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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**TO WHAT EXTENT DOES ISIS MARK A NEW STAGE
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SALAFI-JIHADISM?**

by

Hisham Al Manasir
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December 2017

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**TO WHAT EXTENT DOES ISIS MARK A NEW STAGE IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF SALAFI-JIHADISM?**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines whether the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) marks a new stage in the development of Salafi-jihadism. Based on a thorough examination of primary and secondary sources, this study concludes that the emergence of ISIS introduced three significant differences into the Salafi-jihadism world. First, sectarianism and the mass application of *takfir* to excommunicate Muslims have been at the core of ISIS's strategy. Second, ISIS's establishment of the proto-caliphate is a huge milestone in the history of Salafi-jihadism. Third, a propaganda campaign and the professional use of media are additional new characteristics that distinguish ISIS from the other Salafi-jihadist groups. The thesis concludes that ISIS marks a new stage in the development of Salafi-jihadism. Although ISIS has attempted to leave an extensive legacy, we believe that the establishment of the Islamic caliphate is the only lasting impact that ISIS will have on Salafi-jihadism ideology. Despite the terrible reputation ISIS has gained for its brutalities, the success that the group had in establishing a proto-caliphate—however briefly—will live forever, and may encourage future generations of Salafi-jihadists to undertake the same endeavor.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CE	Common Era
DMI	Directorate of Military Intelligence
ICSR	International Center for the Study of Radicalization
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State in Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JAF	Jordanian Armed Forces
JTJ	Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad
USD	U.S. dollars

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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Salafi-jihadism ideology is a relatively new concept that prevailed during the last century. Initially, the ideology emerged as a reaction to the imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire.¹ Thereafter, the views of successive Islamic scholars and leaders have contributed to the radicalization of the ideology. At the same time, adherents, fascinated by this view, believed that Salafism was the only way for regenerating the authentic principles of so-called true Islam. Consequently, because Muslims in the Middle East failed to rebuild an Islamic empire, the extremists sought a way to create Salafi-jihadist groups in order to spread their views into the world. Each one of these groups based their theories on the Salafi-jihadism ideology.

The extremists may vary in principles and approaches but they mostly agree when it comes to their ultimate goal: reviving parts of the original Islamic Caliphate and applying Sharia law. Their shared objectives include removing the secular regimes in certain Muslim countries and reforming the political and cultural way of life by adopting a very narrow interpretation of the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (known as hadith).

Recently, the Salafi-jihadism ideology has been adopted by several militant movements, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), al-Qaeda, Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabaab in Somalia, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, Ansar Dine in Mali, and many more in Afghanistan and Pakistan.² In particular, the world has witnessed ISIS emerge as the most prominent movement, which is notable for its extreme violence around the world, geographical expansion, economic and military power, along with a worldwide attraction among the youth.

This thesis addresses the development of the Salafi-jihadism ideology, with a deep concentration on ISIS. Initially, we track the development of the ideology by

¹ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2007), 65.

² Daniel Byman, "Fighting Salafi-Jihadist Insurgencies: How Much Does Religion Really Matter?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 5 (2013):353.

highlighting the contribution that each of the main Salafi-jihadist theorists has made. Afterward, the discussion focuses on ISIS's contribution to the development of a new era in the history of Salafi-jihadism. The thesis concludes with a discussion on the possible implications of ISIS's ideology after the group is defeated, and we then consider the lasting impact of its ideology on that of Salafi-jihadism.

For the sake of accuracy and inclusivity, the thesis briefly touches some main events that occurred from the medieval era until the present. This historical background sheds light on the influence of key historical figures such as Ibn Taymiyya in the thirteenth century, whose teachings shape the core of modern Salafi-jihadist ideology.³ Understanding the root motivations and ideas of Salafi-jihadism better enables us to visualize the lasting impacts of the ideology. Nevertheless, the study does not examine a detailed historical chronology, but instead, it considers some touchpoints throughout the evolution of Salafi-jihadism in order to delineate the original underpinnings from recent contributions to this ideology.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written about ISIS since the organization became public. Subject matter experts, scholars, and journalists frequently publish books and articles in which they analyze ISIS's history, what the group represents, and how it came to power; some even write recipes for how to defeat ISIS. In this section, we briefly review a few of these publications that directly or indirectly serve the purpose of the research process. The literature is categorized into two main camps. Initially, we highlight some of the most well-known authors on the subject, who see ISIS's ideology as an extension of Salafi-jihadism movement. We then discuss the views of other scholars, who analyze ISIS's ideology from a revolutionary warfare framework.

The thesis carefully analyzes these different approaches in order to look at the ISIS ideology from multiple perspectives. We pay particular attention to the origins that lie behind Salafi-jihadist ideology, and the transformation that it went through under

³ Daniel Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 72.

ISIS's leadership. This study aims to contribute by clearly depicting this transformation so policies can be adjusted to address and counter the expansion of globalized Salafi-jihadism. Unlike the existing literature, this research is unique in that it considers the future of the Salafi-jihadist ideology. In our concluding chapter, we argue whether ISIS ideology will leave a permanent mark on Salafi-jihadism.

