

THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL BELIEFS OF ISIS

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ABSTRACT

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This project attempts to dissect the existence of a popular Islamist insurgency know in short as I.S.I.S, whose initials mean State of Iraq and Syria. It looks into the roots of the jihadist extremist militant group, its mission, how it plans and executes its objectives, how its actions have affected the rest of the world and what the future holds for it. The thesis wishes to figure out why the ISIS has attracted so much attention from all over the world. The various sections of this thesis chronologically shed light on the importance of the topic of ISIS, the roots of the organization, and how has the group managed to use savagery as psychological warfare. This thesis will also cover the responses to ISIS from other Islamic states and Western countries. The thesis concludes by stating the future for ISIS in Religious and Political Conflict in the Middle East.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

ISIS: Introduction

The Islamic State is a self-styled piece of history that traces its emergence from many political, social, and economic tensions that have disturbed the Gulf region and beyond. It has had an effect on the division of territory as imposed on the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire by single handily establishing a large area of territory for itself¹. However, the overall impacts of the ISIS will ultimately, flow much beyond the quest for territory to existing government policies and concepts, including national identity and sovereignty.

This organisation remains prominent because of the violent manner through which it acquires control over the region and the ruthless antics it is using rule its colonies. The group has succeeded to build broad support for its course beyond the front line fighters effectively. It has managed to convert and acquire a significant number of recruits who are willing and ready to protect the group's security and soon graduate into authoritarian soldiers who patrol streets that are under ISIS control.

¹ Malcolm Anderson, (1996). *Frontiers*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

The organisation is a largely visible but rather clandestine too.² Since 2011, there are few tangible facts about the structure of its leadership, despite the group's large amount of analysis and publicity it has managed to generate. The picture remains obscure, thanks to the movement's misleading propaganda and also the people who through questionable accounts, have said that they are familiar with ISIS. The organisation has acquired dominance speedily in the field of terrorism, through insurgency meant to achieve proto-statehood.³ However, it is also a movement that above all seems so fearful that it could inevitably get forced back underground just as quickly as it rose. Due to that fact, this thesis relies on the observations of defectors, the movement's publications, and the analysis of others who have taken an interest in the progress of the group, despite the scarcity of information. Nonetheless, these sources are without a doubt enough to map out the evolution of the organisation, the movement's operations and structure, though it may fall short in detail or clarity.

This report refers to this movement as The Islamic State, all through this text, because it is the name the movement uses to describe itself. It could use the group's Arabic acronym as an alternative, that is, '*al Dawla al Islamiya fi al Iraq wa al Sham*' as well. However, evidently, using its full name fails to show any recognition or endorsement of the self-description of the group.⁴

² Soufangroup.com, (2015), The Islamic State | The Soufan Group. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://soufangroup.com/the-islamic-state/>.

³ Simon Anholt, (2009), *Nation 'Branding': Propaganda or Statecraft?*, Public Diplomacy Magazine.

⁴ Fred Donner, (2012), "Introduction." *In The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Variorum.

Observations/Recommendations

ISIS has been demonstrating its adeptness both tact and strategy, since late 2011. The organisation has for years of survived as a notably violent terrorist and a criminal gang, with the ability to stage multiple synchronized attacks central areas in Iraq. Much more recently, it has successfully achieved global attention when it overthrew the government in East and North of Syria, and subsequently expanding across the border. In the meantime, the Nouri al-Maliki's (Syria's Prime Minister, then) sectarian approach motivated the Sunni community from Iraq to willingly and readily support the course of the group. That was because The Islamic State appeared to possess the ability to reverse the increasing marginalization of the Sunni tribe. That support has been essential in the viability of the organisation.

The State's fast expansion throughout the Syria/Iraq border later advanced it along the transition to the insurgency, having graduated from terrorism. Its cells were transformed into military training grounds while its guerrilla tactics advanced into campaigns to invade and maintain territory. The changes took place under the leadership of individuals with different skills. Fortunately, most leaders in the top echelons of The Islamic State were ex-Ba'athists. They held top positions during Saddam's regime. However, army leaders seldom make effective administrators in public office, and the difficulty of taking control of territory could most likely demonstrated the undoing of the State.⁵ That is unless the State can handle the cruel totalitarianism that seems to be a

⁵ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*, Institute for the Study of War.

source of motivation for its fighters with a similar measure of pragmatism and tolerance that could reassure its subjects.

Despite how secular the States Ba'athist leaders were originally, ISIS supports the religiously legitimacy of its actions. They base their actions on an extreme takfiri/Salafist interpretation of Islam which simply means that whoever goes against the rules of the organisation must be an infidel (*kafir*) or an apostate (*murtad*).⁶ Evidently, in the Middle East, most Muslims are Salafist, and takfirism has attracted wide criticism as being quite excessive, or rather the radicalism of the ISIS group.⁷ It is important to note that this criticism stems from even the most unlikely places, the supporters of the al Qaeda. However, although ISIS is not winning friends as such, the factors stated below help it to survive, and so long as they exist, they will maintain the survival of the movement.

The first factor is the huge sectarian fault line that has majorly determined the politics of the Middle East since the Iranian revolution of 1979. It has been of prime need following the emergence of regional influence by Iran after the United States invaded Iraq in 2003.⁸ Despite the trouble that ISIS has caused in regards to the stability of Middle East, countries on both sides of the divide perceive it as a better than having the region dominated by their rival states. ISIS will continue to survive with the little regional opposition as long as this calculation remains as the status quo in the region.

⁶ Aymenn Jawad, Al-Tamimi, (2014), *The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Charles Philip Issawi, (1991), *An Arab Philosophy of History*, Princeton: Darwin Press.

The second factor is as a result of the complete lack of trust (by the ruled in the Arab world) in their leaders' capacity to rule them in fairness, and that sentiment goes beyond the two affected countries. In countries in the North Africa and the Gulf region, the notion of government by the Islamist teachings (Quran) is largely accepted up until it faces a challenge of the reality of ISIS. Given that governance in these countries does not meet the expectations of the people, hopeful recruits will continue to stream in to fill the ISIS ranks.⁹ Also, a lot others who are not fortunate enough to have an opportunity or means to travel might get inclined to want to adopt the States' directives within those states. Consequently, the threat of terrorism, be it external or home-grown, will most likely result in more repression or other shortcomings in administration in all except those states that appear most forward looking and confident.

The third factor is the United States-led international coalition of more than 60 partners and countries that condemn The Islamic State's objectives and activities. Many Muslims all over the world see that as a further incentive for the need for such an organisation. According to them, it appears to represent a US-led campaign against religion and autonomy. ISIS is particularly filled with a fury as it claims that the West is denying it its independence enforce the beliefs that the group holds dear and want to abide by.¹⁰ The group is working tirelessly to persuade its potential supporters of the eagerness of the Western world to do the much it can to shield local rulers thereby

⁹ Youssef Aboul-Enein, (2010), *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press.

¹⁰ Harleen Gambhir, (2015), *Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State*. Institute for the Study of War, Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/dabiq-strategic-messaging-islamic-state>.

ensuring that the non-Muslims' irreligious and discriminatory policies remain enforced in the Arab world. Sadly, not much has been done to discredit that narrative on the ground.

The fourth factor is an extension of the third factor in that, the little that has been done to discredit the ISIS claims has failed to enter the information bubble created by its potential or actual supporters. The State commits a huge portion of its effort and resources to the propagation of a positive image of itself, which it reinforces with a strong ideology.¹¹ Despite there being several challenges in understanding the context through which ISIS creates its religious texts, which include a prophetic vision of the nearing apocalypse, the message is clearer, and more thorough than the counter messages of its rivals. Their message shows a wholesome break from what has got used to while, on the other hand, its enemies keep on offering more of the same message. The Islamic State guarantees its prospective members intense engagement and adventure with an exciting new venture.¹² The competing voices offer nothing comparable to what ISIS offers its recruits, or at least, its target audience.

The fifth factor also borrows from the above two factors (the narrative promoted by The Islamic State). There is evidently shortage of other attractive options for both foreign and local soldiers who end up considering joining The Islamic State as a means of finding a purpose for their lives, identity, or religious fulfilment. Therefore, the factors that push or lure people from other countries to come to join and fight for the group remain unaddressed. Furthermore, the weakness of the supposedly positive

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Elliot Friedland, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*. *Clarionproject.org*, Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>

counter-narratives to expose the negative side that the narrative of The Islamic State exposes those fighters to finding the ISIS suitable for joining. They get attracted by the alluring message of the group, and though they might get concerned about the activities of the group, lack of a clear understanding shadows the reality that it is impossible to get involved with the ISIS without participating in the ills orchestrated by the group.

The sixth factor is that despite the global stance being opposed to the repressive and discriminatory practices of both the Iraqi and, even more, the Syrian administration, not much action has been taken to enforce or, at least, bring about change. Regarding this factor, The Islamic State seems better motivated and more willing to address this matter than other players on the opposing side. It will take political change to do away with this soft support and get bold support from the other side. Otherwise, the Islamic State will win it over time by entwining the interests of the tribal leaders and the local population with its own.¹³

Lastly, the educational, characteristic stagnation in terms of religion and culture as seen in the Arab world offers a suitable environment for the ISIS to thrive. That is because that stagnation restricts any newer avenues of future deliberation other than the burning desire to go back in time and start all over. The Arab World consists of almost all the countries found in North Africa and the entire Middle Eastern region.

Literature Review

The study of the ISIS militia is important, and the extensive research that has been conducted previously together with the information that has already been

¹³ John Esposito, (2011), *Islam: The Straight Path* (4th ed.), New York: Oxford University Press.

documented serves as a clear indicator as to why the world should be concerned. This part of the paper will illustrate the context in which this research is based while justifying the essence of conducting the study. Here, the reader will understand why knowing the political and religious beliefs of ISIS is important in anticipating the group's next moves and in figuring out how to deal with the organization in future. This part comprises of literature from previously done research studies that focused on other various factors that contributed to or are a result the emergence of The Islamic State. It majorly focuses on analysing the happenings around the Iraqi and Syrian region and how they relate to the ISIS militia. That way, this research study will go on to fill the gaps that previous researches have failed to account for, while refining and adding to the knowledge and understanding of ISIS.

National Armies Have Been Surpassed by Some of the Militias.

According to the World Public Opinion Organization, both Iraq and Syria, large standing government troops have failed to tone down internal rebellions. While the turmoil in Syria transformed into fully fledged war, the masses of Sunni recruits proved too strong for Syria's ground troops, pushing the Syrian government to surrender the control of some sections of the country to rebel control¹⁴. The government shifted its attention to utilizing the loyalist-dominated air force, elite forces and artillery units as they were more reliable than ground forces. Masses Shia militias from Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraq, all equipped and trained by Iranian Quds came together to fight in

¹⁴ WorldPublicOpinion.org. (2007), *Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and Al-Qaeda*, The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, Accessed 14 November 2015, from http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf

collaboration with the Syrian military. By losing a significant chunk of the country's territory, the government lost access to a multitude of people that have now become refugees, people that the government would have recruited to fight in the Syrian army. That obliged the government to rely on hastily organized local militias and depend more heavily on Alawite recruits to fill army ranks. According to this research, one can conclude that the apparent lapse by the Syrian government to curb the insurgencies at their earliest stages motivated the militant groups such as ISIS to claim territory. While it can be true, it is not the reason The Islamic State has become such an unstoppable force. This thesis seeks to fill this 'gap' created by previous research by documenting the history of the group as well as the key objectives it hopes to achieve. About 350,000 Iraqi troops that were equipped, trained and organized just recently by the US tried in vain to stop the advancement of a small and under-armed irregular militia force of that comprised of about one-twentieth of the army's size.

Although air support from American troops countered the immediate reaction (attacks) from The Islamic State, the government of Iraq was had to rely forcefully on insurgent groups formed by Shia politicians, religious leaders, and warlords who had some relationship with Iran, to guard its defenses. Most of these warlords had fought alongside Iran during the 1980's Iran and Iraqi war. In 2015, Shia militias, a small contingent of regular army forces and some Sunni tribesmen as well, joined forces and were successful in getting several villages, towns and one key city under the control of the government once again. They, however, fell short in holding on to Ramadi. According to Jawad, without substantial support from the Sunni, Iraqi forces will fail in

their quest to regain control of the Anbar Province.¹⁵ That statement begs the question, “Are the Sunnis in a position to collaborate with the Iraqi government given their partial involvement with the Islamic State?” This issue will be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this research. Also, Jawad goes on to say that the Iraqi army is under reconstruction with assistance from the US, but it will take a long time (many months) before it gets in shape to try the hard work of recapturing Mosul, as well as other key urban centers that are under the control of ISIS.¹⁶ This research will shed light on the matter, by analyzing the viability of the ISIS group being suppressed through a US-Iraqi government intervention.

One major challenge in training this force is getting people willing to volunteer to enroll to be trained. This is mostly visible in Sunni volunteers, most of whom have no will to help an administration they perceive as being under the control of Iran. Until then, Iraq will keep relying on the militias to guard Baghdad. Iraqi police forces are dedicated in manning checkpoints and mounting roadblocks to guard the city of Bagdad and another government-held territory against being infiltrated by sleepers and terrorists.

The change in military power from centrally controlled regular forces to semiautonomous militias has had consequences, both politically and on the military. While militias are in a capacity to defend local enclaves, they are in no position to operate strategically, and they are prone to experience wrangles among themselves. It is difficult for them to observe the chain of command; the militias lack training, mobility

¹⁵ Aymenn Jawad, Al-Tamimi, (2014), *The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

and heavy weaponry, although ISIS is a radical force, it was largely untrained in the weapons and tactics of modern war. Experience is a harsh master, and the group now appears to have increased its learning curve and military expertise. It also seems quite skilled at coordinating attacks on a large-scale, conduct shaping operations, and can mobilize large troops for decisive battles. In any case that they have insufficient heavy weaponry, the Islamic State has been innovative. Some of the innovations include the use of mass armored bulldozers and Humvees (seized from raids) to conduct suicide attacks using car bombs, as seen in Ramadi. That serves as proof some experience and skill that is the result of large-scale warfare facilitated by former officers of the Iraqi government. By capturing Ramadi, The Islamic State was able to get its hands on heavy weaponry. Insurgent groups are also difficult to suppress and, mostly where the conflicts involve different sectarian groups, as there is the likelihood of them carrying out pillage, and try to wipe out the existence of rival factions. ISIS appears not to care much about such mannerisms and surprisingly, the organization utilizes such behavior to unleash terror on its enemies and lure in more foreign soldiers. The increasing government dependence on Shia insurgent groups as well presents an increasingly diminishes the hopes of the existence of a sovereign country endowed with an administration that is can govern the whole of Iraqi territory.

In their book, '*ISIS Governance in Syria*' Caris, Charlie, and Samuel, claim that among the major characters of a country that is on the right track is it having monopoly over how it utilizes its force.¹⁷ In Iraq's instance, Shia insurgent groups have

¹⁷ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*. Institute for the Study of War.

been effective at serving as a parallel government since 2004, as government officers controlled the groups through family ties, much of which received Iranian support from. That then culminated into the weakening of the central government, one whose internal affairs are highly susceptible influence from Iran. This situation looks similar to one that exists currently in Lebanon, and that has made most scholars of the situation in Iraq to call it the “Lebanonization of Iraq.”¹⁸ The challenges that are facing Iraq are same as those being experienced in Syria; only the problems in Syria are much harder to resolve, and the country is quite far down the path to destruction. The country’s (Syria) air force and ground army are capable of using force strategically to ruin commerce, hinder the supply of food, and limit access to medical services in places that are under rebel control. However, the fact that they rely on militias to defend loyalist enclaves affects them because the militias have limited strategic ability and effectiveness to project power. According to Anderson, the author of the book ‘*Frontiers*’ there is little likelihood that the government will be able to regain territory from jihadist control, and in some cases, it might take several years for that to happen.¹⁹ This paper will discuss this sentiment further, by giving supportive information in regards to that claim in the subsequent chapters.

