attempting to subvert the integrity of the states in the Islamic world. It would, therefore, appear that even in the minds of the Salafi Jihadists the state is the key actor in international politics. It is not disputed that there are numerous varieties of powerful actors in the international system and the sovereignty of the state is increasingly challenged. They have not yet, however, superseded the state in terms of relevance.

The international system, characterised by nation-states, a hegemonic actor and great powers that help to preserve it, is a significant obstacle to the Salafi Jihadist project based on Muslim unity and religiously sanctioned governance. The entrenchment of this system prevents the construction of an Islamic order. Further to this, China, Russia, India, Brazil, Japan, the European Union and other great and emerging powers may struggle over the rights, privileges and responsibilities of a leading state within the system, but they do not seek to overturn the existing order. They do not seek to change the rules of the game but, rather, labour to obtain more authority and leadership within it. There have at times emerged ambitious rulers who pursue change outside of the established parameters; however, they often face a coalition of powers who prefer to maintain the status quo. Similarly, Salafi Jihadists who
seek to challenge the status quo will face actors who are willing to work together in the interest of maintaining the international system.

Salafi Jihadists have evidently rejected the international order and asserted this resistance in religious terms, in search of a political agenda to change the existing order. It is resistance that in another historical or societal context could be expressed in secular terms. The task of this book has been to demonstrate that Salafi Jihadist resistance is both unique and common. It is based on a desire to obtain power and unity by dismantling the nation-state system in the Middle East. However, it is unique in that it is the manifestation of Islamic history and ideology with particular concepts of order that the liberal international order cannot, as Ikenberry suggested, ‘reconcile’ with.

9.3 Post-hegemonic challenges to world order

Since the 1980s scholars of IR have been debating American decline and its fading influence as a global power. This argument has yet to reach any consensus, with some scholars arguing that it is less that America is in decline but, rather, that others are on the ascent, and that the unipolar moment immediately following the Cold War and the demise of the bipolar system will result in a number of emerging great powers to rival the US. Whether or not the US is in decline and in danger of losing its hegemonic position remains unresolved in the scholarship of IR and, in particular, IPE. However, what is without dispute is the growth of China and others such as Brazil and India, as well as the significance of Europe, Japan and South Korea. However, it is the position of the US as a dominant hegemonic actor and its influence globally, particularly in maintaining the status quo of the international system, that has resulted in the conflict with Salafi Jihadism. Further, this is less to do with anything specifically American, be it values or policy. It would, therefore, seem evident that if other powerful states began to spread their influence internationally and aid in maintaining the status quo, particularly in the Arab/Islamic world, then they too would come into conflict with Salafi Jihadism and find themselves as targets in al-Qaeda’s broader global agenda.

Al Qaeda’s affiliates have attacked the citizens of numerous countries who are visiting or working in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), citing reasons related to their country’s assistance to the US in prosecuting its ‘War on Terror’ or their personal acts of aiding governments in the Islamic world they contend are illegitimate. In 2003, 41 people were killed in a series of attacks on Belgian, Spanish and Jewish sites in Casablanca. In March of 2009 four South Korean tourists were killed...
during an attack in Yemen. Thirty-eight workers at a gas plant were killed during a hostage crisis in Algeria in January of 2013. These are but a few of the many examples. Killing individuals within the MENA region speaks largely of opportunity than a particular stance towards a state. In the case of countries that would appear to be on the Islamic periphery with limited engagement with the politics of the region, but influential in the maintenance of the international system, the case of Japan and China provide insight.

Japan is not an emerging power and has since World War Two been a powerful economic actor in the international system. Japan had largely maintained a distance from the Islamic world and though it has, at least in theory, supported the ‘War on Terror’, its active participation has been cautious. Nevertheless, in 2010 Japan suffered its first attack by al-Qaeda affiliate the Brigades of Abdullah which detonated an explosive device on the hull of the M Star supertanker in the straits of Hormuz. A statement released by the organisation noted that the attacks were designed to ‘weaken the international blasphemous system that plundered the wealth of the Muslims’. This would appear to be an obvious reference to Japan’s role as a leading economic power. Prior to this, in 2003 after the invasion of Iraq, Japan came into the gaze of al-Qaeda. An operative named Abu Mohammed al-Ablaj issued a statement to the London based magazine al-Majallah: ‘Our strikes will reach the heart of Tokyo. If they want to destroy their economic power and be trampled under the feet of the combatants of Allah, let them come to Iraq.’ Affiliation with the US, interference in the Islamic world and playing a leading role in the economic layer of the international order evidently have potential consequences.