1. ISIS as a New Wave of Salafi-Jihadism Ideology

Daniel Byman, a professor in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, asserts that ISIS, sometimes referred to as the Islamic State, and al-Qaeda differ on both tactics and strategy, and they are competing for the lead of the overall jihadist movement.⁴ In contrast to al-Qaeda, Byman argues, ISIS does not see itself as a vanguard in the fight against the West to arouse the Muslim world, but rather, ISIS wants to build a state, purify it, and later expand.⁵ Moreover, the Islamic State's implementation of many Wahhabi teachings is also a substantial difference that Byman points out when he compares ISIS with al-Qaeda. Yonah and Dean Alexander share a similar point of view with Byman. They assert that the principal difference between the two terror organizations has been in their focus.⁶ Although evolving, the authors argue, ISIS mostly focuses inward seeking to build an Islamic state, whereas al-Qaeda and its affiliates have aimed to push jihad globally.⁷ In addition, the authors note that the Islamic State has brought the employment of the social media campaign to a new level.

In his 2015 book, *ISIS: A History*, Fawaz A. Gerges argues that ISIS marks a new wave of Salafi-jihadism in many aspects, comparing the group to its predecessors in terms of size, statehood, leadership ambitions, area of operation, the area of interest (far enemy and near enemy), and sectarianism.⁸

⁴ Ibid., 168.

⁵ Ibid., 170.

⁶ Yonah Alexander and Dean Alexander, *The Islamic State: Combating the Caliphate Without Borders* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 38.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 224–231.

Leaning in the same direction as Gerges are Malcolm Nance in *Defeating ISIS: Who They Are, How They Fight, What They Believe*; Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan in *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*; Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger in *ISIS: The State of Terror*; and Patrick Cockburn in *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*. According to Nance, ISIS has managed to surpass al-Qaeda and become a cult of Jihad, whose core values and ideology have Osama bin Laden as a single point of origin.⁹ Moreover, Nance asserts that ISIS ideology is like a hemorrhagic virus, and much more contagious than al-Qaeda's.¹⁰

The Syrian expert on tribal and jihadist dynamics, Hassan Hassan, and journalist Michael Weiss explain what ISIS is seeking to accomplish and why it is such a threat to the world. The authors examine the evolution and adaptation of ISIS over the past decade, which have transformed ISIS into a greater threat than any other previous Salafi-jihadist organization.¹¹ The authors explain how ISIS's war started and against whom; more importantly, the authors detail how Shia and other minority sects and ethnicities are ISIS's primary targets.

Jessica Stern and John M. Berger argue that ISIS has made its name by using beheadings and all kinds of savage acts as a form of marketing and recruitment, trying to introduce and infuse in us a state of terror.¹² The authors assert that ISIS "pushes the boundaries of the definition of insurgency," and believe that ISIS, despite its short, contradictory, and full-of-surprises history, has launched significant changes in strategy, messaging, and recruitment that will last long after its defeat.¹³

Patrick Cockburn highlights the role of Syrian and Iraq conflicts in shaping the new landscape of jihadism that ISIS controls. Among other points, he asserts that "Jihadi

⁹ Malcolm Nance, *Defeating ISIS: Who They Are, How They Fight, What They Believe* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., 2016), 192.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 6.

¹² Jessica Stern and John M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 3.

¹³ Ibid., 11.

fighters combined religious fanaticism and military expertise to win spectacular and unexpected victories against Iraq, Syrian, and Kurdish forces.”¹⁴

Lastly, Graeme Wood, in his highly discussed article, *What ISIS Really Wants*, argues that the West mistakenly continues to see jihadism as monolithic; ISIS, he asserts, has already eclipsed Al Qaeda.¹⁵ Further, in his article he points out the differences between ISIS and Al Qaeda, describing the first one as a group full of energy and creativity.

2. ISIS Ideology as a Revolutionary Movement

A few other scholars have come up with a different approach when analyzing ISIS’s ideology. Scott Atran, a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford, argues that ISIS’s ideology is not something new, and the violence of the organization is similar to the revolutionary violence of many other groups who came before.¹⁶ Furthermore, he asserts that “asymmetric operations involving spectacular killings to destabilize the social order is a tactic that has been around as long as recorded history.”¹⁷ Within the framework of revolutionary warfare, Craig Whiteside, in “The Islamic State and the Return of Revolutionary Warfare,” draws a parallel between ISIS and the Vietnamese communists.¹⁸ Whiteside argues that the Salafi-jihadist movement adopted the revolutionary warfare approach after the Afghan-Soviet War, “due to the similarity of its struggle against powerful enemies and proxies that dominated an international system inherently incompatible with their ideology.”¹⁹ Lastly, Jonathan S. Baker, in his thesis, *Harbingers of the Caliphate: Islamic State Revolutionary Actions 2011–2014*, at Naval Postgraduate School, develops a “model of revolutionary movement growth” in order to

¹⁴ Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2015), 5.