The transition of power from the use of central armies to the use of insurgent groups also serves as an indication of the weakness of the government. The central authority has lost monopoly over large-scale violence while its forces can conduct destructive attacks that are limited to national frontiers, but they will hardly conquer or

¹⁸ M. Anderson, (1996), *Frontiers*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

¹⁹ Ibid.

take over the control of the entire country. Political power has devolved in house insurgencies that seek to fulfill individual sectarian or political objectives—local militia commanders and rebel formations, most of whom owe their allegiance to mafia organizations, warlords, or foreign powers.²⁰ The re-emergence of a credible national authority and the reunification of the countries of would imperil the sectarian agendas, weaken the authority of local militia group leaders, and also bring down capital gaining ventures that come into play when there is a lack of proper national government. Iraq and Syria have had a history of being governed by heads of state who have committed murders in their pursuit of power and maintained national unity, as well as their power. They did so through administering pervasive internal security apparatuses, and creating large armies through which they ruthlessly suppress opposition. With the power of the central government and armed forces diminishing, both countries may experience similar instability as those to that of the 1950s and 60s.²¹ Syria saw seven coups and numerous plots in the years between 1949 and 1970, plots whose result was the rise into power of Hafez al-Assad.²² Iraq witnessed several coups between the late 50' and late 60', coups that culminated into Saddam Hussein's ascension into power.²³

²⁰ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*. Institute for the Study of War.

²¹ Michael Cook, (2001), *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge University Press.

²² WorldPublicOpinion.org., (2007), *Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and Al-Qaeda. The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland*. Accessed 14 November 2015, from http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf

²³ Ibid.

The Influx in Foreign Fighters Joining the War and Posing a Global Threat

The Public Diplomacy Magazine released figures released in public at the start of 2015, and according to them, approximately twenty thousand people of different nationalities had gone to Iraq and Syria to participate in the resistance.²⁴ The members of jihadist groups became the majority, and since the breakup of The Islamic State from the rest of the jihadist groups, a higher percentage of them shifted camps to join ISIS.

According to the *World Public Opinion Organization*, of these foreigners, about 3,400 came from Western countries and especially Europe. Despite there being a bombing campaign targeting ISIS, volunteers kept on heading towards the two countries. The prime minister of France suggested that as many as 10,000 volunteers from Europe will have travelled to Iraq and Syria by the end of 2015. The numbers are not certain, and thus making it difficult to determine whether the flow is slowing because of the coalition campaign. However, private discussions between French and German officials in June of 2015 concluded that, so far, there remains no actual data showing the decrease in number of Europeans travelling or looking to travel to Iraq and Syria. Also, recent FBI figures suggest that more Americans are travelling or seeking to fly to Syria. There are many questions surrounding this occurrence (people travelling from well-established countries to a war-torn area to join jihadist organizations, especially ISIS), and this paper will illustrate why that is happening.

Also, according to Friedland (2014), when ISIS is recruiting, it emphasizes on the use of unlimited violence against any Shias and Sunnis who they perceive as a traitor,

²⁴ Simon Anholt, (2009), *Nation 'Branding': Propaganda or Statecraft?*, Public Diplomacy Magazine.

as well as non-Islamic infidels, as a show of the group's authenticity and fervor.²⁵ This research study will show why this is true as well as why ISIS has lured a significant number of volunteers from different nationalities, and who seem supportive of the group's brutal practices and extremist views. Also, according to *The Soufan Group*, to make certain of the group's continuing loyalty, The Islamic State has reportedly enlisted them in atrocities and thus discouraging them from ever leaving the group.²⁶ The foreign fighters form a significant part of ISIS's entire force, a vital resource for its successive acts of terror. There is nothing that motivates them to end the fighting.

While some might become disillusioned, most of them expect to be treated harshly, were they to decide to go back home and since there is no way out for them, they have to keep on fighting, even though they are aware that they will end up dead. If ISIS or its successors are prevented from operating openly through military pressure, the organization will probably carry on with its campaign underground. However, since foreign fighters will not easily adapt to the local population, and mostly a population that wants to take advantage and turn against the foreigners, not many would survive. Some of them may scatter around the globe or join other jihadist fronts in the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and Libya, or also join new fronts in the Middle East and North Africa.²⁷ Presently, governments from the West now fear that several of ISIS's foreign soldiers might be tasked by the organization, bent upon revenge, to go back to their respective

²⁵ Elliot Friedland, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*, Clarionproject.org. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>

²⁶ Soufangroup.com, (2015), *The Islamic State | The Soufan Group*, Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://soufangroup.com/the-islamic-state/>

²⁷ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*, Institute for the Study of War.

countries and conduct terrorist attacks at home. Some Western officials are of the view that it is best to keep the foreign fighters in the confines of their current war areas.

Permanent Displacement of Thousands of Refugees

Approximately two hundred thousand Syrians have perished ever since the civil war began in Syria while about half of the country's population had no option but flee the country, with more than 7 million internally displaced and 4 million registered refugees abroad.²⁸ If the war continues, there will be an increase in death toll and the number of refugees, making it a humanitarian catastrophe. There is a need for swift action to be taken in countering the spread of the jihadist organizations in the region for the sake of preserving life and stopping unnecessary suffering by the people.²⁹

The counterinsurgency campaign in Syria has deliberately caused the collapse of the economy and limited the provision of crucial public services to places that are the government does not control. Since there are little hopes of seeing a seize fire any time soon, it is impossible for return and resettlement of the Syrian people. Meanwhile, there is the limited capacity of the neighboring countries absorbing the 4 million refugees permanently. About to 2 million Syrian refugees fled to Jordan and Lebanon. They constitute 25% of Lebanon's population, and form about 10% of Jordan's population. The matter about the refugees, here, is not just simply the sharing the little resources with them. The absorbing of refugees officially will interfere with the fragile local political

²⁸ IGN, (2016), *A message to all Infidels and Americans Wiki Guide – IGN*, Accessed 16 Jan. 2016 from <http://www.ign.com/wikis/a-message-to-all-infidels-and-americans>,.

²⁹ Ibid.

and sectarian balances. At the same time, refugees being there heighten the possibility that the chaos in Syria will spread towards the host countries.

Evidently, there is need to understand the roots of the turmoil in this war-torn region, and the first step is getting to know the different sides that are involved in that war. That is why this research has majored on one of the most dominant forces in the region, The Islamic State.

Summary of the Islamist State

By October 2014, the territory stretching from The South of Baghdad to North of Aleppo was under the control of The Islamic State. The self-declared ‘Caliphate’ of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi controlled the cities of Mosul and Raqqa in Syria and Iraq.³⁰ That means by that time; around six million people in both Syria and Iraq were living under the rule of the ISIS.

The control of territory by The Islamic State’s depends on formation or building of alliances with various local actors, including the members of Saddam Hussein’s army and Sunni tribal group. Saddam’s troops offer intelligence services to the ISIS. Many members of that alliance include majority of those who suffered under the Shia-dominated administrations of Bashar al-Assad and Nouri al-Maliki.³¹

ISIS has nonetheless, demonstrated an effective approach in regards to the accretion of land. For instance, the State has taken control of territory occupied by weak

³⁰ WorldPublicOpinion.org. (2007), *Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and Al-Qaeda*, The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland, Accessed 14 November 2015, from http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf

³¹ Ibid.

rivals. That is irrespective of the adversaries' sectarian belief or where they stand politically. The organisation has also taken over areas with ample supply of commodities like natural gas, wheat and water. In the long run, of ISIS's strength comes from the ability of the organisation to maintain its alliances as it continues to deepens its independent levers of power.³² For ISIS to achieve sustainability, it needs to strike a balance between exercising control through the use of fear and consent, especially with the rise of international interest and determination of taking action against it.

As stated earlier, The Islamic State seeks to use religion as a cushion for legitimizing its actions. A self-declared Caliphate must appear to demonstrate or show powerful ideas in terms of religious appeal. For this reason, The ISIS utilizes the widely known Salafists held notion that claims that all Muslims should and must go back to the unity and simplicity as they perceive could have characterized the early times of their religion. It might appear as if, ideologically the appeal of ISIS, both in and out its areas of influence seems to imply the narrative common to global terrorism. However, unlike al Qaeda, the ISIS ideology focuses more thoroughly on the extreme revolution in 'Muslim States' than on conducting direct attacks those country's foreign allies (from the West).³³ That is so because, in the eyes of The Islamic State, the leaders in those Muslim-majority states in the Arab World region are not religious and are corrupt as well. There is a need for a violent revolution in these countries because the current regimes fall easily under the influence of the Western Powers, most notably, the United States. To fuel the 'turn-

³² Julia McQuaid, (2015), *Reviving the Caliphate: Fad, or the Future?*, Center for Naval Analyses., Accessed 14 November 2015 from <http://www.cna.org/research/2014/revivingcaliphate>.

³³ Ibid.

around' in the Muslim states and achieve the purest government that ISIS envisions, the organisation deepens the political rift that exists in the religion between Sunni and Shia traditional beliefs.

It is of grave concern that most of the key sympathisers are not have sufficient knowledge about Islam to counter the misinterpretation of the religion as preached through the ideologies of ISIS. Their supporters unquestionably take heed of the organisation's interpretations of the religion without giving much thought into it, and accept to take part in the senseless murder as well as the absolutist style of government that forms the hallmark of the organisation. What motivates each to join the movement relies more heavily on the oscillation of a social grouping that offers identity, purpose, belonging, direction, a sense of empowerment and excitement, than the recruits' actual understanding of their religion. The Islamic State also gives the potential recruits from all around the world an opportunity to take on something new, thereby leaving behind all the unwelcome baggage from their previous life.

The tactics used by ISIS include guerrilla warfare, the perpetration of acts of terror and insurgency. A majority of the organisation's central leadership, (a large number of those being ex Ba'athists), have been key players in violent and clandestine opposition towards the Iraqi administration for the last decade.³⁴ Many have been held in US-run detention camps at various times while some others are escapees of detention camps in Iraq following the 'Breaking the Walls' campaign that was orchestrated by the ISIS group in July 2012 to July 2013 by the predecessors or the current day ISIS leaders.

³⁴ Dabiq, 2014e, *Remaining and Expanding, 2014*, Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-5-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

The combined experience and knowledge of the leaders have played a huge part in ISIS, particularly militarily. It has also attempted to consolidate (least in major urban centres under its influence) its territorial gains through initiating development and administrative capacity.³⁵ That means not only has the organisation successfully lured soldiers to fill its ranks, The Islamist State has indeed gone on to establish a group of professionals and technocrats that do not necessarily fight for the group in war zones. However, in that sector of the organisation is the existence of a potential long-term weakness for the State.

Unless The Islamist State can sustain the development and maintenance of public infrastructure while meeting demands for water, food, health care, energy and sanitation, it will not survive. The State also needs to build and sustain a functioning economy. Economically, its source of revenue comes through selling oil, tax collection on both individuals and businesses, money collected at toll stations in roads, capital acquired through operating of stolen factories, and through the sale of captured equipment. The State also raises money from a number of criminal activities including kidnapping and asking for ransom, extorting residents, looting and demanding money from people and businesses for protection. In the State's earlier days, both local and external supporters gave individual donations, and those contributions were a key source of revenue.³⁶ However by around June of 2014, the contributions did not measure up regarding percentage when compared to other avenues for making money. Through capturing a vast number of vehicles meant for military use, oil deposits and equipment,

³⁵ Dabiq. 2014d, *The Return of Khalifah*. Al Hayat Media Center, 2014, Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

³⁶ Jan Blomme, (1993), *Review on JSTOR*. Jstor.org. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40106671?seq=1>.

and also the acquiring of commodities that were left behind by the people running away from ISIS rule, the State continues to reward its followers. The belongings that were left behind by those who ISIS murders, are also commodities that help ISIS sustain itself.

According to US intelligence estimates, The Islamic State has employed thousands of people, with around 20,000 and 31,500 fighters. It also has another group of officers that keeps the organisation smoothly operational. Some of the group's soldiers are both volunteers while others are recruits. Most volunteers are foreigners whereas the recruits are forcefully taken into service junior officers of the army and come from either tribes or families whose territory has been taken over through military conquest. Also, some staff in charge of administration come from volunteers while others get coerced, with the latter category making up the majority. That is because ISIS has been able to talk workers into keeping on working in places of work that they have been working with a promise to continue paying their wages. ISIS supervisors are chosen to ensure the smooth running of activities in major institutions like the municipal services or bakeries. However, the essential staff comprise of local people who have remained in place for one reason or another. The loyalty of the essential staffs, therefore, a matter of debate and is of no guarantee.

The Islamic State has also put in considerable effort to garner international recognition and approval via its outreach through digital online platforms and alternative media. The group pays considerable focus to the image it portrays to the world and strives achieve a balance between photos meant to instil fear onto its rivals (using horrifying pictures) and softer images meant to encourage its supporters and sympathisers. That approach has achieved success but regarding administrative and

military and victories, much of its success can get attributed to the oppositions' inability to counter the advances of the ISIS group and not much on the strength that the organisations possesses inherently.

Thus, ISIS future relies on the ability of other power centres in Syria and Iraq to offer credible and sufficient assurances of a better life for the purpose of persuasion. That is, to convince and offer support to the majority of people who are uncommitted to the ISIS and live under the fear of risking their lives opposing it.

Religious Appeals

Scholars have been in much debate over the formation of The Islamic Organization and the reasons the group acts in the manner it does. Regardless of the various debates that they have raised collectively, most political scientists argue and believe that the Islamic State as an aftermath or outcome of politics and war among a wide range of other factors. It being that this notion could hold some water, it potentially much conceals the individual power of ideas that appear, quite much of Western origin, old fashioned but attractively unusual. Therefore, a huge piece of this thesis gets committed to studying The Islamic States' roots in regard to ideology and religion roots. In a large part of the confusion that surrounds the ISIS's ideological appeal comes from a notion that the Caliphate of the 7th century and all that it stood to represent has not been accorded the appreciation it deserves.³⁷ Since time immemorial, the Caliphate has been considered by many to have got ordainment from God who charged him with the

³⁷ Edward Luttwak, (2014), *Caliphate Redivivus? Why a Careful Look at the 7th Century Can Predict How the Caliphate Will End*. Hoover Institution, Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.hoover.org/research/caliphate-redivivus-why-carefullook-7th-century-can-predict-how-new-caliphate-will-end>.

responsibility of being a protector of the faith. The seventh century Caliphate is, therefore, memorable for his deep involvement in Muslim tradition and culture.

That widely accepted fact serves as prove that ISIS is not merely a means of combating the West or an outcome of the geopolitical events of the contemporary world. The legendary notion of the Caliphate and the subsequent Islamic State is, therefore, the desired end in itself, on some level of interpretation.³⁸ It is also important not to take The Islamic State's request to the Caliphate lightly, especially with the group's strong media outburst on the same, because it is a central part of The Islamic State's legitimacy. ISIS distinguishes itself from other Islamist groups in that the organisation, unlike all others, does not just advocate (in rhetoric) for the restoration of the Caliphate.³⁹ The Islamic State is seen taking actual steps towards the revival of the Caliphate. It is an important requirement that any Caliphate or state acquires Sovereign territory. The invasion, take over, and maintenance of control over physical territory is a clear demonstration that The ISIS takes the matter of re-establishing a caliphate seriously. The group's boldness in doing so comes from the believe that their actions are right because it is God's will that they do so. The organisation has taken to the media to show off territorial gains and flaunting military victories as a strategy to emphasize that message, thereby reinforcing the credibility of the ISIS. Territorial gains have served to strengthen the group's argument about the religious necessity of migration or *Hijrah* in other words.⁴⁰ With the

³⁸ Madawi Al-Rasheed, & Marat Shterin. (2013), "Introduction." *In Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dabiq. 2014a. *A Call to Hijrah, 2014*. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-3-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

sufficient restoration of the Caliphate (as suggested in the media by ISIS), all Muslims should migrate to the Islamic State as it is their religious duty. They should do so to add to the establishment and sustenance of the group.

The explanation of that religious narrative and many others takes up much of the dedicated media campaign by the ISIS, and there, it explains ideologies stretching far past the Caliphate itself. Among the most alluring concepts in The Islamic State's literature about religion is the deep concern about the apocalypse. Through an analysis of The Islamic State media one can discover that The Islamic State's theme of the end of times plays quite an important part in the manner in which the ISIS behaves.⁴¹ ISIS suggests via its online platforms that the organisation's key mandate is to be a channel of governing worldly issues. According to them, it is also a means through which Muslims will attain salvation as the End Times approach. By persuading its followers of the proximity of the Final Hour, also that it is an avenue of acquiring salvation; The Islamic State is supporting its ideologies concerning the urgent need of re-establishing the Caliphate.⁴²

The ISIS has further played into the prophetic narrative relied on the media of the organisation by taking actions such as seizing Dabiq and reviving slavery. That has empowered ISIS to an extent that it is unwise to underestimate them. Kimball, with the nearing of the cataclysmic end nothing else, is of any significance. All elements of the basic life wither by comparison. Public criticism geared towards the movement only

⁴¹ Dabiq, 2014d, *Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan, 2014*, Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-6-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

⁴² Ibid.

serves to enhance the notion that people are adamantly accepting what is reality and that the days signalling the end of the universe as we know it are here with us. Consequently, the concept of the fast approaching end of time is a powerful tool for recruiting used by The Islamic State. Through the organisation's prophetic approach and their use of symbols, rhetoric and images of religion, The Islamic State justifies its actions quite much and strengthens its legitimacy.