The case of China is even more pressing. Not least significantly because not only is China an emerging power but it also has its own Muslim population. China is a rising star among great powers. However, China has historically been grouped with the downtrodden of the developing world that has suffered under Western Imperialism. Its role, however, is changing. China has maintained a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of other states for over 60 years. Yet, subnational and transnational threats along with China’s increased interests abroad will undoubtedly challenge this policy of non-intervention, which is grounded substantially in a concept of world order that privileges state sovereignty. With China’s economic interests having grown exponentially on a global scale, significant Chinese economic investment has been made in Pakistan and Afghanistan, making the stability of those states critical to Chinese interests. China has as well developed an interest in maintaining the
status quo order including support for regimes that Salafi Jihadists view as apostate. As China becomes increasingly engaged outside of its own borders, it is likely that the Salafi Jihadists will be forced to focus on Chinese foreign interests in much the way the US has been targeted.42

Bin Laden in a 1998 interview expressed the al-Qaeda position on China, which would appear to conceptualise China, like the Islamic world, as oppressed by the Western powers. Equally, however, he expressed a veiled warning: ‘I often here about Chinese Muslims but since we have no direct connection with people in China and no member of our organisation comes from China, I don’t have any detailed knowledge about them. The Chinese government is not fully aware of the US and Israel. These two countries also want to usurp the resources of China. So I would suggest the Chinese government be careful of the US and the West.’43

China would appear peripheral to the Global Jihad and indeed the broader Muslim world, with the exception of the Muslim minority in the northwest province of Xinjiang known to its Muslim inhabitants as East Turkestan. Al-Qaeda has traditionally refrained from targeting China, possibly as a strategic matter of not wishing to incur the wrath of another significant power. In parallel, China has endeavoured to pre-empt any attempt by al-Qaeda to direct the Global Jihad against Chinese interests by refraining from rhetorical confrontation with the Salafi Jihadists.

In 2006 a video entitled Jihad in Eastern Turkestan appeared on a UK based Islamic website with Uighur militants displaying weapons making threats to attack the enemy (China). The video expressed clear sympathies with al-Qaeda, containing images of the 9/11 attacks, demonstrating that these militants are drawing inspiration from al-Qaeda.44 In 2008 the Turkistan Islamic Party announced its intentions to carry out jihad in China, and since has been responsible for the production of an online magazine similar to Inspire as produced by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. This Turkestan publication is written in Arabic which is not spoken in the region. This appears to be a tactic for the purpose of soliciting support from jihadist benefactors and positioning Xinjiang as a part of the Global Jihad.45

On July 5, 2009 riots erupted in the Xinjiang city of Urumqi between Muslims and ethnic Han Chinese, resulting in the deaths of 184 people.46 The riots were followed by a crackdown from Chinese authorities to restore security. From the Salafi Jihadist perspective this was viewed as the brutal oppression of Muslim people. A Chinese official, however, attempted to ease the concerns of Muslims stating, ‘measures that the
Chinese government takes to stop riots do not target any specific ethnic population but the violent crimes that aim to split China and mar the ethnic relationships. We hope Muslim compatriots will understand the truth."\(^{47}\)

During the same month the al-Qaeda affiliated group al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb expressed solidarity with the Chinese Muslims threatening to kill 50,000 Chinese workers in Algeria. Later, in October of 2009, al-Qaeda spokesmen Abu Yahya al-Libi condemned Chinese actions and invited the Muslims of Xinjiang to join the Global Jihad: ‘There is no way to remove injustice and oppression without a true return to their religion and serious preparation for jihad in the path of God the almighty and carry weapons in the face of those Chinese invaders. It is the duty for Muslims to stand by their wounded and oppressed brothers in East Turkestan and support them with all they can.’\(^{48}\)

Al-Libi, in a video entitled *East Turkestan the Forgotten Wound*, laid out the specific grievances al-Qaeda has with China in relation to Xinjiang: (1) Trying to dissolve Islamic identity in East Turkestan just as Europe did in Andalusia and the Jews are doing in Palestine; (2) Colonising Xinjiang with Han Chinese and aiding them with jobs, land and money; (3) Limiting the growth of Muslim populations with abortions and taxation; (4) Robbing the Muslims of natural resources; (5) The killing of 200,000 Muslims; (6) Separating Muslim women from their families by exporting them to work in factories in the east causing them to lose ties with their family and culture and turn to atheism or kill themselves.\(^{49}\) The situation in China additionally caught the attention of al-Qaeda central with al-Zawahiri associating China with the traditional powers and linking it to the Global Jihad as a status quo maintenance actor. Al-Zawahiri stated: ‘Respect for the principles of the United Nations basically means ruling by other than sharia and also means recognition of Israel’s control of Palestine and Russia’s control of Chechnya and indeed all of the Muslim Caucasus, and it means recognition of Spain’s control over Ceuta and Melilla and China’s control over East Turkestan, because all these states are members of the UN whose charter calls for respecting the unity and integrity of those territories.’\(^{50}\) From this it can be observed that China is increasingly attracting attention from al-Qaeda and potentially could be observed as a target, as it behaves as other great powers which help to maintain the status quo.