¹⁵ Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants.” *The Atlantic* 315, no. 2 (2015): 79.

¹⁶ Scott Atran, “ISIS Is a Revolution.” *Aeon*, December 15, 2015, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-isis-has-the-potential-to-be-a-world-altering-revolution>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Craig Whiteside, “The Islamic State and the Return of Revolutionary Warfare,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5 (2016): 743–776.

¹⁹ Ibid., 744.

“evaluate the significant Islamic State actions..., and how the actions contribute to movement’s growth in Iraq and Syria.”²⁰ Baker concludes that ISIS has used, although not in a sequential order, a model of revolutionary movement growth from 2011 to 2014 to return to prominence.²¹

Lastly, quite different from the mainstream is the Salafi-jihadi analyst Ahmed Al Hamdan in *Methodological Difference Between ISIS and Al Qaida*. Al Hamdan asserts that ISIS ideology has deviated from the methodology of the Salafi-jihadist movement, and therefore, it is not an extension of it.²² One of the main premises in his argument is that ISIS has been declaring those who disagree with them as innovators, and by defaming them, ISIS has been destroying the boundary of unity in issues of individual opinion; a practice that is not followed by Salafi-jihadists.²³

B. APPROACH

The thesis utilizes qualitative data to analyze the research question. The primary source of information is the relevant literature, such as books and articles written in English and Arabic by subject matter experts. Moreover, public documents, statements, as well as videos of ISIS and other Salafi-jihadist groups are examined in order to better understand the evolution of Salafi-jihadist ideology.

Another important source of information is the interviews that the authors conducted with Jordanian officials from Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) in August 2017. Jordan has a long tradition of fighting different Salafi-jihadist groups. The geographical proximity to the proto-caliphate established by ISIS makes Jordan a particularly important element in the fight against ISIS. Hence, interviews with high-ranking officers

²⁰ Jonathan S. Baker, “Harbingers of the Caliphate: Islamic State Revolutionary Actions 2011–2014” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 1.
https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/49330/16Jun_Baker_Jonathan.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

²¹ Ibid., 69–71.

²² Ahmed Al Hamdan, “Methodological Differences between ISIS and Al Qaid: Who Are the Ones that Deviated?” *Al Muwahideen Media*, February 27, 2016,
<https://almuwahideenmedia.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/methodological.pdf>.

²³ Ibid.

of the Jordanian military further shed light on the research question. Fighting against ISIS and other Salafi-jihadist groups is part of Jordanians' official day-to-day working routine, so their insights constitute a valuable element in the research process. The questions we have asked are the following:

1. The Kingdom of Jordan has been fighting the extremist Salafi-jihadist groups for quite a while. How is the fight against ISIS different?
2. What recruiting tools are ISIS and al-Qaeda using? What are the characteristics of the recruiters?
3. Is ISIS's propaganda distinct from that of other Salafi-jihadist groups?
4. Is there any distinction between ISIS in Syria and ISIS in Iraq?
5. What is new in ISIS (if anything) in regards to Salafi-jihadism ideology?
6. What is the status of the Coalition campaign against ISIS? Are there indications it will end soon?
7. If ISIS is soon defeated, are there indications about other Salafi-jihadist groups willing to take their place?
8. Will ISIS's new ideology leave a permanent mark on Salafi-jihadist ideology?

C. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter II provides an overview of the key elements of this research: Salafism, Jihadism, and Wahhabism. Chapter III contains a discussion of the conceptual basis that forms the Salafi-jihadist ideological narrative, and emphasizes the key thoughts that have shaped the ideology. Chapter IV combines insights from relevant literature and the interviews to depict clearly ISIS's "contribution" to the Salafi-jihadist ideology. In Chapter V, we draw our conclusions. Instead of simply presenting historical facts about ISIS and Salafi-jihadism, the aim is to build different approaches to address the phenomenon. Even so,

we believe that it is essential to fully understand the origins of Salafi-jihadism and its transformation under ISIS leadership. The thesis also considers the future of Salafi-jihadist ideology. In the end, drawing from our deep analyses, the thesis argues whether ISIS's ideology will leave permanent marks on Salafi-jihadism.