The Movement has without a doubt forcefully mapped out a state, in line with the state formation theory of conquest. Going by the findings above, though, it is evident that The Islamic State does not get its motivation from just material benefits as suggested by scholars of conquest such as Oppenheimer and Gumplowicz. William Lilly, a theorist in state formation, says that for the successful formation of a state, there is a need for both a widely accepted body of ideas that supplement the use of physical force. In simpler terms, ideology is a key factor in the formation of a state by force. An analysis of ISIS media campaigns clearly demonstrates that ideology is an effective tool used by ISIS in their nation-building strategy. One it is looked at in combination with the military campaign, ideology comes in handy in explaining the Islamic organisation's success in establishing a state.

To a certain extent, the culture theory of state formation also comes in handy in explaining ISIS's success. In the words of theorists like Anderson and his colleague, Barkey, are theorists concerned with the formation of ISIS. According to these theorists, a state forms in an attempt to represent particular historical narrative that are commonly

shared by its people or imply to establish a particular cultural identity.⁴³ The Islamic State without a doubt appeals to the Sunni Muslim in both aspects. It heavily touches on their cultural identity, hence its ability to sway them while at the same time touching on their revered historical aspects. Its historical approach dates to the seventh century, where its beliefs resonate with a Caliphate of that generation. The resonance with this historical Caliphate is the element of ISIS that brings fellow Muslims together in support of the group. However, ISIS holds that the Caliphate is both an embodiment of identity as well as the Islam religion. Therefore, by viewing a Caliphate from that angle of both historical and cultural significance, the ISIS achieves the strategy for the formation of the state. ISIS never advocates for the Caliphate's voluntary construction. Rather, The Islamic State gives the impression that the Caliphate is a religious obligation and an entity every Muslim has no option but to take part in the restoration of the caliphate. Any immigrants or visitors into the Caliphate State will need to submit to the sharia, which according to the Muslim has a high cosmic purpose. According to the voluntary theory of state formation, states can get established when the potential citizens submit on their own accord to any individual or group of individuals that they view as a representation of the divine they believe. That theory gets supported in the case of ISIS.⁴⁴

⁴³ Michael Cook, (2001), *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁴ Harleen Gambhir, (2015), *Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State*. Institute for the Study of War, Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/dabiq-strategic-messaging-islamic-state>

The Application of Force

Any conversation regarding the ISIS forces the person to address its relentless tolerance for violence and brutality. In numerous occasions, ISIS has forcefully attacked civilians and used brutal torture leading to death in almost all provinces under its control, resulting in massive human rights atrocities and war crimes. Surprisingly, while most perpetrators of violence try to cover up their crimes, ISIS does not and uses its media campaign to promote them instead. ISIS's use of violence is somewhat connected to the Zarqawi legacy, a leader so prominent for his horrifying use of violence, that he acquired the name "the Sheikh of the Slaughterers".⁴⁵

It is also of much importance to recognize how the public display of violence contributes to The Islamic State's building strategy. ISIS diligently justifies its brutal acts by relating them to historical religious deeds of the behaviours of the ancient Muslim leaders. The Group does not act by religious theories or concepts as most other Muslims do. Theirs is an attempt to reflect its actions to the 'practical' accounts of Islam, and thereby mirroring the violent acts of their historical religious leaders.⁴⁶ Regardless of the fact that this group constantly Islamic Quran and Hadith teachings to support its use of force and barbaric acts, no scholars have had the ability to critically associate Islam with the horrid graphic ways with which the Islamic State conducts its murders. History is rich with examples of such diverse insurgent groups, both political and religious, that have employed force and brutality similar to that of ISIS.

⁴⁵ Patricia Crone, & Martin Hinds, (1986), *God's Caliph: Religious authority in the first centuries of Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Nonetheless, in the army strategies of the Islamic State, force and brutality play a key role especially in the efforts to acquire more territory. A keen evaluation of The Islamic State's military strategies that got revealed out in the premier issue of *Dabiq* revealed the following. That a simple book is what fuels the toleration of force and cruelty by ISIS, at least partly, entitled *Management of Savagery or Idarat al-Tawahush, in Arabic*. The book is by a jihadi ideologue by the name Abu Bakr Naji. This literature allegedly constitutes part of the ideological teachings of the ISIS and is popularly shared amongst the leaders of ISIS. The book provides a feasible strategy for building a Sunni caliphate and motivates jihadists to induce tactically disasters by hitting the country's critical industries and infrastructure. For example, they could target tourist sites and oil fields. That way they could draw the attention of a country's security forces in the sites hit and subsequently open up the rest of the country to security breaches.⁴⁷

Insurgents can then manoeuvre their way through the ungoverned areas conquer them and establish their Islamic State system of governments. In the same issue of *Dabiq*, The Islamic State generates similar strategies to make core governments weak through terrorist attacks, or *nikayah* in Arabic. Through acts of terrorism, ISIS inflicts mayhem and chaos (*tawahhush*), which is the second stage of their strategy. The implementation of this stage enables ISIS to consolidate its power in regions that are unstable, thereby establishing new state-like structures in those regions. That is the final

⁴⁷ Dabiq, 2014c, *The Failed Crusade, 2014*, Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-4-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

stage of their strategy and goes by the name *tamkin*, according to Dabiq. Therefore, ISIS ‘calculates’ that what it gains from violence, diminishes any losses in popularity.⁴⁸

The display of the group’s heinous acts often to the public gets targeted to foreign governments, to meet the following purposes as well. Public brutality, firstly, serves the purpose of demonstrating the desire of the organisation to receive a ransom. Through the circulation of video footage showing public beheadings, ISIS is sending a message to foreign governments that it will not hesitate to act on any threats it has made to any government, unless the governments can accept to pay off the demands they make. The second and very important purpose of the group using the public display of violence is that it that action takes on media significance and heightens the public's sense of ISIS’s power. In other words, the public becomes more willing to accept the group’s territorial claims. That way, the public brutality is a mechanism of ISIS show off its strength and capabilities while demonstrating to any fans around the globe that the group is unstoppable despite international efforts to counter it.

Additionally, in an audio statement given by the official spokesman of The Islamic State al-Adnani, through al-Furqan media, he said the following in support of the above.

Everyone is watching, wondering in confusion and astonishment. They say, 'Does this make sense?! Is the Caliphate rising in the midst of our armies? Is Allah’s law being implemented despite our legions, arsenals, planes, tanks, missiles, aircraft carriers, and weapons of mass destruction? The Caliphate will remain, by Allah’s permission, until the Judgment Day, for we are the true followers of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), and none of his followers will ever be defeated.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ IGN, (2016), *A message to all Infidels and Americans Wiki Guide - IGN*. [online], Available at: <http://www.ign.com/wikis/a-message-to-all-infidels-and-americans>, [Accessed 16 Jan. 2016].

Methodology

- Primary Research

Much of the research on ISIS in this thesis will come from primary sources.

Moreover, most of the information about ISIS developments will get sourced from online and print media. That is because the emergence of The Islamic State in the international scene is quite recent. Like social media, articles from both Arabic and English newspapers is important in tracking developments concerning The Islamic State. Particularly, Arabic newspapers in will assist this report in analyzing the perception of Arabic countries towards the developments.

- Social Media-It is among the vital sources of primary research for this paper because the organisation's social media platforms have a timeline of rebel statements by Islamist leaders. The social media platforms can also provide evidence of day to day activities and movements of the group. Also, both Islamist and Rebel groups (particularly ISIS) in the Arab world, are notorious for their use online sites, which include many blogs regarding the holy war as well as numerous web forums on the same. Additionally, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook flood with conversations, videos, and tweets regarding the group. They use these means to communicating to their sympathizers, fans and among each other. This report has information on some of the latest conversations concerning ISIS, within the jihadi community

Activists based in both Iraq and Syria also get reported through the same online platforms. Therefore, this research has taken into the various Facebook and Twitter accounts, to follow propaganda and political rhetoric being disseminated by

the various concerned sources. Most of the information gained from these sources are propaganda because it is subject to bias for both supporting and opposing sides.⁵⁰ The information is, however; still important because it offers insight into the state of mind of the members and leaders of these Islamist groups. The researcher of this qualitative research has also put to remain relatively anonymous while in pursuit of that information. That is because there is a potential danger associated with visiting social media accounts belonging to The Islamic State or other jihadi web forums.

- Propaganda and Publications about ISIS- ISIS has become prominent for its effective use of media campaigns, created and made published through The Islamic State's many formal media centres. The ISIS has successfully dispersed some publications documenting the group's achievements as well as advertising its broad political and military strategy. This report has examined some of those publications carefully, most importantly, *Dabiq*, which is a magazine belonging to ISIS and written The English language. This thesis has also looked into a frequently published report by the name "Islamic State Report," for the sake of analyzing The Islamic State's religious and political vision.

- Public Statements-This thesis also considers statements and speeches given by leaders and members of the ISIS in public. Most of the statements are available on the Internet and some; one can get access to formally through The Islamic State's media centres, or informally through ISIS social media sites. This report has

⁵⁰ Eva Kingsepp, (2008), *Propaganda as an Instrument of Statecraft: Two Case Studies*, *Papers.ssrn.com*. Accessed 16 November 2015, from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2285151

paid keen alertness to note any application of rhetoric in the speeches then translated any observed rhetoric in an attempt try to establish how it relates to the organisation's objectives and ideology.⁵¹

- Secondary Research

A significant portion of this paper borrows heavily from secondary research. This thesis utilizes some books written by distinguished authors whose ideas and texts have offered useful background information regarding various aspects of this study. One example is the nature and context of the original Islamic state and secondly, the real intention of establishing the position of the Caliph. The text in this thesis will use some journals and publications as well, all of which cover relevant topics.

⁵¹ Reza Pankhurst, (2015), *The Caliphate, and the Changing Strategy of the Public Statements of al-Qaeda's Leaders* (4th ed.).

CHAPTER II

ROOTS OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

Wahhabi Roots

Introduction

It is important to realize that despite ISIS being an Islamic movement; it has been with us for a long time, though under the form of other organizations that existed in the distant past. That is because the roots of the ISIS group are in Wahhabism, a form of Islam developed as recently as the 18th century and got practiced in Saudi Arabia.⁵² The grand arrival of ISIS on the backyard of Iraq has attracted a lot of attention globally. Many have been horrified and astonished by the violence of the group and its evident support from Sunni youth. Moreover, people are finding Saudi Arabia's simultaneous conflicting reactions towards the activities of the group in the modern world not only troubling but also inexplicable. They fail to understand whether the Saudis understand that ISIS poses a threat to them too.

The ruling elite in Saudi Arabia appears divided as some claim that the Islamic State is trying to counter the Iranian Shiite with Sunni action. In other words, they see this scenario as a different Sunni state systematically arising at the central point

⁵² Madawi Al-Rasheed, & Marat Shterin, (2013), "Introduction," *In Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*, New York: Columbia University Press.

of what they see as a Sunni historical succession; coming together under The Islamic State's strict Salafist ideology.⁵³

On the flip side, other Saudis disapprove of the occurrence, recalling the history of the Wahhabist Ikhwan revolution against Abd-al-Aziz, but which in the late 1920s, almost caused the inward collapse of Wahhabism and the al-Saud. This thesis acknowledges that Wahhabism has had a great impact in shaping the history of the Middle East region and sees it as a root for the formation of ISIS. That is because there are distinct similarities between Wahhabist mode of operation during the time of existence and the ISIS way of doing things in the contemporary world. The source of tension and internal discord in Saudi Arabia over ISIS can only get clarified by understanding the inherent and continuing duality that lies at the centre of the Kingdom's historical origins and its doctrinal makeup.

One strand that dominates the Saudi identity links directly to the founder of Wahhabism, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, and the way Ibn Saud (a minor leader among many), put use al-Wahhab's radical, exclusionist Puritanism.⁵⁴ The second strand to Saudi's confusing duality links to King Abd-al Aziz's change to embrace statehood in the early 1920s. He curbed Ikhwani violence to initiate diplomatic relations with America and Britain, as a nation-state.⁵⁵ The King also institutionalized the Wahhabist impulse that existed originally and subsequently seized the opportunely thriving oil industry in the 1970s and drove away the volatile Ikhwani current from home. Instead of using violent

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Madawi Al-Rasheed, & Marat Shterin, (2013), "Introduction." *In Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

revolution Abd-al-Aziz did so by diffusing a cultural revolution, throughout the Muslim world. The Cultural Revolution was not simple reform. The basis of the revolution was Abd al-Wahhab's Jacobin-like dislike for the deviationism and the putrescence that he perceived all about him, and which fuelled his desire to purge all heresies and idolatries from Islam.

Muslim Impostors

Abd al-Wahhab, a disciple of Ibn Taymiyyah (a 14th-century scholar), hated the Ottoman nobles who journeyed across Arabia towards Mecca. In the eyes of Abd al-Wahhab's, these eccentric, tobacco smokers, hashish consumers, drum playing Egyptians and were not Muslims, but mere imposters who masqueraded as Muslims.⁵⁶ He also did not appreciate the behavior of local Bedouin Arabs or consider it better because they angered him by their erecting of tombstones, honoring of saints, and their superstitions. Such superstitions included the lionizing of graves or associating particular places with the divine). Abd al-Wahhab denounced all this behavior, as *bida*, or God-forbidden in other words.

Both Taymiyyah and Abd al-Wahhab believed that the years that the Prophet Muhammad stayed in Medina were the best of times for the Muslim society. According to them, all Muslims should strive to emulate that period, and that belief is, in essence, Salafism.

Taymiyyah was staunchly against Sufism, Shi'ism and Greek philosophy. He condemned visiting the Muhammad's grave and also was against the celebration the

⁵⁶ Henri Claessen., & Peter Skalnik, (1978), *The Early State: Theories and Hypotheses*, The Hague: Mouton: In The Early State.

prophet's birthday, claiming that manner of behaviour was merely copying the way Christians worship Jesus as God.⁵⁷ Abd al-Wahhab carried on all that teaching from his teacher, saying that any a believer who hesitates or doubts that particular interpretation of Islam should warrant the deprivation of his or her life and property.

One major tenet of the doctrine by Abd al-Wahhab has become the central idea of *takfir*. Under this takfiri doctrine, his followers and he could deem other Muslims infidels if at all they engaged in activities that seem to intrude on the sovereignty of the King (who is the absolute Authority). Abd al-Wahhab denounced fellow Muslims, who honored the dead, angels or saints. According to him, such sentiments detracted from the ultimate subservience one must feel towards the Almighty, and only Him. Wahhabi Islam, therefore, bans any prayer to dead loved ones and saints, any pilgrimages to special mosques or tombs and, religious festivals celebrating saints. That includes the honouring of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad and also prohibits the use of gravestones for burials.⁵⁸

Abd al-Wahhab desired to see conformity, the type of conformity that was to get demonstrated in tangible and physical ways. He demanded that all fellow Muslims should pledge their allegiance, individually, to a single Muslim leader, a Caliph, if it happened that there was one. He wrote that all those who failed to conform to that view were to face death, their daughters and wives violated, and their possessions are taken

⁵⁷ Madawi Al-Rasheed, & Marat Shterin, (2013), "Introduction." *In Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁵⁸ Henri Claessen, & Peter Skalnik, (1978), *The Early State: Theories and Hypotheses*, The Hague: Mouton: In The Early State.

away. Sufis, Shiite, and other Muslim denominations had to face death as well, as Abd al-Wahhab did not consider them Muslim at all.

The text above clearly demonstrates the similarity between ISIS and Wahhabism. The only difference would emerge only much later. That is following the subsequent establishment of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine. The doctrine of "One Ruler, One Authority, One Mosque"⁵⁹ formed the three pillars that respectively referred to the Saudi king, the absolute authority of Wahhabism, and its control of the mosque the word.

The ISIS refusal to uphold these three pillars on which the entire Sunni authority presently rests is the difference that makes ISIS a great threat to Saudi Arabia, despite it conforming to Wahhabism in all other respects.