Despite receiving limited attention, due to the killing of Bin Laden in Pakistan by US forces, the Turkistan Islamic Party released another video in May of 2011 entitled *Letter to the Chinese People*, expressing similar
grievances to those espoused by al-Libi. This would seem to be a case of standard method of operation for al-Qaeda and its associates, linking a local plight to the Global Jihad, in what is referred to as ‘glocalisation’. Where al-Qaeda has been historically reluctant to engage with China, emerging realities of international politics will undoubtedly cause al-Qaeda to readjust its strategy. As China becomes more global and its interests spread, it too will become a target of al-Qaeda as it aids in maintaining the status quo.

Though the Xinjiang movement and an attack on a Japanese oil tanker at present cannot be compared to al-Qaeda’s operations against the US and its allies, it demonstrates that any actor who plays a leading role in the international system, regardless of direct engagement with the core of the Islamic world, is a potential target. Not because it has offended the Salafi Jihadists directly but because they potentially stand, along with the US, Europe and to a lesser extent Russia, as obstacles to their objectives. It is not necessarily the values or the policies expressed by states that lead them into conflict with the jihadists, it is as much the role they play in the international system.

9.4 Conclusion

Two concepts of sovereignty have come to be contested in the twenty-first century, which has affected many around the world and has come to alter international relations. The first is the international order characterised by the sovereignty of individual states. Although the US and, to a lesser extent, other great and emerging powers assist in keeping this system in place, the notion of sovereignty and order that has increasingly been consolidated since World War Two has been the general consensus of the governing powers around the world. This system based on the early European model is not the result of a single grand event. Rather, it has evolved through the wars of religion in Europe, colonisation and decolonisation, the fall of empires, the World Wars, the Cold War and the post-Cold War period. This slow moving process has come to engulf the world at large.

In competition with this system is another notion of sovereignty rooted in the Islamic tradition. Salafi Jihadists envision an order based on the days of early Islam where the community of believers was unified in a single political entity and governed by a religiously sanctioned ruler.

The international system as it stands prevents the realisation of this Salafi Jihadist order. Its very nature ensures that there can be no unification of the Islamic, particularly Arab, world on which to impose an
Islamic political order based on Salafi Jihadist understandings of God’s Sovereignty and Islamic practices.

Although there have been many assertions as to why Salafi Jihadism is in conflict with the US, an investigation of the contemporary world order and looking to historical and emerging orders detract from the notion that what Salafi Jihadists object to is anything that is particularly American, apart from its unprecedented power and a willingness to maintain the existing international order. Numerous factors undoubtedly have had an effect on the rise of Salafi Jihadism and its continued existence. It is not debated that Israel, modernity, US culture and foreign policy, and the process of globalisation serve as valuable tools in recruiting Salafi Jihadist foot soldiers. However, when the question is observed as a whole, rather than in specific geographical or temporal spaces, the Global Jihad can be understood at the systemic level.

Islamic concepts of the international, sovereignty, statehood and legitimacy vary. However, the Salafi Jihadist concept is in large part incompatible with the existing order. The Islamic concepts of the international that al-Qaeda have employed in the construction of its ideology do not conform to existing orthodox concepts of the international and the existing world order. Whatever the features of the current order in social, economic, cultural or material terms, the premier variable which prevents an Islamic order is the division of the Islamic world into nation-state units and the willingness of the hegemon, along with other powers, to maintain this system. As long as this is the case, unity and legitimate sovereignty, as prescribed by the Salafi Jihadist understanding, is impossible to establish.

At the present time the US remains the premier hegemonic power in the international system despite the prophecies of its decline. This has ensured that it has pride of place in the Salafi Jihadist war. Its power, willingness to assert it both in material and ideational terms and the willingness of great and secondary powers to operate within the confines of the system it underwrites, makes it a necessary target. However necessary US power may be to the maintenance of the international system, on its own the US is not necessarily the key variable over time. Hegemonic powers have preceded it and they will quite possibly follow it. It is, then, a combination of factors in a given context of time. The US is the leading hegemonic actor at a time when the international system is more consolidated than it has historically been, more agreed upon than it has been and, therefore, more capable of restricting the freedom of action of those who envision an alternative order. It is not exclusively about US policies or values but, rather, its particular position, and
willingness to play a role in a time period where the international system is defined as it is. In short, whoever maintains this order is engaged in the task of preventing the emergence of a transnational Islamic state, whether this is by design or simply as a side effect of the nature of international order. The US is at a crossroads in history where long-standing Islamic ideas regarding unity and legitimacy intersect with a system that the US aids in maintaining. This has stopped the long running process from continuing. If in the future other great powers become more substantially invested in maintaining the status quo, they will also find themselves in the position of encountering Salafi Jihadist resistance. It is not the character of the actor that is in question, but rather the position that actor, and increasingly actors, maintains that brings it into conflict with Salafi Jihadism.