II. SALAFISM, JIHADISM, AND WAHHABISM

In Chapter I, we introduced the research question and outlined our approach in this thesis. In this chapter, we examine terminologies and key concepts. Even though Salafi-jihadism is our focus, the ideology is part of a broader Salafi spectrum. That said, after a brief note on the Islamic legal sources of Islam as a religion, we discuss the general philosophy of Salafism. We then explain the concept of *jihad* and *jihadism*, and in the final section of this chapter, we also address Wahhabism because the conservative movement is believed to particularly influence ISIS's ideology.²⁴

In general, Muslims of all sects are supposed to live according to the doctrines and teachings of Islam. These rules of living must strictly derive and be interpreted from Islamic legal sources: the Quran, *Hadith*, *Ijtihad* and *Qiyas*.²⁵ The Quran, the holy book that was revealed to Prophet Mohammed, is the first fundamental source of the Islamic law. The second source—the *Sunnah*—is everything else that came from the Prophet besides the Quran. In other words, the *Sunnah* is the record of the Prophet's acts, deeds, and teachings that further detail and explain the Quran. *Ijtihad*—a much-discussed topic by Salafi thinkers—is the third source of the Islamic law. *Ijtihad* is considered by Muslim scholars a broad source that enables Islamic law to adapt to contemporary situations and issues not covered by Quran and the *Sunnah*. The Islamic scholars/lawyers (*ulama*) are the ones responsible to analyze and explain the best ways to solve contemporary issues based on their interpretation of Quran and *Sunnah*. *Ijtihad* can be rather complicated and controversial since it is derived from different individuals' understanding and interpretations of various verses of the Quran and deeds of the Prophet. The fourth source is *al-Qiyas*. Literally, *al-Qiyas* denotes evaluating the external borders and the internal ingredients of something, or making scientific analogy to set equivalence between two things. From the religion point of view, *al-Qiyas* is “the extension of a Shariah ruling

²⁴ Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State*, 6.

²⁵ Abrar Hasan, *Independence of Judiciary and Judicial Crisis* (Pakistan: Createspace, May 21, 2013), 21.

from an original case (Asl) to a new case (Far') because the new case has the same effective cause (Illah) as the original case."²⁶

A. SALAFISM

Salafism is a movement that supports going back to the practices of the first three generations of Muslims. *Salafiyya*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, refers to “a strictly orthodox Sunni Muslim reform movement advocating a return to the early Islam of the Qur’an and the Sunna.” From an Arabic language point of view, *salaf* means past or refers to the past. Salafi philosophy is particularly founded on the following *hadith* (Prophet’s saying): “The best of people is my generation, then those who come after them, then those who come after them.”²⁷ The first three generations are commonly known as *al-salaf al-salah*—the Pious Forefathers. Prophet Muhammad and his companions, also known as the *Sahaba*, are included in the first one. The next generation is known as *al-tabi’in* and includes the successors who were born after the Prophet’s death. The last best generation, referred to as *tabi al-tabi’in*, includes the Muslim population that lived after the second generation.

Salafists argue that Islam, at that certain period, was in its golden age, pure and without any kind of distortions. Moreover, this age is considered a time when Muslims properly understood the religion and applied it in a perfect way.²⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, when commenting a verse from the Quran, described non-Salafists as:

All who contradict and oppose the Messenger after the right path has been clearly shown to them, have followed other than the Path of the Believers; and all who follow other than the Path of the Believers have contradicted and opposed the Messenger after the right Path has been shown to them. If one thinks that he is following the Path of the Faithful Believers and is

²⁶ Shah Abdul Hannan, “Islamic Jurisprudence (Usul Al Fiqh): Qiyas,” Muslim Tents, accessed October 12, 2017, http://www.muslimtents.com/aminahsworld/Islamic_jurisprudence_qiyas.html.

²⁷ Abu ‘Iyad Al-Salafi, “A Brief Introduction to the Salafi Dawah,” Salafi publication, accessed June 24, 2017, <http://www.salafipublications.com/sps/sp.cfm?subsecID=SLF02&articleID=SLF020001&pfriend>.

²⁸ Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

mistaken, he is in the same position as one who thinks he is following the Messenger and is mistaken.²⁹

Salafi ideology, in principle, is about introducing the idea of *tawhid*—the unity of God—and the idea of doctrine purity (*aqida*) in order to go back to authenticity. However, the idea does not refer only to monotheism. For Salafists, *tawhid* is also about rejecting innovations (e.g., visiting the shrine graves), practices that consequently relate to unbelief (*kufir*) and polytheism (*shirk*) because they assign partners to God.³⁰ Therefore, Salafists argue that Muslims should be freed from the traditional rules that have been mixed with the religion.

Salafism is a belief system that represents a broad range of adherents, generally divided into three categories, of which violent jihadists comprise only a small percentage. Quintan Wiktorowicz asserts that “the community is broad enough to include such diverse figures as Osama bin Laden and the Mufti of Saudi Arabia.”³¹ Wiktorowicz divides Salafists into purists (considered conservatives by some other scholars), politicians (also defined as the theological category), and jihadists. This categorization has been widely accepted by other scholars since Wiktorowicz published his research in 2006.³²

This thesis focus, indeed, is on the third category—the jihadists—which we refer to as Salafi-jihadists. According to Shiraz Maher, there are five essential features of contemporary Salafi-jihadism: *tawhid* (the unity of God); *hakimiyya* (what the Islamic authority looks like and who to serve); *al-wala wa-l-bara* (loyalty and disavowal; *al-wala* refers to loyalty to God, Islam, and other Muslims; *al-bara* refers to disavowal of the polytheists and their allies); jihad; and *takfir* (excommunicating or dismissing Muslims from the faith of Islam).³³ However, subject matter experts’ ideas vary when it comes to the characteristics that define Salafism or Salafi-jihadism. Alvi Hayyat argues that the

²⁹ Abu ‘Iyad al-Salafi, “A Brief Introduction to the Salafi Dawah.”