Brief History 1741-1818

Abd al-Wahhab's staunch believe in the implementation of these ultra-radical views ultimately led to his banishment from his town. He, however, got accepted into the Ibn Saud tribe in 1741, having had wandered for a while. Abd al-Wahhab told Ibn Saud of his novel teaching, and the perception Ibn Saud got from the teachings was a means to overturn Arab convention and tradition. It was to Ibn Saud, a way to acquire power and his clan, seized on Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine, and went on to do and justify what they always did. That was raiding other villages and stealing their possessions, only now, they felt that their actions were under the name of *jihad* and not within the sphere of Arab tradition, as before. Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Saud also reintroduced the notion of

⁵⁹ Ibid.

martyrdom in the name of jihad, claiming immediate entry into ‘paradise’ for all those martyred.⁶⁰

They began their campaign, by first conquering a few local communities and went on to impose their rule over them. Members of the conquered clans had to choose between two options, either to convert into Wahhabism or to face death. The Alliance had control over most of the Arabian Peninsula by 1790 and had repeatedly raided Iraq, Medina and Syria.

The strategy of the alliance was like that of ISIS today. That is, to instill fear and to bring the people they had conquered into submission. In 1801, the Allies invaded Iraq, specifically the Holy City of Karbala, where they massacred tens of thousands of Shiites and destroyed their shrines, including the shrine of Imam Hussein (the deceased grandson of Prophet Muhammad). Lieutenant Francis Warden, a British official, observed the situation at that period and wrote that they waged war against the entire Karbala. They went on to destroy the Tomb of Hussein, having slain more than five thousand of the inhabitants with peculiar cruelty.

Osman Ibn Bishr Najdi, who was the historian of the first Saudi state, documented that Ibn Saud had committed a mass killings in Karbala in 1801. He proudly wrote down the happening of that massacre saying that they took Karbala, slaughtered and made their people slaves, then went on to praise Allah, Lord of the Worlds.⁶¹ He

⁶⁰ Charles Philip Issawi, (1991), *An Arab Philosophy of History*, Princeton: Darwin Press,

⁶¹ Edward Luttwak, (2014), *Caliphate Redivivus? Why a Careful Look at the 7th Century Can Predict How the Caliphate Will End*. Hoover Institution. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.hoover.org/research/caliphate-redivivus-why-carefullook-7th-century-can-predict-how-new-caliphate-will-end>.

added that, and they did not apologize for that saying that the unbelievers should expect the same treatment.

Abdul Aziz then invaded the Holy City of Mecca in 1803, and the city surrendered under the impact of panic and terror (Medina has destined the same fate as well). Followers of Abd al-Wahhab demolished all historical monuments, tombs and shrines in their midst and by the time they finished, they had destroyed Islamic architecture that had taken centuries to put up, near the Grand Mosque.

In November of 1803, however, a Shiite assassin assassinated King Abdul Aziz, as an act of revenge for the Karbala massacre. He got succeeded by his son, Saud bin Abd al-Aziz, and he continued the conquest of Arabia. However, Ottoman rulers felt the need to stand up against the slow but steady destruction of their empire. In 1812, the Ottoman army, which composed of Egyptians, drove the Alliance out of Jeddah, Mecca and Medina. Saud bin Abd al-Aziz succumbed to fever and died in 1814. Unfortunately, the Ottomans captured his son, Abdullah bin Saud, and took him to Istanbul, where he got executed gruesomely.

In 1815, the Egyptians, under the Ottoman's leadership, crushed the Wahhabi forces in a decisive battle. In 1818, the Ottomans captured and devoured the Wahhabi capital of Dariyah, bringing an end to the first Saudi state. The few Wahhabis who remained fled back to the desert to regroup, and they remained there quite dormant, for the better part of the 19th century.

History Returns with ISIS

It is easy to understand how the establishment of the Islamic State by ISIS in modern day Iraq resonates amongst those who can recall history. Evidently, the ethos of

18th century Wahhabism never died in Nejd, but it came back to life in the wake of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following the chaos of the First World War.

The Al Saud, in this cultural rebirth of the 20th century, was under the leadership of the politically insightful Abd-al-Aziz, who, on uniting the wayward Bedouin tribes, established the Saudi "Ikhwan." He did so in the spirit of Ibn Saud's and Abd-al Wahhab's earlier fighting proselytisers. The Ikhwan marked a re-emergence of the early, semi-independent and fierce vanguard movement of armed Wahhabist, committed "moralists" that had almost succeeded in taking over Arabia by the early 1800s. In the same way as before, the Ikhwan again managed to capture Mecca, Jeddah and Medina between 1914 and 1926. Abd-al-Aziz, however, started to feel as if his wider interests under threat by the revolutionary "Jacobinism" demonstrated by the Ikhwan.⁶² The Ikhwan revolted, and what followed was a civil war that took place until the King had them killed in the 1930s.

For Abd-al-Aziz, the simple principles of past decades started eroding as oil began getting discovered in the peninsular. America and Britain began courting Abd-al-Aziz but remained inclined to support Sharif Husain as Arabia's only legitimate ruler. The Saudis had to develop a more steadfast diplomatic posture. Wahhabism was therefore changed forcefully from a movement that supported revolutionary jihad and the purification of theological takfiri, to a movement that advocated for conservative social, political, religious and theological Da'wa or Islamic call.⁶³

⁶² Julia McQuaid, (2015), *The Struggle for Unity and Authority in Islam: Reviving the Caliphate?*, Center for Naval Analyses, Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.cna.org/research/2014/revivingcaliphate>.

⁶³ Charles Philip Issawi, (1991), *An Arab Philosophy of History*, Princeton: Darwin Press.

1999-2006: Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi

When the Islamic State seized Mosul on 10th June 2014 took the world by surprise and raised many questions as to the origins of the ISIS group. This report traces the origins of ISIS to a Jordanian Islamist militant by the name Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who went on to build his paramilitary organization after his release from prison. In 1999, he found *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* (JTWJ) with the help of bin Laden and other al-Qaeda (AQ) leaders present in Afghanistan then.⁶⁴

Having been a student of Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, a well-known Sunni Salafist preacher, Zarqawi was believed highly in sectarianism and had fierce opposition towards the state. Therefore, among the major objectives, JTWJ had initially was to topple the government of Jordan and execute brutal wars targeted on Shia Muslims. Zarqawi got blamed of planning a terrorist incident in the country (Amman); he and his new military group had to go into hiding. Zarqawi and JTWJ resurfaced after several years in the North of Iraq. When Iraq got invaded by the US in 2003, Zarqawi seized the opportunity and built a base for his organization in Iraq. Zarqawi joined the insurgency, with the aim to expand JTWJ and the organization's operations, thereby attracting international attention after coordinating several of high profile attacks. For instance, Zarqawi became popular after masterminding have the United Nations bombing at their Headquarters in Baghdad, an attack that led to the death of 22 people. Among those who perished was Sergio Viera de Mello, a UN special envoy.⁶⁵ Zarqawi also said that his

⁶⁴ Aymenn Jawad, Al-Tamimi, (2014), *The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham*,

⁶⁵ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*, Institute for the Study of War.

organization was responsible for attacks on several Shia holy sites, most importantly, an attack on the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, Iraq, whereby 83 worshippers died.⁶⁶ Also, in February of 2004, he helped in the planning and execution of one more fatal attack that went down in Iraq during a respected Shia holiday, the Ashura festival. On that occasion, 183 Shias died in both Baghdad and Karbala.⁶⁷ Zaraqawi once again caught the attention of the world when he beheaded two U.S nationals. In 2004, Zaraqawi beheaded Ken Bigley and Nick Berg on Camera.

Inevitably, Zaraqawi's horrible brutality accompanied by his constant use of violence translated to a broken relationship that he and Osama bin Laden shared. Primarily, Zaraqawi's target the Shia Muslim in Iraq because he saw them as the greatest threat to the rise of a Sunni led government in the country. Therefore, Zaraqawi counted that if he stirred chaos and confusion they would be to his advantage and cast his organization in the light to seem like the protector of the Sunni Muslim and advance to initiate the foundation of an Islamic state.⁶⁸ As a result of Zaraqawi's agenda having a sectarian nature, he was able to acquire many followers from the Sunni Iraqis who felt alienated. He appealed to Sunni ex-Baathists who pledged to offer support to his course. That was because following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime; they got kicked out of the seats of power. After the Prime Minister's (Maliki) ascent to the office, Sunnis were completely shut out of politics. Therefore, despite Baathists being averagely secular,

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Dabiq, (2014), *The Return of Khalifah*, Al Hayat Media Center, 2014. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

Zarqawi and most ex-Baathists had a common agenda, which was both anti-state and anti-Shia.

However, both Islamists and nationalists within the Sunni in Iraqi found Zarqawi's use of force and brutality to be troubling, which resulted in many foes for Zarqawi. In September of 2004, Zarqawi formally joined al-Qaeda (AQ) with the hope of gaining more recruits. He did so by pledging an oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*) to Osama bin Laden and he also renaming his organization from JTJW to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). However, Osama had his doubts regarding Zarqawi. Through an open letter from Zawahiri, (the then deputy to bin Laden) to Zarqawi, he highlighted a disparity in ideology between AQ leadership and Zarqawi.⁶⁹ While Zarqawi was of the idea that the only means to succeed in his mission were through violence and force, leaders of the al-Qaeda warned him against using brutality and violence. They particularly discouraged him from using violence on the Shia community. The reason was due to the fact they were afraid to spoil the reputation that existed regarding the jihadi.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, bin Laden allowed Zarqawi to push the AQ franchise further in Iraq. Barely two years after the establishment of AQI, the US initiated a counterinsurgency project in the country, a campaign popularly known as "the surge." Zarqawi died in 2006, following a US airstrike.

⁶⁹ Dabiq, 2014d, *The Return of Khalifah*, Al Hayat Media Center, 2014. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

⁷⁰ Dabiq, 2014a, *A Call to Hijrah, 2014*, Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-3-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

2006-2010: Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi

After Zarqawi died, AQI soon merged with more AQ affiliate groups that operated in Iraq at that time, leading to the formation the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) with its leader being Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. There was symbolic importance in the act of changing the organization's old name al-Qaeda in Iraq to the new name Islamic State of Iraq as it portrayed a shift in the organization's vision and strategy. Other than just inciting sectarian violence and carrying out high profile attacks, ISI wanted to establish their state. It wanted to establish a state that had the ability to governing territory, generate own revenue and implement organization's interpretation of Sharia Law. ISI, however, remained an official affiliate of al- Qaeda, despite its name change. That meant that while Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was in charge of operations of ISI in Iraq, he was nevertheless answerable to Ayman al-Zawahiri's leadership, for he was the leader of Central al-Qaeda.⁷¹

As soon as it got established, ISI based its operations in the province of Anbar, West of Iraq. Anbar is a tribal area with a high population of marginalized Sunni Muslims who naturally felt sympathetic of ISI's campaign against the Shia. ISI thus settled in Anbar and began setting up structures for governance and the enactment of sharia law as well. ISI had by 2006, taken total military governance over Anbar and paralyzed any functioning of the authorities of Ramadi Government, (Capital city of Anbar).⁷² Following the assassination of members of Anbar's Provincial Council by ISI

⁷¹ Fred Donner, (2012), *Introduction, In The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Variorum.

⁷² Ibid.

fighters, ISI lost favor in the eyes of Anbar tribesmen. ISIS implemented the Sharia at an extreme, which contradicted with the beliefs of the Anbars. Sheikh Abdul Satter al-Rishawi argued that the ISI insurgency brutally killed many civilians that purportedly opposed the group and for that reason, the tribesmen turned against ISI. According to them, the only solution to stopping the ISI menace was to team up with American forces. It was after a meeting between Rishawi and 10 US troops that had set base in Anbar that they agreed to combat ISI. The US assisted the tribesmen led by Sheikh Abdul Satter al-Rishawi to build a council of tribal militias for the Sunni, also known as Sahwat al-Anbar. After a US-led surge in 2007, the Sahwat used an insurgency later known as “the Anbar Awakening” to successfully expelled ISI from both Fallujah and Anbar.⁷³

Soon after that victory that the U.S facilitated, the prime minister of Iraq, Maliki, became afraid that the tribal militia, Sahwat, posed a threat towards the Shia majority in Iraq. Consequently, Maliki turned down the need to admit Sahwat inside the Shia-dominated Iraqi government. When Malik excluded the council from playing a role in the political arena of Iraq, the Anbar men joined forces and fought alongside ISI. At the same time, ISI had grown very weak between 2006 and 2010, following the US-led attacks in Iraq and their strong stance on “War on Terror.”⁷⁴ The majority of the ISI fighters had either died in combat or detained, thereby starving ISI of manpower. By 2010, the organization was pretty much on its knees, a fact whose evidence was the

⁷³ Fred Donner, (2012), *Introduction.* In *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Variorum.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

significant drop in the number of sectarian violence attacks during that period.⁷⁵ Omar al-Baghdadi died in 2010, following a joint American-Iraqi airstrike, fatally crippling the already weakened ISI. Meanwhile, as the American army commenced their departure from the land Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISI's newly appointed leader, took that opportunity to revamp the organization.

2010-2013: Reign of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi

Sources offer varying details concerning certain details on the life and career of Al-Baghdadi. Although there is a common narrative that describes his background that is quite clear, Baghdadi still remains a figure with some degree of mystery. According to Baghdadi's biography found in many jihadist websites, 1971 was the year of his birth and he was born to a Sunni religious family in Samarra, Iraq. His name was Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samaarai originally, but later on, he took the name Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurayshi.

Baghdadi is believed to have acquired an undergraduate degree in Islamic studies and master's degrees on the same before pursuing a Ph.D. in Sharia law. He studied at the University of Baghdad. In 2003, before the fall of the reign of Saddam Hussein, Baghdadi stayed in a small house next to an unspecified mosque in Diyala, in the northeastern part of Baghdad. There, he passed as a Salafist preacher and right about the time the US invaded Iraq; Baghdadi established an Islamist militant group by the name *Jaysh Ahl al- Sunnah al-Jamaah*. He formed this group from the small but many

⁷⁵ Youssef Aboul-Enein, (2010), *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press.

militia groups that later decided to unify under the ISI banner.⁷⁶ However, in 2004, a battle ensued between Baghdadi and the owner of the mosque in which he had been teaching. Baghdadi declined an invitation to join the political Islam Party, giving the reason that according to Salafist teachings it was wrong to have political organizations.⁷⁷ Following his decline, he got an eviction notice from the mosque, and soon afterwards, Baghdadi got detained in Camp Bucca, which is a US incarceration facility in The South of Iraq) by the US forces.

Meanwhile, when Baghdadi got captured, the insurgency of the Sunni, in which Zarqawi took centre- stage, was taking over both western and central Iraq. The majority of the detainees in Camp Bucca had taken part in the Sunni insurgency, and some were close associates of Zarqawi. Unlike almost all other prisoners in detention there, Baghdadi was special in one important way. He had the ability to claim that he was a direct descendant of the Holy Prophet because he came from the Quraysh tribe, Prophet Muhammad's tribe. Abu Ahmed, one of the top most officials in ISIS today in an interview said that he had spent time with Baghdadi in Bucca. According to him, despite the fact that Baghdadi was quiet, he was endowed with a gift of oratory; he would use words effectively and was all together, a skilled mediator. Even American prison guards looked up to him to mediate fractious disputes that constantly existed between competing factions thereby helped restore calm in the camp.

⁷⁶ Elliot Friedland, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*, Clarionproject.org. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Julia McQuaid, (2015), *The Struggle for Unity and Authority in Islam: Reviving the Caliphate?*, Center for Naval Analyses. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.cna.org/research/2014/revivingcaliphate>.

Camp Bucca had to about 24,000 detainees by the time Baghdadi got detained.⁷⁸ The camp provided the most appropriate environment to exchange of brutal, violent, extreme ideologies among the detainees and for radicalization as well. Andrew Thompson, a military veteran perceived the Iraqi military prisons as somewhat 'terrorist universities', where hardened radicals played the role of professors while other detainees were the students. Abu Ahmed, on the other hand, perceived Bucca as some factory that made them all, as according to him, the camp helped build their ideology.⁷⁹ Most militant fanatics soon formed coalitions with ex- Baathist military leaders who got captured following the collapse of the government of Saddam Hussein.