³⁰ Joas Wagemakers, “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi: The Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2009): 283.

³¹ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 207.

³² Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

concepts of “Unification of Governance” and of *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-Kufr* are key characteristics of Salafism as well.³⁴ The “Unification of Governance” has to do with the refusal of all man-made laws and the unification of all Muslims under one governance (Caliphate). On the other hand, *dar al-Islam* refers to the territory where the Muslims live, while *dar al-Kufr* refers to the territory inhabited by the unbelievers.

B. JIHADISM

Jihad, likely the most well known and yet the least understood Islamic term by the general Western public, does not solely refer to literal war. The word jihad stems from the root word *jahada*, which means to struggle or exert effort.³⁵ Jihad is “a personal attempt to seek God’s will, resist temptation, and strive to be a better Muslim or a collective effort to improve one’s community as well as defend it or expand it by means of warfare.”³⁶ The concept of jihad in Islam is categorized into two types, *al-qital*—warfare—considered the “jihad of the sword” or “the lesser jihad”; and *jihad al-nafs*—the greater jihad—the struggle against one’s own diabolical tendencies in order to be accepted by God as a good believer.³⁷

It must be noted that jihad in the holy Quran, like in the following verse, is described as a self-defense act: “Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory.”³⁸ In fact, the majority of orthodox Muslim scholars believe that “jihad’s objective has never been to fight all unbelievers..., and physically fighting is not a permanent condition against unbelievers, but only when treaties are broken or aggression

³⁴ Hayat Alvi, “The Diffusion of Intra-Islamic Violence and Terrorism: The Impact of the Proliferation of Salafi/Wahhabi Ideologies,” *Middle East* 18, no. 2 (2014): 39.

³⁵ Maher, *Salafi- Jihadism*, 32.

³⁶ Hadi Rasmya, “Awamil Saud Alsalafiya Aljihadya wa mokafahatiha,” *Iraqi Publication*, accessed Jun 25, 2017, <http://www.iraqicp.com/index.php/sections/platform>.

³⁷ Maher, *Salafi- Jihadism*, 34.

³⁸ Quran, Surahh al-Hajj 22, Verse 39.

has been made against Muslim territory.”³⁹ On the other hand, inviting non-Muslims is considered as a continuous jihad as per the *hadith*: “I have been ordered to fight the people until they declare that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, establish prayers, and pay zakat. If they perform all that, their blood and property are guaranteed protection on my behalf except when justified by Islamic laws.”⁴⁰ Linguistic scholars of *hadith* argue that the word “fight” in the *hadith* does refer to struggle and not combat, therefore, “not forcing anyone to become Muslim at the point of a sword.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, the concept of jihad remains a highly contested one among scholars.

Current usage of the jihad concept as applied to political and social life is not new. In *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, Rudolph Peters lays out three traditional key functions of the doctrine of jihad. Primarily, jihad was used to mobilize and encourage Muslims to fight the unbelievers since jihad is considered a religious duty.⁴² Secondly, Peters continues, jihad was used to increase the credibility of a leader, because declaring jihad was one of the main tasks of a lawful caliph.⁴³ Lastly, the doctrine of jihad served as a set of rules that guided foreign policy and the relationships with foreign powers.⁴⁴

Salafi-jihadist scholars have elevated the position of *jihad* so much that they consider it a foremost obligation for Muslims once they accept Islam as their religion. In the view of Salafi-jihadists, jihad is an *ibada* in the path of God—a fundamental act of worship like the other five pillars of Islam, such as prayer or the pilgrimage. Contemporary jihadist movements use comments by ancient scholars such as Ibn Nuhaas,

³⁹ Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, and Shaykh Seraj Hendricks, “Jihad: A Misunderstood Concept from Islam,” The Islamic Supreme Council of America, accessed July 25, 2017, <http://islamicsupremecouncil.org/understanding-islam/legal-rulings/5-jihad-a-misunderstood-concept-from-islam.html>.

⁴⁰ Related by Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim.

⁴¹ Shaykh Muhammad Hisham, The Islamic Supreme Council of America, accessed July 28, 2017, <http://islamicsupremecouncil.org/understanding-islam/legal-rulings/5-jihad-a-misunderstood-concept-from-islam.html>.