The alliances formed were strategic and purposeful because the two sides complimented each other in the sense that each faction had what the other lacked. On one side, the ex-Baathists had vast experience militarily, but both the US troops and Maliki's forces had crushed their spirit to a point that there was little motivation to fight. On the flip side, Baghdadi and his allies, were adequately motivated and had much religious fervor but lacked both administrative and military experience. Therefore, at Bucca things added up just fine as ideologues acquire bureaucratic and military traits while the bureaucrats adopted violent extremism.⁸⁰ Ultimately, there was the formation of an alliance that was extremely powerful, all geared towards the advancement of the anti-Shia campaign. Following the closure of Camp Bucca in March of 2009, the detainees

⁷⁸ Elliot Friedland, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*. Clarionproject.org. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ WorldPublicOpinion.org., (2007), *Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and Al-Qaeda*, The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland. Accessed 14 November 2015, from http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf

got released. As predicted by many close observers of the unfolding in Iraq, most of the detainees released returned to joining Islamist militant groups, now having been dangerously radicalized, would. According to an estimate by analysts, almost nine members that form the current leadership in ISIS today were once detained with Baghdadi between 2004 and 2009 in Camp Bucca.⁸¹

It still is unclear as to how and when exactly Baghdadi became an al-Qaeda operative, but after his release from detainment, Baghdadi was much later appointed the head of the ISI organization. By 2010, the US forces had started to pull out of the Iraq, and Baghdadi instantly initiated the process of rebuilding ISI and recruiting new followers. His first move was planning organized campaigns of suicide attacks and fatal car bombings among others. ISI was known to demonstrate the potential to execute twenty to thirty attacks in provinces chosen randomly in Iraq within the span of an hour. On 19th of August 2011, the ISI published an official statement on the group's website, with a promise to carry out, even more, attacks all over Iraq. They warned that they would do so through conducting raids, roadside bombs, small but fatal attacks, and suicide attacks in towns, cities as well as rural areas all over Iraq.⁸²

The group managed to get on its feet in 2011 during the period of the onset of the Civil War that hit Syrian then. Though the tension in Syria started off as secular series of less chaotic demonstrations in the society, they fast evolved to become religious and catastrophic civil unrest. Initially, Baghdadi saw the conflict in Syria as trivial and

⁸¹ Friedland & Elliot, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*, Clarionproject.org. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>

⁸² Charlie Caris. & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*, Institute for the Study of War.

irrelevant to his organization, whose primary campaign was in Iraq. However, he quickly decided to seize the chance that presented itself through the emerging chaos in Syria. That was because he saw a way for the ISI to maximize from the war by conducting military operations in the country while recruiting new fighters. Before July of 2011, Baghdadi decided to lead some of his ISI members to the North of Syria to support Sunni that were rebelling and fighting with the Assad regime. Soon after his decision, uprisings in Syria spread and turned out to be even more violent.

Abu Mohammed al-Golani led a small group of ISI fighters in August of 2011, towards the province of Hasakah in the North-East of Syria. Zawahiri approved Baghdadi's decision, and offered his support to the Golani led the group by and sent other al-Qaeda militants, majorly from Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Golani attracted, even more, recruits from Syria and beyond as news of a campaign led by him against the regime in Syria circulated all around the world through the Internet. He had a following of about 2,000 fighters by 2012 while at the same time; funds began to trickle down in significant amounts from nearby Sunni states, and especially from the Gulf States that supported Sunni's decision to oppose Syria. Consequently, security analysis came to a conclusion that Golani and his followers received a very large sum of that money. Because Golani and his fighters had adequate resources as well as a manageable army, they conquered significant territories in Syria and established their territories across areas with oil. The 23rd of January 2012 saw the formal establishment of the Al-Nusra Front or Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). After its establishment, Golani served as the head of that organization. In the meanwhile, Baghdadi had his ISI operations centrally focused in Iraq. However, he further advanced of the organization's

reach past Iraq. ISI launched a spectacular campaign in July of 2012, which went by the name “Breaking the Walls.” The series of attacks targeted Iraqi prisons for close to a year, and it incorporated waves of explosive attacks and car bombings on eight major prisons.⁸³ Most of those the detainees in those prisons were former members of the al-Qaeda Iraq organization as well as more militant Islamist organizations that got suppressed following the counterinsurgency that took place between 2006 and 2007.

The campaign (Breaking the Walls) was, therefore, an attempt by Baghdadi to re-establish a large pool of manpower for the sake of filling the ranks in ISI. They would also take part in carrying out the groups’ operations in Iraq. At the same time, Maliki yet again found a way to undermine the Sunni population in Iraq. In December 2012, Maliki’s police force arrested Rafi al-Issawi’s bodyguards. Rafi al-Issawi was a highly respected Sunni politician who doubled up as Iraq’s Minister of Finance. They accused the bodyguards of plotting an attack of terror against the Prime Minister and his regime.⁸⁴ Many people, particularly Sunni Iraqis did not believe that al-Issawi’s bodyguards were capable of planning a terrorist attack. Most of them also perceived the Prime Minister’s accusation as a direct attack on the Sunni community. It was also significantly interrupted as an effort by the Prime Minister to eliminate the Sunnis from the Iraq government, which the Shia dominated.

Subsequently, massive protests erupted in Fallujah and Ramadi, soon expanded to other Sunni-dominated cities such as Tikrit and Mosul. At the beginning of

⁸³ Aymenn Jawad, Al-Tamimi, (2014), *The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham*,

⁸⁴ Elliot Friedland, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*, *Clarionproject.org*. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>

the demonstrations, they were a condemnation of the anti-terrorism laws in Iraq. Protestors claimed that the laws were maliciously targeting the Sunni community. The demonstrators then began to demand more respect for civil rights and much later, they demanded Maliki's resignation. Although the demonstrations were quite intense, they stayed quite peaceful for months. Funds poured in from neighboring Sunni states in support the demonstrators and to assist in the establishment of protest "camps" meant for the demonstrators to receive food and sleep.⁸⁵ In March of 2013, among the people taking part in the demonstrations in Ramadi were several men seen to have been waving the flag of the al-Qaeda. These men called themselves ISIS, 'The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham.'

2013-2014: The Spread of ISIS

At this time, the crisis in Syria had cascaded rapidly and violently while JN was gaining significant influence under Golani's leadership. Meanwhile, Baghdadi, who still saw Golani as his subordinate, noticed attention moving away from the Iraq insurgency moving towards Syria. Baghdadi reasserted his authority in April of 2013 when he announced that the ISI and JN had united to bring forth the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). The formation of ISIS substantially changed Baghdadi and his ambition. After forming ISIS, Baghdadi no longer focused all his strategies in Iraq but

⁸⁵ Youssef Aboul-Enein, (2010), *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press.

expanded his operations into Syria. Therefore, Baghdad claimed the power fund as well as direct the movements both in Iraq and Syria.⁸⁶

Maliki responded forceful and violent when it he realized that ISIS fighters had started to penetrate the protests in Ramadi and other towns. In April of that year, regime forces acted brutally and used drastic force towards the protesters gathered in northern part of Iraq. The attack murdered the protesters in hundreds of numbers.⁸⁷ The ISIS militia took that opportunity to recruit Sunni demonstrators, claiming that it would take great force to achieve success in opposing the regime. This argument made sense to many desperate and marginalized Sunnis who now had the feeling that they had nowhere else to run to for support and protection. Therefore, many Sunni demonstrators joined ranks with ISIS, despite being relatively secular and highly educated. Meanwhile, Maliki issued yet another attack against the Sunni opposition. Later in December of that year, Maliki said that the protest camp in Ramadi had turned into the headquarters for al-Qaeda leadership and then ordered his security forces to dismantle the camp. Clashes broke out almost immediately, and 10 Sunni civilians lost their lives.

That December, Maliki sent police forces to arrest Ahmed al-Alwani, a Sunni Parliament member, who was an avid supporter of the protests. Following the arrest, the Sunnis reacted unexpectedly and demanded freedom from the Iraq security forces by running them out of the city causing chaos and unrest. Seizing a good opportunity to expand its territory, some of the ISIS militia from Syria made use of the chaos and

⁸⁶ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*. Institute for the Study of War.

⁸⁷ Michael Cook, (2001), *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge University Press.

invaded the city in large numbers. The ISIS militia and the Iraq security forces engaged in violent exchanges. In the end, the ISIS won due to their vigorous training, military grade weapon, and large numbers. After the victory, the ISIS established their ground in Anbar City and therefore, control of the Sunnis. The next ambition for the Group became Mosul, which is the northern region of Iraq and dominated purely by Sunnis.

Around that period of the invasion, Baghdadi and Golani were engulfed in a bitter argument and negotiations. Golani refused to acknowledge the victory of ISIS in Anbar because it required that Golani submit to Baghdadi's leadership. Instead, Golani appealed to Zawahiri, thereby reaffirming his allegiance to AQ Central. After many months of discussions, Zawahiri commanded Baghdadi to minimize some of his operations to Iraq and went on to appoint Golani as the one in charge of operations in Syria. Baghdadi declined to limit his activities to geographic boundaries and told Zawahiri that he (Baghdadi) chose to follow God's command as opposed to following commands that contradict it in the draft.

When Baghdadi chose to retain rule and operations over Syria, Zawahiri decided to terminate all the relations between AQ and ISIS. In 2014 around February, Zawahiri declared that ISIS was not a part of the al-Qaeda group and that they had no organizational relationship with ISIS, adding that al-Qaeda was not responsible for ISIS actions.⁸⁸ Soon after that announcement, ISIS, now being an independent organization, went on to increase its operations in Syria, gained control of many oil fields and territory in eastern part of Syria. For a short period, the divided between JN and ISIS stayed quite

⁸⁸ Elliot Friedland, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*, *Clarionproject.org*. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>.

unsure to the ground troops, but then, many fighters quit JN and joined ISIS at the beginning of 2014. Based on some reports, approximately 65 percent of fighters from JN defected to ISIS.⁸⁹ Most of them were non-Syrians fighters. Nonetheless, the rift between ISIS and JN would, did not cease. Eventually, it evolved into a jihadi unrest that stirred a civil war.⁹⁰

Although some people have perceived the conflict between Golani and Baghdadi as somewhat more than a mere struggle for power, there are also significant ideological distinct between the two leaders. An analysis of these differences can help to offer an explanation the hostile relationship between JN and ISIS. For starters, ISIS members are not interested in just remaining underground and coming to surface later only to brutally attack or cause violent attacks. Their plan is to found a state and to beat any group or person who opposes them. ISIS is unlike al-Qaeda. It is an organization intent on building a functioning state. The difference between NJ and ISIS is that despite the fact that Golani aims to establish a nation, he believes that it is not the appropriate time to restore the Islamic Caliphate. Therefore, Golani envisions a state that is only as big as Syria. Also, Golani has decided to stop answering questions about the idea of state building and governance until they can overthrow Assad.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Julia McQuaid, (2015), *The Struggle for Unity and Authority in Islam: Reviving the Caliphate?*, Center for Naval Analyses. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.cna.org/research/2014/revivingcaliphate>.

⁹⁰ Dabiq. 2014c. *The Failed Crusade, 2014*. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-4-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

⁹¹ Edward Luttwak, (2014), *Caliphate Redivivus? Why a Careful Look at the 7th Century Can Predict How the Caliphate Will End*. Hoover Institution, Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.hoover.org/research/caliphate-redivivus-why-carefullook-7th-century-can-predict-how-new-caliphate-will-end>.

Baghdadi's ambitions are global. He aims for a caliphate that extends across the globe encompassing Syria and Iraq but one that also includes all of the Arab world.

Unlike the other leaders, Zawahiri and Golani, Baghdadi strongly believes that the foretold Islamic Caliphate should get restored now and not any time later. He also believes that one emir must take control over the central authority of the state. Having increased its manpower and territorial control in Syria, and after solidifying its control over some areas in western Iraq, ISIS seized the chance to attack Mosul. On 6th June 2014, ISIS carried out a huge attack in downtown Mosul. On 10th of June, 800 ISIS fighters formed an "uneasy alliance" with Sunni tribesmen, former Baathists, and other Sunni rebels and went on to capture Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq.

Success in capturing the city of Mosul came as a tremendous boost of confidence for ISIS fighters. It provided them with military grade weapons from America and Russia. After Mosul victory, the ISIS army quickly forged on towards the south, sieging the cities of Hawijah, Qayyarah, Tikrit and al-Shaq at. Then, on 29th June, on day one of Ramadan, the official spokesman of ISIS, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, declared the re-establishment of the Caliphate. After the establishment of the caliphate, Baghdadi became the caliph. On the same day, ISIS used the media to release a publication by the name "The End of Sykes-Picot," which showed an ISIS members pointing to a bulldozed Iraq-Syrian border. He went on to say that, they did not recognize and will never recognize the so-called border of Sykes-Picot. What followed was an immediate rejection

the establishment of the caliphate by Nine Syrian rebel groups, JN included. They also attempted to weaken any support towards the Islamic State by threatening other jihadist.⁹²

Nonetheless, on 4 July in Mosul, Baghdadi gave out a sermon in which he urged the Muslims to remember that they were under the obligation to not only support the Islamic State but to also spread the Faith.⁹³ The sermon that Baghdadi gave on that day garnered attention globally and brought tens of thousands of followers from all over the world into Iraq and Syria to back up Baghdadi.

⁹² John Esposito, (2011), *Islam: The Straight Path* (4th ed.), New York: Oxford University Press.

⁹³ Ibid.

CHAPTER III

WHAT ISIS WANTS: POLITICAL OBJECTIVES AND RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGIES

The Islamic State's Ideology

Other than a hunger for power, the ideological conviction that drives The Islamic State originates from two quite distinct directions; despite both having a similar theme. The number one and major strand is the fundamental principle of Islamic opinion that dates back to the scholar Ibn Taymiyya of the 14th Century. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al Wahhab passed down this opinion and were responsible for modern day ideologies of Salafists. Their different ways these two individuals interpreted Islam essentially demands the absolute and harsh rejection of any additions since the times of Prophet Muhammed.

According to them, any diversion from the teachings drawn from a superficial reading of the Hadith and the Quran is blasphemy that must get eradicated. It, therefore, follows that Sufism, Shi'ism, or and anyone or anything that fails to agree to their interpretation of Islam, should face destruction, and that is the basis of takfirism.⁹⁴ ISIS, therefore, justifies its violent nature by arguing that all those actions by the group are for

⁹⁴ Madawi Al-Rasheed, & Marat Shterin, (2013), "Introduction." *In Demystifying the Caliphate: Historical Memory and Contemporary Contexts*, New York: Columbia University Press.

the good of reviving Islam and reforming it into its initial pure form. They claim that the group will unite the Muslim world under a truly Islamic rule, and thereby restore the greatness and dignity of fellow Muslims while carrying out the orders of God.

The Influence of Ex-Ba'athists

The second strand of ISIS, most prominent in its organization as well as political objectives, is Ba'athism or in other words, the network of ex-Ba'athists who defected in 2008 and 2010 to The Islamic State and joined forces. The original form of Ba'athism sought the restoration of the Arab race through rescuing it from the legacy of colonialism and the defilement of its values. It wanted to establish a pan-Arab state that was under a one leadership of the Ba'ath party leading. Ba'athism served as a secularist movement that urged for the distinction of government and religion, and Syria and Iraq stayed secular states under the Ba'athist regime. However, Ba'athist theoreticians saw the development of Islam as a demonstration of the intellectual vitality of the Arab people and the greatness of Arab culture.

When professed Ba'athists perhaps inevitably, managed to seize control in both Iraq and Syria, they fail in the same ways that they had argued that so many other reformers did before them. Ba'athism got stained with elements of racism, elitism, and fascism and became a cult of the leadership instead of being a vanguard movement working for the interests of the people.

Both the theory of Ba'athism and the takfiri/Salafist approach envision a new beginning that is to come about through a trip to the past.⁹⁵ Although takfirism/Salafist is

⁹⁵ Charles Philip Issawi (1991), *An Arab Philosophy of History*. Princeton: Darwin Press.

more inclusive than Ba'athism theoretically, (it accepts non-Arabs who agree to obey the rules), the idea of a state managed by a minor group of the enlightened appeals to both. Moreover, the great majorities of Ba'athists opposing the new regime in Iraq were secular and had formed the Ba'ath party only as a means to progress up the hierarchy. However, they knew for a fact that Salafist/takfirism made more sense and had become a much better motivator for the people than Ba'athism ever would. Political movements require ideological glue to succeed,⁹⁶ and the Ba'athists look like they had decided that as long as they could push the campaign to reacquire power, they did not get bothered much by what their Salafist/takfiri allies perceived might happen next.

The collaboration between members of ex-Ba'athist and AQI also got strengthened when many of them found themselves serving time in United States incarceration centers such as Camp Bucca in Iraq. It is likely, for instance, that Abu Bakr met some of the ex-members of the Ba'ath party who later on take senior positions in the leadership of The Islamic State.

In the initial days of that alliance, the Ba'athists might have had the advantage as they brought organizational and military skills and a team of experienced bureaucrats that ISI and AQI lacked.⁹⁷ The Ba'athists were still ascendant as late as 2010. This thesis can prove this by citing the following example. That is when Hajji Bakr, a senior ex-army Ba'athist officer (who had ascended to a senior position in ISI), facilitated the

⁹⁶ Dabiq, 2014a, *A Call to Hijrah, 2014*. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-3-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

⁹⁷ Dabiq, 2014d, *The Return of Khalifah*, Al Hayat Media Center, 2014. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

appointment of Abu Bakr as head the organization following the death of Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (al-Masri) and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi in 2010.

However, since the sudden growth of The Islamic State from late 2011 in the wake of the Syrian civil war, and the subsequent declaration of the Caliphate on the 29th of June 2014, it appears like the Salafist/takfiris have taken over. That also demonstrates the hardening of sectarianism as a matter of belief as opposed to the group identity, which has culminated into the supporting or joining of The Islamic State by a wider range of Sunnis outside Iraq. The Shia have reacted by seeing The Islamic State as part of an unholy collaboration against them by Sunni and Ba'athist groups including Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al Naqshbandiya (JRTN). That has compounded into the sectarian divide. Many ex-Ba'athists continue to occupy top positions in The Islamic State, and both groups continue to find sufficient coincidence of interest to overcome any disagreement in ideology.

Following the fall of Mosul in July 2014, there was an audio publication by Izzat al Douri, (one who took over the leadership of the Ba'ath party following Saddam Hussein's demise). In this recording, he praised several resistance groups, such as the Islamic Army, the Jaysh al Mujahidun, the 1920s Brigades and most importantly, The Islamic State.⁹⁸ Al Douri thanked the leader of The Islamic State (without mentioning Abu Bakr's name) because of issuing a pardon to all Iraqi police and soldiers and who left the government to join the resistance. Moving on, for the sake of their survival, all these defectors had to pledge allegiance to The Islamic State. However, the loyalty of

⁹⁸ Fred Donner, (2012), "Introduction." In *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Variorum.

these new recruits is questionable. That is because these secularists who have joined The Islamic State may have done so for want of an alternative. That includes the ex-Ba'athists in the ISIS leadership.

Through his declaration of the Caliphate Abu Bakr has managed to get more space to reach decisions. The assassination campaign against rivals or would be opponents by his security detail has without a doubt reduced any direct opposition to his plans, but it has not completely crushed the opposition. The execution of senior Ba'athist leaders after the capture of Mosul might have achieved the desired effect of eliminating potential political rivals, and might have also cowed others into submission. However, that does not reassure the Salafist/takfiris of their safety in the long run.

The Islamic State also counts on allegiance from tribal leaders whose help comes more as a result of their antagonism towards their government than because they genuinely support the ambitions of Abu Bakr's Caliphate. However, just like the Ba'athists, most tribal leaders disapprove of the extremism of the Salafist/Takfiri members of The Islamic State. They particularly despise the thousands of foreigners in their midst, who have no local ties and who they perceive as being least considerate of local social hierarchy and customs.⁹⁹

For the moment, however, Abu Bakr's fierce commitment to the volatile Salafist/takfiri beliefs that now characterize the movement, has led him to a position of absolute authority. That is in collaboration with his fact that he also has a totalitarian and ruthless mindset. He has not had to get branded a natural leader or a visionary. He is just

⁹⁹ Ibid.

strong enough to have his will imposed more effectively than anyone else.¹⁰⁰ Although they failed to work together, Abu Bakr's (ISIS) long-term goals are almost identical to the long-term goals of the al Qaeda leadership. The tensions between the two organizations date back to Zarqawi's days, and have always been about tactics and leadership, and not about long-term objectives.

Growing Ambition

The organization has had its name changed, first from Al Qaeda in Iraq to The Islamic State of Iraq, and then The Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria, and most recently to The Islamic State or the Caliphate. That shows more than just an evolution of the organization's geographical ambition, or a display of steady but notable growth. There is immense religious significance for the Salafist/takfiris through the declaration an Islamic State, both geographically and many other aspects. In 2006, when Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (Abu Bakr's predecessor), declared the formation of The Islamic State of Iraq, he regarded himself as the defender of Muslim faith and the leader of all Muslims.¹⁰¹ He was, in essence, declaring a Caliphate, and although he did not go as far as saying so, his organization demonstrated that it had control of as much territory as had the Prophet during his reign in Medina.

From a religious standpoint, ISIS should have conquered the Hejaz (as the location of the two holy places, Medina and Mecca) as an early objective. The organization has not given this as its objective. Although there exists a clear challenge to

¹⁰⁰ Fred Donner, (2012), *"Introduction."* In *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Variorum.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

the religious authority of the king of Saudi Arabia, in purely political terms, Abu Bakr's organization still reflects its background as an Iraqi group with Iraqi objectives, which now has an increasing stake in Syria. By changing its name to The Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria, the objective of the group then was to try to capitalize on the energy came with the civil war in Syria. The group was going to use to boost support for the insurgency in Iraq, by highlighting a common cause of Sunni displeasure with the Shia governments on either side of the border.¹⁰² That is considering that in Syria, the Sunni make up 70 percent of the population while in Iraq they comprise only about 30 percent of the population.

By changing the movement's name to The Islamic State, Abu Bakr sought to broaden the appeal of the group beyond Iraq and Syria without necessarily having to change its short-term objectives. By removing the geographic limitations in the movement's name, Abu Bakr reinforced stand as the leader of global 'jihad' to al Qaeda and thus gave more reason for foreign fighters to join him. A map published by the US Department of Defense in September of 2014, the US Government assesses ISIS territorial ambition to extend by 2016. According to the map, by that time ISIS will have covered all the Sunni areas of Iraq that sit to the north and west of Baghdad and a huge portion of Syria excluding Damascus and the west of Syria. It will also have occupied a small area of Northern Jordan.

¹⁰² Youssef Aboul-Enein, (2010), *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press.

By naming the group The Islamic State, going on to bulldoze the berm that separates Iraq and Syria and subsequently destroying border posts¹⁰³, Abu Bakr reinforces his rejection of the colonial boundaries. These are the boundaries that came into place in 1916 following the Sykes-Picot agreement. This act appeals to three different constituencies: first, the local tribes who span the border and secondly, the Arab nationalists who disapprove of the ever existing colonial legacy of divide and rule. Lastly, it appeals to members of the Muslim Umma whose belief is that they should form one state based on the common faith they share.

Over and above the increase in its territory, another objective of The Islamic State is to consolidate its rule through attempting to convert the masses into the group's Salafist/takfiri creed (*dawa*). It also seeks to impose a sharia-based rule to establish further its authority and build its apparent legitimacy. It also wants to provide education as a form of recruitment and indoctrination¹⁰⁴, as well as offering humanitarian aid and public services to achieve public support and approval.

The Need for Administrators

As much as the transformation from conquest to governance is vital for the group to have the power to sustain the Caliphate, that change presents the biggest challenge for the Caliphate. Some technocrats will offer support The Islamic State at will while some others will get intimidated into supporting the group. Overall, though, finding

¹⁰³ Julia McQuaid, (2015), *The Struggle for Unity and Authority in Islam: Reviving the Caliphate?*, Center for Naval Analyses. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.cna.org/research/2014/revivingcaliphate>

¹⁰⁴ Elliot Friedland, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*. *Clarionproject.org*. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>

the people with the ability needed to manage a state, let alone the territory currently under The Islamic State's control, calls for a recruitment campaign. However, the group's violent reputation will undermine such campaigns. Most existing technocrats will flee from The Islamic State's advances while others fall foul of the group's intolerance of anything short of full-fledged support. For ISIS, loyalty is of more importance than governance, but ironically, it is governance that is the prime determinant of its durability.

CHAPTER IV

THE MANAGEMENT OF SAVAGERY AS PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

Definition of “Management of Savagery”

By definition, the ‘Management of Savagery’ is the process used to control violent or ferocious acts of chaos.¹⁰⁵ A more elaborate explanation would differ according to the objectives, nature and goals of the individuals in charge of the administration. Considering the initial form of the phrase, it is evident that it refers to the management of needs of the people with regard to provision of food, medical aid and treatment, justice and security preservation among the people living in the regions of savagery. That also includes securing the borders by establishing groups that prevent anyone from trying to invade the regions of savagery, while developing defensive fortifications as well.

The process advances with time from stages of managing the basic needs of the people (such as food provision and medical treatment) to where the administration becomes responsible for the provision of services such as education. Meanwhile, the efforts to secure the borders of the region and preservation of security within the region of savagery advance to territory expansion through invading other regions.

¹⁰⁵ Abu Bakr, Naji, (2006), *The Management of Savagery*, 1st ed. [ebook], Harvard University: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies. Accessed 12 Jan. 2016 from, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>

Questions may arise as to why it gets referred to as ‘management of savage chaos’ or ‘management of savagery’ instead of just ‘management of chaos’. The reason being that, it is not quite simply like managing an institution, or a commercial company, or a neighborhood in a residential place or district, or even a peaceful society that is suffering from chaos. Rather, it is more nebulous than mere chaos, if perceived in light of its corresponding historical occurrences and precedence that has taken place in the modern world.¹⁰⁶ It is more nebulous than chaos, given greed, wealth, and various other forces that shape human nature as discussed in this chapter of the thesis.

Before it submitted to the ISIS administration, the region of savagery was in a similar situation as Afghanistan had been before falling under the control of the Taliban.¹⁰⁷ That is, a region forced into submission under the most primitive form of the law of the jungle. A region whose good and wise people among the wrongdoers alike long for someone to control the savagery. They are willing to accept any form of organization, irrespective of whether it comprises of people who uphold good or are evildoers.¹⁰⁸ However, if the management of the savagery comprises of evil people, it is highly likely that the region will become much more barbarous than before.

The preceding part of this chapter explained the initial form of the management of savagery and its requirements. However, before going into much more

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Simon Anholt, (2009), *Nation 'Branding': Propaganda or Statecraft?*, Public Diplomacy Magazine.

¹⁰⁸ Henri Claessen, & Peter Skalnik, (1978), *The Early State: Theories and Hypotheses*, The Hague: Mouton: In The Early State.

detail, it is important to clarify the requirements of the ideal form of “management of savagery” desired the form that agrees with the objectives of the Sharia Law.

- Maintaining internal security
- Provision of food
- Granting access to medical treatment
- Guarding the region of savagery against the enemy invasion
- Imposing Sharia justice among those who live in the regions of savagery
- Increasing the level of belief, raising combat efficiency among the youth of the region of savagery through training them and building a fighting society at every level and among all individuals. That includes raising their awareness about the importance of establishing a fighting culture.

- Working towards the spread of Sharia science; that is, prioritizing the most important aspects over those of lesser importance.

- Deployment of spies and looking to complete the establishment of a minimal intelligence agency.

- Uniting the hearts of people from all around the world by use of Sharia governance and fostering compliance with rules that are publicly observed, at least by those under the administration.

- Using proof to challenge the hypocrites and other ways and making forcing them hide and repress their hypocrisy, to conceal their discouraged opinions, and to dance to the tune of those in authority until their evil gets dealt with accordingly.

- Forging on until it is for them to attack and repel the enemies, expand their territories, plunder their money, and keep them constantly under apprehension so that they yearn for reconciliation.
- Form coalitions with groups and organizations whose coalitions are in good terms with ISIS, as well as those who have not completely pledged their allegiance to the administration.

Historical Precedents of the ISIS Management of Savagery

Extraordinary events are happening in Iraq and a big part of the Muslim World around the Middle East region. There is the evident seizure of territory historically belonging to the Sunni community, territory that spans Iraq and Syria (but seen as the emergence of a Sunni "belt" that extends across the region). The symbolism is applicable in the context of Islam of the early days. The sheer ruthlessness of The Islamic State's military strategy continues to dazzle and has stimulated passion and enthusiasm among young Sunni Muslims everywhere.¹⁰⁹

This occurrence has commanded the attention and admiration of many in the Gulf States and especially Iraq. The reality also frightens, considering the flesh creeps and the marching of beheaders. It is this gruesome, adrenaline-filled mix of fear and euphoria that show events that somehow mirror the very foundation of the Islamic Empire. All through the Middle East and North Africa, the Salafist arising of a Sunni

¹⁰⁹ Youssef Aboul-Enein, (2010), *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press.

self-perception of usurpation, grievance, and victimhood are brewing this new collective passion for Da'ish (ISIS).¹¹⁰ As stated earlier in this thesis, ISIS is neither al-Qaeda nor an al-Qaeda franchise or affiliate. After working together briefly, ISIS stands antagonistically and is directly opposed to al-Qaeda, which according to ISIS, is acting in terror. (The group, however, still follows the writings of Abdallah Azzam, a man who had influenced al-Qaeda intellectually).

(This thesis uses Zarqawism to identify the ideology of the Islamic State loosely. Zarqawism grew from different roots and unlike the ideology of the al-Qaeda; it was not a grand scheme to destroy the USA. The Zarqawism ideology was all about the feeling of being heavily grounded, impoverished, displaced and looked down upon as a rural class). It rose from a sense of Sunni loss of power, privilege, state ownership and claimed rights. It got driven by a deep yearning for retaliation against "usurpers." It also had its overtones as a war between classes, which is a war between the people of the countryside and the elite and affluent cosmopolitans. Above all, though, it had deep roots in bigotry; that is, intolerance towards those 'others' who were of a different opinion and in particular, the Shi'i and Iranians.

Zarqawism took shape in Iraq amid the war that was in the form of local "blood politics" and not in the same manner as Bin Laden's global war paradigms.¹¹¹ It got grounded in the context of the spiteful sectarian struggle and the humiliation that the

¹¹⁰ Dabiq, 2014e, *Remaining and Expanding, 2014*. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-5-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

¹¹¹ Edward Luttwak (2014), *Caliphate Redivivus? Why a Careful Look at the 7th Century Can Predict How the Caliphate Will End*. Hoover Institution. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.hoover.org/research/caliphate-redivivus-why-carefullook-7th-century-can-predict-how-new-caliphate-will-end>.

Sunnah suffered, having been ousted from the realms of power and quite essentially dismissed from the army. Meanwhile, Sunnis fighting against Syrian occupation by Iraq carried the Zarqawi ideology back to their already aggrieved and resentful hinterland of Hama and Homs.

The major characteristic of the Zarqawi doctrine was the assimilation and incorporation of an intolerant Wahhabism, an ideology that advocated for the purging of the 'defiled' Islam, through the blade of the sword. Islam was to get "purified" down to a unique authority, single voice, and a single leadership for the entire Islam community. It was through such purification and pursuit of deliberate ruthlessness that the Islamic State and Sharia would get reconstructed. One element that distinguishes Zarqawi from al-Qaeda is the refusal to embrace conventional historical beliefs about the formation of the Islamic state.¹¹² In this revision of history, the Islamic state got established by the fighting scholars who fought on behalf of Islam with support from their armed followers.(that is contrary to the conventional reading).

Therefore, while Zarqawism incorporates Wahhabi "puritanism," it breaks with Wahhabism in a truly revolutionary manner by failing to acknowledge the Saudi Kingdom as the legitimate founders of a State. It also does not recognize the Sudi Kingdom as an interpreter of the Qur'an or the head of the Mosque. ISIS takes all these attributes for itself and according to them, ISIS itself is the State. That includes completely falsifying of all aspects of Sunni and religious and temporal authority.

¹¹² Reza Pankhurst, (2015), *The Caliphate, and the Changing Strategy of the Public Statements of al-Qaeda's Leaders* (4th ed.),

Although Zarqawism refers to Azzam's writings in regards to the destruction of the U.S. as a key objective, in reality, ISIS goes a step further to filter its understanding of modern day politics. It wants the world to view it as a replica of the migration of the Prophet from Mecca, the struggle, and resistance he faces with the people of Mecca.¹¹³ It is important to note the symbolism here, in that; the Prophet's "Muslim project" nearly came to an end at the battle of Uhud against the forces of Mecca. ISIS reversal to the divine mission in Syria seems to have the symbolic equivalence of today's battle of 'Uhud'.¹¹⁴ In other words, many interpret the setbacks that ISIS experienced in Syria as an existential setback to the entire Sunni project.