⁴² Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1996), 5.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

who still retains his popularity, in order to convince jihadist adherents about their radical view of jihad. Ibn Nuhaas interpreted a quote from the Quran saying that “If it weren’t for Allah checking the nonbelievers through the believers and giving the believers authority to protect Islam and break the armies of disbelief, [then] disbelief would have reigned on earth and the true religion would have been eliminated. This proves that whatever is in this status [i.e., jihad] deserves to be a pillar of *iman* [faith].”⁴⁵ Similarly, Sayyid Qutb considered jihad as “the holy war to subjugate Islamic teachings and expand Islam.”⁴⁶ Moreover, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the initial leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), said “next to faith, there is nothing more important than repulsing an assailant enemy who ruins the religion and the world.”⁴⁷

Salafi-jihadists often exploit, even against Islamic law, the concept of jihadism to motivate supporters to fight. Salafi-jihadists have constantly elaborated new interpretations of the concept of jihad, so they could invoke it at any time to legitimize their activities against any target regardless of religion, race, or nationality. In fact, the Imam (the highest religious representative in the country) used to be the one in charge of declaring *jihad*. Currently, in most of the Muslim countries, the ruler of the country is the one who bears the authority to declare *jihad*. Any other call for jihad is considered illegitimate by orthodox Muslims and, therefore, refused on religious grounds.⁴⁸

One of the key features of jihad that contemporary Salafi-jihadist movements often exploit is the Islamic principle of *qisas*, which refers to retaliation in an innovative way in order to justify the targeting of civilians.⁴⁹ “An eye for an eye” would be the comparable idea.⁵⁰ The *Qisas* concept is typically used as a justice instrument for individuals involved in cases of murder; however, Salafi-jihadists have been particularly

⁴⁵ Maher, *Salafi- Jihadism*, 33.

⁴⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Beirut: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1980), 42.

⁴⁷ Maher, *Salafi- Jihadism*, 33.

⁴⁸ Peters, *Jihad*, 55.

⁴⁹ Maher, *Salafi- Jihadism*, 49.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

innovative by applying this particular concept to international affairs.⁵¹ ISIS in its well-known magazine—*Dabiq*—labeled many of its international terror assaults (e.g., the Paris attacks) as “just terror” in response to what the group perceives as hostilities against Muslim countries from the Western ones.⁵²

C. WAHHABISM

Somewhat similar to Salafism, Wahhabism advocates for a return to “purity”; however, Wahhabism takes that farther. Wahhabism is a branch of the Salafist movement that arose in the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century with the purpose of reforming the secular political provisions within Islamic principles (see Figure 1).⁵³

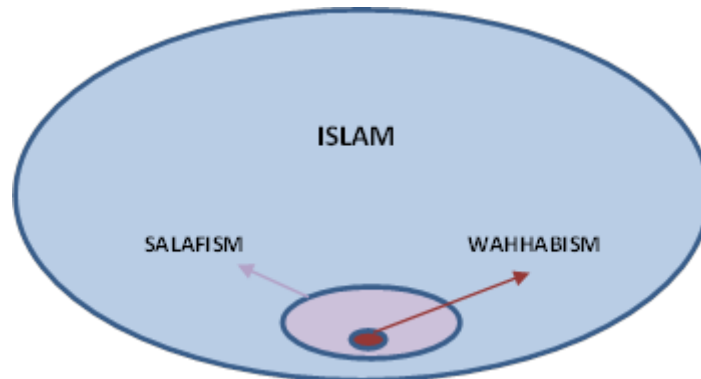


Figure 1. Wahhabism depicted in relation to Salafism and Islam.

The ideology is based on the teachings of Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, whose mission was to revive pure worship and devotion to Allah alone. The movement is also known as *Adwa lil Tawhid* (call of unity) and its adherents as *Ahl Tawhid* (the people of unity). Interestingly, the movement grew up in a vast, thinly populated area in central Arabia but managed to come to dominance and resulted in the founding of the Saudi

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Shiraz Maher, “Inside the Minds of the ISIS Murderers,” *New Statesman* (May 2017), <http://www.newstatesman.com/world/2017/05/inside-minds-isis-murderers>.

⁵³ David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: IB Tauris & Co., Ltd, 2009), 10.

state.⁵⁴ Today, Saudi Arabia remains one of the most religious and conservative countries in the world, and the ruling family is strongly connected to the clergy of Wahhabism. Moreover, Saudi Arabia's symbolic position as the birthplace of Islam and Saudi's oil money allow the country to finance and spread Wahhabi ideology outside the country's borders.⁵⁵

Wahhabi ideology in the Arabian Peninsula is a rebirth of Islam based on its pure religious doctrines and rules. According to Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab, Muslims must form a *bayah* (oath of allegiance) to a Muslim ruler. On the other hand, the ruler has to be committed in his allegiance to the people for as long as he governs the society based on the laws of God. One of the main tenets of Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine is the concept of *takfir*. Under the *takfiri* doctrine, Wahhabis can excommunicate a fellow Muslim if the individual engages in activities that are considered by Wahhabis as non-Islamic; therefore, those who do not comply with the rules should be murdered (because they would be apostates) and their possessions confiscated. Wahhabis believe that, to the list of apostates deserving death, should be also included the Shiite, Sufis and other Muslim denominations.