Contemporary Precedents of the ISIS Management of Savagery

In this allegory, Iran stands for the Meccans, and not America. It is a popular opinion that America is the far enemy. The symbolism, however, points undoubtedly to the near enemy: Iran. In present day Iraq, ISIS has clearly shown that the journey towards consolidating the Islamic State has already cleared the first stage that includes vexation operations, over-extending its resources and dispersing the enemy's strength.¹¹⁵

Here, this text deciphers what ISIS means by the word "enemy". ISIS does not say this, but leaders of the Gulf region have made it abundantly clear who the enemy is.

They have been telling Westerners that if only Nouri al-Maliki and Bashar al-Assad were

¹¹³ Donner, & M. Fred, (2012), "Introduction," *In The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Variorum.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Edward Luttwak, (2014), *Caliphate Redivivus? Why a Careful Look at the 7th Century Can Predict How the Caliphate Will End*. Hoover Institution. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.hoover.org/research/caliphate-redivivus-why-carefullook-7th-century-can-predict-how-new-caliphate-will-end>.

to be ousted from power, all conflict would get resolved, and the Middle East would become peaceful. That is because both get perceived as being obstacles to hegemony of the regional Sunni.¹¹⁶ Thus, today, ISIS perceives eastern Syria and Iraq as being the stage two (the "Management of Savagery") in the process towards consolidating the Caliphate. Below is an illustration of what that means and what it implies for the conduct of next period.

The phrase "administration or management of savagery," gets defined in the treatise by Abu Bakr Naji as that hiatus that occurs when one power is waning power and the other is trying to consolidate power at the same time. The assumption here is that certain chaos will erupt, and it is the disputed territory that will suffer the consequences of the violence as power revolves back and forth between the 'old' and the 'incoming' power. In this case, the new power is the Islamic State.

Establishing a Fighting Society

According to ISIS literature, in this period it will have limited goals to achieve. That is;

- achieving and preserving total internal security
- fixing all its frontiers
- providing food to the population
- implementing Sharia as well as Islamic justice
- establishment a "fighting society," at every level of the community

¹¹⁶ Julia McQuaid, (2015), *The Struggle for Unity and Authority in Islam: Reviving the Caliphate?*, Center for Naval Analyses. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.cna.org/research/2014/revivingcaliphate>.

In this phase also, security measures will call the detection and eradication of spies. They will also challenge the hypocrites with proof and other ways and forcing them to hide and repress their hypocrisy, to conceal their demoralized opinions, and to follow those that are in authority until their evil gets dealt with accordingly.

In simpler terms, any move on Baghdad, which **ISIS** is certain will come, will less likely be imminent. They will, however, wait until the area being seized gets 'secured', and its inhabitants brought under control.

Plunder of Financial Resources

The implication in this phase is that ISIS has as the aim to eventually become financially self-sufficient. Indeed, it clearly has been pursuing this objective in Syria (taking oil fields, seizing warehouses that have arms for the SNC, and selling much of the industrial infrastructure of Aleppo and northern Syria to the Turks). That also suggests that ISIS is not presently contesting the Peshmerga take over militarily in Kirkuk (with its substantial oil resources). It is only a matter of time before Da'ish seeks to acquire such an obvious source of revenue. The group has fought other jihadist groups in Syria for control of Raqa'a's oil revenue.

However, this second phase (administering violence until the State becomes consolidated) signals the beginning of "mass killing of the enemy with the aim of making him frightened." The literature acknowledges that anyone who has experienced conflict (contrary to those who merely theorize it) understand the notion that slaughtering and striking fear into the enemies' hearts is natural in war. The point gets illustrated by citing the Companions (of the Prophet) who used fire to burn people, however odious, for they knew the utility of using rough violence whenever possible in war.

No Room for Mercy

In the treatise, *The Management of Savagery* the author clearly states that "softness" is unacceptable as softness is the ingredient for failure. According to the author, their enemies will not show any mercy to them. Therefore, that should compel them to make the enemy think a thousand times before they dare attack them.

The second major Zarqawi's notion presents itself in the reading given by Da'ish to the military campaigns taken up by first Caliph. The "reading" seems to legitimize and highlight the need for "rough violence" during the hiatus period when Islamic state has not yet fully become consolidated. It was following the demise of the Prophet that some Arab tribes declined to pay Zakat to Abu Bakr (as they did when the Prophet was alive). They held (according to the Arab tradition that prevailed then) that their tribal allegiance to him had naturally expired with the Prophet's death. What followed were the deadly Wars of Apostasy (Wars of the Ridda), a definition adhered closely by ISIS.

In short, the forms of violence practiced by ISIS (such as beheadings) are not some crazed fanaticism or psychotic rituals but are deliberate and well-considered strategies. The military strategy that the ISIS utilized in Iraq was also neither some populist adventure nor some spontaneous act of terror, but rather a reflection of professional and well-prepared military planning.¹¹⁷

What seems like random acts violence has a specific purpose. The aim is to induce huge fear among the people and to break their psychology. Recent reports about

¹¹⁷ Harleen Gambhir, (2015), *Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State*, Institute for the Study of War. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/dabiq-strategic-messaging-islamic-state>

ISIS have indeed showed that that is what the organization has already managed to do for many residents of Baghdad, and they are indeed quite frightened.

A Policy of Polarization

ISIS's focus, for now, is to pile pressure on the city's population through taking over the Haditha dam (the city's water supply) and seizing the Baiji refinery (its sources of fuel). ISIS's explicit purpose for Baghdad is to polarize the city's population as it has done in Syria.

Polarization, as explained by the author of *The Management of Savagery*, means dragging the masses into the battle so that it eventually creates rifts between the people. Therefore, one group of people will opt to join the side of the people of truth; the other group will join the side of the people of falsehood, and the rest (the last group) will opt to remain neutral, waiting to join the victor of the battle. According to the author, ISIS must attract sympathizers from this last group, and make it hopeful of their victory, especially because this group has a distinct role to play in the later stages of the present battle.¹¹⁸

Dragging the people into the conquest requires more actions that will aggravate opposition and, thereby, make the people participate in the battle, willing or unwilling so that everyone joins the side that he or she supports. The author added that they had to make that battle so violent that death was a just heartbeat away. It will get clear to both groups that are entering the battle will most likely lead to death. According

¹¹⁸ Eva Kingsepp, (2008), *Propaganda as an Instrument of Statecraft: Two Case Studies*, *Papers.ssrn.com*. Accessed 16 November 2015, from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2285151.

to Abu Bakr Naji, that was to be a powerful motive because the people will choose to fight on the side of the people of truth, because, in that case, they will die well.

The author added that dying well was better than dying for falsehood as those who died in falsehood lost both this world and the next. This strategy is most likely what is causing huge problems for the Iraqi government. As Nouri al-Maliki assembles and prepares a vast Shi'a army, he most likely plans first to concentrate on stopping ISIS' momentum, and, will achieve that by delivering a sharp military defeat. That way, he will break the magic spell that ISIS has on many Sunnis who have been amazed by the organization's bold advance across Iraq.

Whether al-Maliki's defense against ISIS succeeds or fails will depend upon the issue of polarization. The use of too much force, heavy weaponry and the presence of many civilian casualties will gravitate the Sunni population towards the ISIS. However, at the same time, if there is too little force there is a risk of inflating ISIS' reputation even more.

There is also a possibility of this conflict metamorphosing into a Shi'a- Sunni conflict (because of polarization), and such an outcome is not favourable for both al-Maliki and Iran. Iran will urge al-Maliki to avoid such an outcome altogether since there will be a priority to protect the Shi'i shrines. Iran has no intention to get directly involved in the fighting, at least, not for now, and at this stage, they would rather seek to keep on providing Iraq discreet advice and support.

The mainstream liberal interventionist media is promoting a facile narrative suggesting that the defensive mobilization of Iraqi Shi'i militias' will be quite similar to

the actions of ISIS.¹¹⁹ The existence of such a narrative demonstrates just how deep the Western countries have uncritically absorbed the Sunni discourse of victimhood and dispossession.¹²⁰ They have misunderstood it and given legitimacy to takfiri jihadism and thereby reflecting just how little they understand of the dangers which ISIS represents.

Having now declared war in Lebanon, ISIS's successes are likely to inspire young Muslims even more unless something gets done to stop the organisation. The ground is ready for the massive spread of the word about ISIS success through the outpourings of 24-hour Salafist radio and television broadcasts as well as the increasingly important PR campaigns on social media.¹²¹ Word is set to spread throughout the Middle East and into Africa. All that depends on the outcome of events in Iraq.

¹¹⁹ Elliot Friedland, (2014), *Special Report: The Islamic State*, *Clarionproject.org*. Accessed 14 November 2015, from <http://www.clarionproject.org/sites/default/files/islamic-state-isis-isil-factsheet-1.pdf>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Dabiq, 2014d, *The Return of Khalifah*, Al Hayat Media Center, 2014. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

CHAPTER V

THE RESPONSES TO ISIS: ISLAMIC AND WESTERN REACTIONS

Islamic Responses to ISIS

The War is at a Stalemate

Despite there being fighting in Iraq and Syria on multiple fronts even presently, the conflicts are in essence, at a stalemate.¹²² There are a few exceptions to this point; in that, the map of the war taking place in in the two states does not appear dramatically different from the map of the conflict almost one year ago. Then, initial victories by the Shia and Kurdish militias forced ISIS out of eastern and northern Iraq. When Iraqi forces went on to free Tikrit, they lost Ramadi. In 2013, Assad's government seemed like it was about to fall but in 2014, it was able to recapture several towns, only to appear weak again in the recent past. Government troops cannot suppress the rebellion and recapture Syrian territory now. That is because presently, the territory in the West of Syria is under the control of rebel fronts while ISIL is in the East. Also, the rebel formations cannot defeat or overrun the government and neither can they subdue the loyalist government strongholds in the west of Syria.¹²³

¹²² Youssef Aboul-Enein, (2010), *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Global Threat*, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press.

¹²³ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*. Institute for the Study of War.

It will take years to rebuild the Iraqi security forces and even with support from Iran, the Iraqi army, for the near future, will not have the ability to dislodge ISIS fighters from the city and town areas they control presently. Moreover, supposing the Iraqi government seeks assistance from the Shia-dominated Popular Mobilization Forces (organized, equipped and trained by Iran to recapture Sunni villages and urban places, it will possibly result in an even more intense sectarian conflict in the region. That will also have the effect of greater and long-term instability in the country. The Islamic state will keep on dominating Iraq's Anbar Province as well as the adjacent part of eastern Syria. The group has, however, reached a sectarian boundary.¹²⁴ The Islamic State received significant support in the Sunni territory, especially when they facilitated resistance during the Iraq War. It will, however, find it quite challenging to seize and maintain control in the majority, Shia-dominated areas in Iraq. Some towns might fall under ISIS control, but it will be difficult for the organization to repeat its sweep across northern Iraq as it did in 2014. However, it will be able to challenge other small jihadist organizations for Syrian territory. In the long run, the question remains whether The Islamic State will be able to govern the areas properly presently under its control through other ways other than the provision of limited services and regular intimidation.

The Islamic State can infiltrate Baghdad and Damascus with sleepers and can conduct large-scale terrorist attacks or even an urban offensive, similar to a smaller version of the 1968 Tet Offensive by Viet Cong in Vietnam.¹²⁵ The aim of that offensive was not to capture and take over Hue or Saigon, but instead, its aim was to seize strategic

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, (2014), *The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham*.

points in the cities and hold them for a month at most, and thereby showing American military's inability to defeat the Viet Cong, despite its military might. However, The Tet Offensive proved a deadly mistake on the side of the attackers as the Viet Cong got crushed as a fighting organization but it negatively affected America's political will. A similar attack in Baghdad or Damascus could lead to the downfall of the current political leaders, but they would get replaced, and the fighting would go on.

The Islamic State and its supporters are likely to boost their terrorist campaigns against Shite community and representations of the Shia faith across the Gulf region, especially in the Shia portions of Iraq and in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and possibly other Gulf monarchies. Kurdish fighters, assisted by coalition airpower, are in a position to defend their autonomous strongholds in northern Syria and Iraq, but they possibly will not be able to make a dramatic entry into ISIS-held territory. Any advance by the Kurdish fighters into the South would lead them into the Sunni territory, and Sunni tribes will without a doubt put up resistance. The Kurds do not want to hold larger pieces of territory in the North, especially because of Turkish opposition. The Kurds seem satisfied with what they want, the domination of the territory from below the Turkish border to the north of Kirkuk north.¹²⁶ However, their cooperation with Baghdad will prove essential if they are to succeed in taking Mosul.

In Syria, rebel formations have been holding most of that territory for some time now. In Iraq, towns have come under the control of changed hands rebel forces, the government and the Islamic State interchangeably. The conflicts seem somewhat like

¹²⁶ Harleen Gambhir, (2015), *Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State*, Institute for the Study of War. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/dabiq-strategic-messaging-islamic-state>

“war of edges”, where consolidation is bound to occur along with erosion and expansion, but moving on, an increase in gains and losses will be expected.

Differences in Sects and Ethnicity Are Now
Drivers of the War

The war in Syria is now almost entirely sectarian. This is due to the erosion of secular opposition to the government; while some Sunnis are still fighting in collaboration with the government forces and thus creating internecine conflicts among themselves.¹²⁷ The other internecine conflict is one between ISIS and JAN since they are both Sunni-dominated organizations. Iraq, on the other hand, the lines between Shia, Kurds and Sunni, are more clearly defined. Fault lines that define each Sectarian group limit military advances and also affects the composition of the national troops. Governments whose larger percent of the territory is under the control of insurgents are unable to conscript or recruit on a national basis. Sunni areas are out of bounds, and also according to Baghdad’s Shia-dominated and Syria’s Alawite-dominated governments Sunni recruits are quite unreliable. Syria will keep on relying on Alawites, and some local Sunnis and this situation is making the national troops fewer representatives of the national populations and transforming them more and more into sectarian formations. The trend gets accelerated by the excessive reliance of militia units from both Baghdad and Damascus, units whose composition is organized exclusively on ethnic or sectarian lines. It will be quite challenging to reverse this trend without having successfully

¹²⁷ Dabiq, 2014e, *Remaining and Expanding*, 2014. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isis-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-5-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

recaptured most of the national territory and putting much effort at political outreach. These actions seem unlikely to happen soon.

On the flip side, secular rebel formations have almost ceased to exist as insurgencies in both Iraq and Syria are composed of mostly Sunni. Former FSA fighters who have joined jihadist groups in Syria may be or must appear to be radicalized for survival. Sectarian differences will keep on impeding the willingness of Iraq's Shia-led government to make determined efforts to fulfill promised concessions made to the Kurds or to reconcile with the Sunnis. These efforts will come in handy in creating a genuine national effort against The Islamic State. The Syrian government has not made any visible attempt to win the mind and hearts of the Sunni.¹²⁸ On the contrary, the Syrian government has adopted a counterinsurgency strategy, whose objective is to make life untenable in Syrian territory that is beyond the control of the government, and thus turning a significant number of the Syrian population into refugees. That is because the brutal behaviour that the Islamic State has demonstrated towards ethnic and religious minorities makes the Shia, Christian, Alawite, Druze, and defenses of other minorities a matter of prime importance. Meanwhile, the behavior of Baghdad's Shia militias and Assad's Alawite loyalists in towns that they conquer contributes to a cycle of retribution, revenge, and forced relocation. Such struggle has become an existential one in all factions involved.

The sectarian nature of this war has two more consequences. First, it impedes assistance and hinders partnership from the US and its coalition partners. While it is the

¹²⁸IGN, (2016), *A message to all Infidels and Americans Wiki Guide – IGN*. Accessed 16 Jan., 2016 at <http://www.ign.com/wikis/a-message-to-all-infidels-and-americans>.

aim of the US and its coalition partners to destroy ISIS and, probably, also instigate the ouster of the Assad government, they do not agree with the brutal manner in which the Sunni are being suppressed. Second, sectarian differences will come in the way of an overall process of conflict settlement. When the Syrian revolution was originally about bringing down the Assad government, there was a possibility of a political settlement as well, but presently, that can no longer be the case. And while the US seeks to persuade the Iraqi government to take the actions necessary to reconcile with Sunni and the Kurdish minorities, peace has a price that neither Sunni, Shia nor Kurd appears to want to pay. No sect can foresee a future of living under the control of another.

Foreign Powers Reaction to ISIS

There is much at stake for foreign powers in the ongoing conflicts. However, without direct, large-scale military interventions, which possibly backfire, no foreign power among them can guarantee a win over their local allies or realize the defeat of their enemies.¹²⁹ Also, the interests of the foreign powers appear to compete with instead of complementing each other. At one time, they might all have accepted to go back to the *status quo ante bellum*, but as the situation stands at present, that can longer happen. Tens of thousands of refugees and jihadist infiltrators as well, threaten to stabilize both Jordan and Lebanon; and in the minds of the leaders of the Islamic State, both countries are part of greater Syria. It is thus apparent that both countries are within ISIS immediate ambitions. Both Jordan and Lebanon want to guard their territory against becoming part of the conflict.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Saudi Arabia, seeing itself as the liberator of Sunnis from Shia aggression, opposes the Assad government, as well as the growing role that played by Iran in the Iraqi-Syrian conflicts.¹³⁰ It is also against the role of Iraq in the civil war in Yemen, where Iranians and Saudis are backing different sides. Meanwhile, though, Saudi Arabia is concerned about the increasing influence that jihadist extremists have in Iraq and Syria and the threat that the organisation continues to pose to the kingdom. Iran perceives itself as a growing power the region. However, with the Iran- Syria strategic alliance threatened and with its new ally in Baghdad under constant assault from Sunni fanatics, Iran could lose its vital footholds in the Gulf region.¹³¹ As the faction element of these wars deepens, Tehran seems to have taken up the role of protecting the Shias. If Iran appears to have played a greater and somewhat more successful role ever since the start of the Syrian uprising, it is because the country has more cards to play and a lot to lose too. Turkey has always been determined to see the downfall of the Assad government, and it is for that reason that it supports the rebels. Meanwhile, though, it fears the emergence of a strong and independent Kurdish political force in Iraq and Syria that will possibly exacerbate separatist ideologies in Turkey. The increasing threat posed by jihadists' organizations and the fear of the return of foreign fighters have pushed Turkey to offer moderate support to jihadist elements. On the other hand, Israel seems to have taken things practically. The Assad government offered the vital link between Hezbollah and Iran but maintained the peace on the border of Israel for 40 years, and, therefore, the

¹³⁰ Malcolm Anderson, (1996), *Frontiers*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

¹³¹ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*, Institute for the Study of War.

Israelis saw Assad as a prudent villain.¹³² What would be most threatening to Israel's security is amassing of wild jihadists on its frontiers. The country's key concern, which has made it intervene severally in Syria, militarily, is with stopping Iran from being part of Hezbollah's arsenal.

Many hope that the US will provide the decisive force in that region, but America has exercised caution about how deep it involves itself military in the wars. It has offered various forms of help to the neighboring countries, especially Jordan. Material assistance to the rebels in Syria has been coming in modest ratios and rather because of the concern that US-provided weapons would end up in the hands of jihadists. The US has led the air campaign against The Islamic State, strikes that proved critical in stopping ISIS from advancing into Kurdish-held regions in North Iraq, as well as the downfall of Kobani in North of Syria. The aerial bombing came in handy for Iraqi government troops, but it failed to prevent the capture of Ramadi by insurgent groups. Without effective ground forces, airpower can suppress attacks from the enemy, but it cannot guard territory against being lost to the enemy. Thousands of troops have been sent to Iraq to guard U.S. diplomatic facilities in both Erbil and Baghdad, to assist in the coordination of operations, and to facilitate training, without being directly involved in combat. America has come short of waging war against The Islamic State and has stirred clear of direct U.S. involvement in counterterrorism efforts that had proved successful in suppressing al Qaeda in Iraq from 2005 to 2011.¹³³

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Simon Anholt, (2009), *Nation 'Branding': Propaganda or Statecraft?*, Public Diplomacy Magazine.

This laid back plan has elicited intense criticism of the government, which appears to have been reluctant in making worthwhile military investments in what Americans would perceive as the Third Iraq War. Critics claim that American combat troops (estimates range between ten thousand and twenty-five thousand) can easily bolster local defenses in key regions, boost the effectiveness of air campaigns, and thus motivate Iraqi forces to fight harder. It indeed remains uncertain whether the Iraqi forces will opt to fight less, and leave much of the work to the American forces. The mere presence of American military units can also boost the possibility that some Sunni tribes, tired of ISIS rule, would get enticed shift camps against ISIS.¹³⁴ However, as mentioned earlier, most Sunni tribes might be reluctant to risk being abandoned the second time by Americans. US troops can also be utilized as a mobile strike force. A costlier and more ambitious task for American troops would be to force ISIS armies out of the towns and cities they hold at present. Unfortunately, urban warfare, mostly against dug-in enemy forces, results in massive casualties on both sides as seen on many occasions. From the 1968 battle of Hue to the 2004 2nd battle of Fallujah, it is apparent how ferocious urban engagements can become. Approximately 13,000 American, Iraqi and British forces got engaged in the battle of Fallujah, and the forces suffered close to 1,000 casualties.

Taking over the control of territory after the defeat of enemy forces would take much commitment from the troops. However, clearing cities of The Islamic State forces, and leaving the subsequent occupation to Shia militias or even Iraqi forces, risks making the U.S. a target for vengeance likely to get inflicted upon Sunni civilians and

¹³⁴ Soufangroup.com, (2015), The Islamic State | The Soufan Group. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://soufangroup.com/the-islamic-state/>

fighters, which ISIS has made apparent through the calculated brutality it has been demonstrating.

American combat forces could also possibly be on a mission to create protected enclaves for refugees. In 2012, Joe Lieberman, John McCain, and four other U.S. senators suggested on the creation of “safe zones” in Syria, where refugees would find safe havens while arming and training anti-Assad rebels. All those possible missions come with risk, as direct involvement by the U.S could result in heavy casualties among Iraqi civilians and U.S. troops as well. It presents the ugly prospect of Americans being taken prisoner in future and getting beheadings and thus increasing pressures to escalate the conflict. Greater U.S. involvement will boost terrorist recruitment exercises and increase the threat of terrorist attacks abroad and in the U.S. It risks the possibility that the U.S. will get involved in a lengthy counterinsurgency campaign, the there being an insurgent sanctuary in Syria, thus requiring that the US expands military operations. It could translate into a long occupation of the region by the US and the possible loss of international support. Also, Iraq’s Shias would not welcome such an intervention by America with or without being instigated by Iran, and might, therefore, renew their hostilities against U.S. forces.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF ISIS IN RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Iraq and Syria have Stopped to Exist as States and The Partitions Will Persist

Both Syria and Iraq are serve as artificial creations in that their borders were laid out by colonial mapmakers who had little knowledge of or paid little attention to sectarian and ethnic realities that existed on the ground, then. Colonial rule kept them in place while exacerbating some of the tensions that brewed between sectarian and ethnic groups. The military dictatorships that took power after independence suppressed any sectarian or ethnic rebellions. When America invaded Iraq and when Syrian people rebellion against the government, the bonds that held both countries together were sundered. The conflicts that erupted since then have deepened the tension between the ethnic groups and divided them even more. The increasingly factional nature of the conflicts and the disintegration of a central authority is a reflection that the partition of both countries as at now will persist. Iraq and Syria have stopped to rule their national territory and might never recover from that at all. Neither country will easily be put into its original self for the near future.

Syrian government army in collaboration with allied Hezbollah fighters and local militias hold the Christian and Alawite bastions in the so-called Djebel Ansariyeh Mountains and the Mediterranean coast, alongside some outposts in parts of the country that are more distant. Tired of the fighting and scarcity of work force, pro-government forces may hold their defences together in this stronghold. The Kurds have been successful in unifying and consolidating their hold on the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Syria. Iraqi Shias are still dominant in southern and eastern parts of Iraq, the region being one of their traditional territories. The Islamic State in eastern Syria and western Iraq, as well as other forces from rebels in the western part of Iraq, continue to dominate the Sunni regions. In 2014, ISIS tried to overextend itself into other regions but faced resistance and was pushed back. At the same time, ISIS and other rebel troops in Syria inch closer to Idlib and Damascus but it seems like they are unable to penetrate Syria's Christian and Alawite heartland deeply.

Iraq will retain its partitioning of Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish zones, despite the disunity between the forces within these areas and despite some being engaged in intersectarian fighting. Likewise, Syria will remain partitioned into a more complicated mosaic of sectarian and ethnic enclaves mostly guarded by local forces. Despite remaining beset with internal conflicts, the Kurds, especially Iraqi Kurds, will maintain the virtual independence that they have had since the Gulf War. Another question is whether the sectarian and ethnic subdivisions are economically viable. One can notice the outlines of a Syrian rump state made up of Damascus and the Western Christian, Druze and Alawite enclaves. It would roughly correspond to the old Syrian Ottoman vilayet. Oil revenues will support a Kurdistan constituting of portions of Iraq and Syria. Likewise, the

Iraqi Shia portion will have ample oil resources. A Sunni entity in the Syrian-Arabian Desert and scattered Euphrates Valley would seem to be primarily an agricultural community and possibly be the most impoverished.

This situation stages a dilemma for the US and other countries that are dedicated to seeing the restoration of Iraq and Syria as they appear on maps. The frontiers of today, as casually sketched in 1915 by colonial officials, have little or no meaning on the ground today. However, there is the suggestion that the current turmoil might get resolved by carving up Iraq and Syria into smaller countries, although some in the Middle East seen the suggestion as another imperialist plot by the Western powers. Those who believe that theory also perceives that the Western countries, and especially the United States, are deliberately fanning the ethnic aspect of the war to satisfy their own agenda.

With international assistance, someday, if the people of Iraq and Syria and get exhausted by the war, they will put their ethnic differences aside, turn against their religious fanaticism, and stop the cycle of retribution. They will compromise upon forming a political structure that will spearhead nominal unity, create room for power-sharing while allowing sufficient local authority and maintaining peace. Lebanon achieved a difficult but tolerable *modus Vivendi* following a civil war that had gone on for 15 years.¹³⁵ Going by the timetable of Lebanon, it is apparent that there will be least a decade longer for hostilities although the civil war in Lebanon was never as intense as the conflicts in Iraq and Syria. It is also possible that perhaps some future Iraqi or Syrian version of a Kemal Ataturk or Ibn Saud, driven by nationalist fervor or dynastic ambition

¹³⁵ WorldPublicOpinion.org., (2007), *Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and Al-Qaeda*, The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland. Accessed 14 November 2015, from http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf

and possessing sufficient charisma, military skill, and political savvy will emerge and restore national rule in that region. No such leader has been able to do that yet.

Sunni Badlands or Islamic State?

The Sunnis of Iraq and Syria face a gleaming future given any scenario. Their lack of satisfaction led to the military success of the rebels, but the question is what that will bring them in the future. The secular, moderate but mostly Sunni opposition in Syria has been suppressed and seized being a major force. That leaves the sect with no armed avatars except the Islamists who collaborate with the extremist jihadists, and while there are several Sunni insurgent groups in Iraq, Sunni resistance is dominated by The Islamic State. Neither ISIS nor the Syrian rebel groups can conquer Iraq and Syria to install Sunni-led governments in Baghdad and Damascus. Hence the question of where the political future of the Sunni majority in Syria and Iraq lies, and whether the Sunnis of both countries can unite to establish an independent state that comprises both Sunni from eastern Syria and western Iraq.

Another important question is whether the Islamic State will keep on surviving if its expansion is kept in check by sectarian boundaries and a strong ground defense that is backed by coalition airpower. The Islamic State's appeal majorly relies upon continued military victories, and the organization's economy is based on plunder and without both, the organization cannot continue its expansion. It might have clearly demonstrated its ability to fight, but it has not yet proved its ability to run a government as well as providing essential services. That is despite it having survived for a year and while also having occupied some territory for two years or more.

Western strategy gets based partly on the assumption that continued ISIS control will ultimately alienate Sunnis and will inevitably fuel their urge to take up arms against the organization, as did during the Iraq War against al Qaeda insurgents.¹³⁶ However, that might as well be wishful thinking. Whatever the attitude the Sunnis might have toward the ISIS extremists, Iraq's Sunnis will not easily join forces controlled by a Shia-dominated government. They will also not rally to Americans the same way they did in 2006. Some Sunni tribes have tried to go against the Islamic State and failed miserably; the U.S. abandoned them once and were presently not there to offer protection either and therefore, turning against The Islamic State remains a tricky proposition.¹³⁷ Even if United States forces were there, it's unlikely for Sunnis to trust once again a country that they believe left them alone. The Americans departed and left them behind with a government they claim that is under the control of Iran.

Mobilizing Iraq's Sunni tribes a second time requires a demonstration that ISIS is losing its grip and is on its way to complete destruction and that the Sunni tribes that go against ISIS can get protected against revenge from The Islamic State.¹³⁸ Also, there has to be reassurance that Shia militias will abstain from treating the Sunnis spared from ISIS rule as collaborators and make them targets for revenge. Currently, none of these conditions can be met. Mobilizing Syria's Sunnis against ISIS will require that they get the assurance of protection against The Islamic State reprisals, as well as a better

¹³⁶Soufangroup.com, (2015), The Islamic State | The Soufan Group. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://soufangroup.com/the-islamic-state/>.

¹³⁷ Simon Anholt, (2009), *Nation 'Branding': Propaganda or Statecraft?*, Public Diplomacy Magazine.

¹³⁸ Soufangroup.com, (2015), The Islamic State | The Soufan Group. Accessed 16 November 2015, from <http://soufangroup.com/the-islamic-state/>

political future than what the Assad regime is offering presently. The U.S. plans to establish a secular armed force in Syria that can take on all jihadist groups and especially ISIS, and the Assad regime as well. Given such circumstances, it would have to incorporate Sunni fighters primarily, if not entirely. The challenges of vetting volunteers have slowed down that process, but even though they manage to meet the announced target of 5,000 fighters the force is still too small in wars where enemies field armies with tens of thousands of troops.¹³⁹ With air support from the U.S., it could potentially guard an enclave Syria and manage to persuade Syrian refugees to return.

The creation of a larger and more superior force will take a much more risk and greater investment, but it is possible. The creation of a large and effective Sunni fighting force can also have political consequences, in that military power comes with political ambitions as well. A Sunni-dominated army can come to perceive itself as the beginning of a Sunni state, and that can complicate the situation. Alternatively, the portions Sunni Iraq and Syria could remain unpacified and unassimilated, a stronghold of fanatics of religion, the continuing source of conflict, a permanent badlands.

Fighting Will Continue for the Foreseeable Future

Given the current state of affairs, the idea of holding an international peace conference with the objective of ending the fighting in Syria appears fanciful. Neither does it appear like new Shia government will be in a position, or will even appear to attain a satisfactory political stance that undermines Sunni resistance. The interrelated

¹³⁹ Simon Anholt, (2009), *Nation 'Branding': Propaganda or Statecraft?*, Public Diplomacy Magazine.

conflicts will most likely continue with neither side can defeating its enemies. That would appear to be a good incentivize for achieving a political settlement, but the increasing factional nature of the war makes it appear like a life-or-death struggle. The players now struggle to guard themselves against atrocities and retribution that might come their way if they appear to lay down their arms. No agreement can get enforced, and none can be trusted. For whoever is motivated by his or her faith, compromise means apostasy. Neither the downfall of ISIS nor the fall of Assad will put an end to these hostilities. The conflicts in both countries are no longer two-sided contests. The jihadist insurgents in Syria will not accept to live under the rule of any government in Damascus unless they are the ones to create that government, and unfortunately, the jihadists are conflicting with each other over control.¹⁴⁰

If ISIS loses in the battlefield and loses its ability to operate openly, it will keep up its struggle in the form of terrorist campaigns and guerrilla warfare, in a similar fashion as it and its predecessors have been doing for decades now. The leadership of The Islamic State cannot order its troops to put their arms down, even in the very unlikely circumstances that it might want to do that. Also, if ISIS caves under military pressures, there are various Sunni insurgent groups that are in cooperation with ISIS at present, it is likely to attract fighters from those groups and carry on with the fight.¹⁴¹ There is no political deal that can end this insurgency. While it is highly unlikely that there will be national settlements, there is the possibility of local accommodations that would not

¹⁴⁰ Charlie Caris, & Samuel Reynolds, (2014), *ISIS Governance in Syria*. Institute for the Study of War.

¹⁴¹ Dabiq, 2014e, *Remaining and Expanding, 2014*. Accessed 13 November 2015, from <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-5-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf>

entail grand agreements but understandings based on pragmatism. These local accommodations will likely lower the level of conflicts or create room for commercial activity to take place even as hostilities continue. Meanwhile, it does not seem like any of the sectarian participants are ready to pay the price necessary to maintain peace. Lack of trust and fear govern all of the aspects of Iraqi politics. As President Barzani (Kurd) said in 2003, the Shia are afraid of the past, the Sunni are afraid of the future, and the Kurds are afraid of both the past and the future.

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