Lastly, Wahhabis strictly reject the reinterpretation of the Quran and the *Sunnah* to settle the new era issues.⁵⁶ Wahhabis are known for banning specific acts that they consider as *shirk*, such as praying at saints' tombs, engaging in religious celebrations, and adopting foreign dress.⁵⁷ Moreover, the ban includes alcoholic drinks, tobacco, and other stimulants that are intoxicating. Music, dancing, as well as loud laughter and dramatic weeping at funerals, have also been banned by Wahhabis.⁵⁸ The exact interpretations of

⁵⁴ Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement*, 70.

⁵⁵ Mohamad Mansour, "Al Wahhabiya: The Story of Religious and Political Ascending," *Orient.Net* (2014), accessed on July 25, 2017, http://orient-news.net/ar/news_show/83054/0/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D9%91%D.

⁵⁶ Natana J Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30.

⁵⁷ Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement*, 70.

⁵⁸ Library of Congress, "Saudi Arabia Wahhabi Theology." Country Study on Saudi Arabia, December 1992, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/loc/sa/wahhabi.htm>.

what shapes the right behavior according to the Quran and *hadith* have given the Wahhabis the title of “Muslim Calvinists.”⁵⁹

D. CONCLUSIONS

Thus far, we have defined the key concepts of the Salafi-jihadism. The ideology is part of a broader Salafi spectrum and aims to revive the Islam practiced by the first three generations. Salafi-jihadists have constantly elaborated new interpretations of the principles of the Islamic law with the purpose of legitimizing and fulfilling their goals. In the next chapter, we examine how the definitions of these principles have evolved throughout the time from one Salafi thinker to another.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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III. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION OF SALAFI-JIHADISM

Having discussed the key concepts of the research in Chapter II, we now trace the prominent ideas and philosophies that have shaped the current Salafi-jihadist ideology. This chapter has two main objectives. First, we examine the ideas and beliefs of the thinkers that continue to motivate extremist Salafi-jihadist organizations such as ISIS. Graeme Wood in “What ISIS Really Wants,” asserts that “the Islamic State is no mere a collection of psychopaths. It is a religious group with carefully considered beliefs.”⁶⁰ In fact, these ideas and beliefs have been carved by well-known religious scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyya, Hasan al Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and others.⁶¹ These ideologues have offered new understanding and interpretations of the religious texts, and they continue to serve as an inspiration for extremists during the present time. In many cases, their works are being used as doctrines by terrorist organizations. Second, while discussing, in chronological order, the ideas of some of the most influential Salafi-jihadist scholars, we also point out the evolution of the Salafi-jihadist ideological concepts over the years. Analyzing the evolution of the ideology from its beginning also enables us to depict in Chapter IV the potential transformation of that ideology under ISIS leadership.

A. INTELLECTUAL FATHERS

Ibn Taymiyyah (1268–1328 CE) was a prestigious and controversial scholar who established the intellectual foundation of Salafi-jihadism. He lived during a period of political, religious, and social unrest, when the Islamic world was experiencing considerable external pressure from the Mongol Dynasty.⁶² For Ibn Taymiyyah, the foreign invasion was an existential threat to the Islamic civilization, so he strived to purify the faith by drawing lines between the true believers and the Mongol semi-

⁶⁰ Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants.”

⁶¹ Waleed al Rawi, *Al Dawala Al Iraq Al Islamiya* (Amman, Jordan: Ameneh House Publication, 2014), 172.

⁶² Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Halim ibn Taymiyya, *Kitab Al-Iman* (Indiana: Iman Publishing House, 2009), 4.

pagans.⁶³ Moreover, Ibn Taymiyyah attempted to create a new order by strictly refusing to subordinate the religion to the state, and in one of his *fatwas* (non-binding juristic opinions) against the Mongols, he argued that the Muslims were obliged to overthrow the Mongol leader for mixing the Sharia law with Mongols' law (*yasa*).⁶⁴

Ibn Taymiyyah's work has been enormously influential to the recent Salafi-jihadist movements to the extent that citing him is a measure of a person's knowledge of Islam.⁶⁵ Among the key contributions of Ibn Taymiyyah to Salafi-jihadist ideology is the concept of jihad itself. He gave jihad the same importance as the five pillars of Islam, and considered jihad an obligation in order to overthrow the forces of new *jahiliyya* (ignorance of God).⁶⁶ He argued to his fellow Muslims that jihad "is the best voluntary [religious] act that a man can perform."⁶⁷ A second major contribution of Ibn Taymiyyah is the idea of *takfir*.⁶⁸ He considered the false Muslims—the Mongols—as more dangerous than the other infidels, and therefore, he argued that fighting the false Muslims should be a priority.⁶⁹ Thirdly, Ibn Taymiyyah, in contrast to the *ulama* of his time, believed that there was room for personal interpretation of religious doctrine—*ijtihad*.⁷⁰ He highlighted the importance of *ijtihad* in his writings, and personally exercised it in many issues of Sharia.⁷¹ An important consideration for Ibn Taymiyyah's work arises from the historical period in which he lived—during the invasion of Muslim lands by a foreign power.⁷²

⁶³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'a Fatwa* (Cairo), XXVIII, 240–42.

⁶⁴ Sami Zubiyadah, *Al Islam, Al Dolah wa Al Mujtama* (Damascus, Syria: Dar Al Mada Lilthqafah wa Alnashir, 1995), 38.

⁶⁵ Hassan Hassan, "A Religious Basis for Violence Misreads Original Principles," *The National* (April 2012), <https://www.thenational.ae/a-religious-basis-for-violence-misreads-original-principles-1.391065>

⁶⁶ Zubiyadah, *Al Islam*, 39.

⁶⁷ Ahmad ibn Taymiyya, *Faqeh il Jihad*, collected by Sheikeh Zuhir Shafiq al-Kabi, Dar al-Feken al-Arabi. (Beirut, Lebanon: 1992), 27.

⁶⁸ Hassan, "A Religious Basis for Violence Misreads Original Principles."

⁶⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'a Fatwa* (Cairo), XXVIII, 412–418.

⁷⁰ Suhail Showkeen, "Ibn Taymiyyah and Some Rules (Dhawabit) of His Ijtihad," *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 3, no. 10 (2015).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Richard Bonney, *Jihād: From Qur'ān to Bin Laden* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 112.

Ibn Taymiyyah’s ideas of jihad, *ijtihad*, *takfir*, and *jahiliyya* have been discussed and further developed by contemporary Salafi-jihadist thinkers. One of these prominent figures of Salafi-jihadism is Hasan al Banna (1906–1949). His work was hugely influenced by the decision of Kemal Ataturk to terminate the caliphate in 1924 and to establish the secular state of Turkey. Al Banna’s initial response was the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose overall mission since its founding has been to promote a revival of Islam.⁷³ The organization’s credo remains “God is our objective; the Quran is our constitution; the Prophet is our leader; struggle is our way; and death for the sake of God is the highest of our inspirations.”⁷⁴ Al Banna believed that Sharia provides the most comprehensive and flexible set of principles that humankind needs.⁷⁵

Al Banna’s revivalist ideas were further advanced in a more radical way by Abdu al-Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966). Mawdudi’s work is considered an important link between al-Banna’s vague methodical approach and the sophisticated philosophy of Sayid Qutb.⁷⁶ Mawdudi—the founder of the Pakistani Islamist political party *Jamaat i-Islami*—is one of the first thinkers who managed to develop a systematic political form of Islam and actually wrote a plan for social action to achieve his vision.⁷⁷ He is generally credited with the revival of the concept of the new *jahiliya*, a concept that was later borrowed by Qutb. Mawdudi believed that Muslims had, in fact, overthrown God’s sovereignty and imposed secular governments.⁷⁸ Moreover, he asserted that “Islam is a revolutionary ideology” and the religion “seeks to alter the social order of the entire world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals.”⁷⁹

⁷³ David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 98.

⁷⁴ Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam’s War against America* (New York: Random House, 2003), 57.

⁷⁵ Ahmad Mawṣilī. *Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy, and the Islamic State* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 121.

⁷⁶ John A. Turner, *Religious Ideology and the Roots of the Global Jihad: Salafi Jihadism and International Order* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 115.

⁷⁷ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

⁷⁸ Turner, *Religious Ideology and the Roots of the Global Jihad*, 115.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 60.

Although Mawdudi is one of the most contemporary influential thinkers of radical Islam, Sayyid Qutb is considered by scholars as the one who founded the actual movement.⁸⁰ Qutb, arguably the greatest contributor to the Salafi-jihadist ideology, is a product of the Muslim Brotherhood organization. He was once an admirer of the West but changed his view after an unhappy experience in the United States. Qutb is broadly regarded as the father of uncompromising militant Islam,⁸¹ and his work represents a clear blueprint for a revolution.⁸²

Qutb's strategy to return mankind to the early days of Islam was based on three interconnected concepts.⁸³ First, Qutb defined the goal to be achieved—the implementation of the Islamic concept of life.⁸⁴ Second, he pointed out the obstacles to overcome—the corrupted social and political systems—that Qutb characterized as *jahiliyyah*.⁸⁵ Qutb constantly preached to Muslims that everything surrounding them was, in fact, *jahiliyyah*. He asserted that “if we look at the sources of modern of living, it becomes clear that the whole world is steeped in Jahiliyyah, [Ignorance of the Divine guidance] and all the marvelous material comforts and high level inventions do not diminish this ignorance.”⁸⁶ In addition, he strongly opposed the submission to and the exercise of authority of some humans over others, and argued that Islam is not about obeying the authority of God's servants but is about obeying God's authority alone.⁸⁷ Third, he explicated the means to overcome the obstacles and achieve the goal—the jihad. Given the existence of *jahiliyya* societies, Qutb argued, religious men have a duty to create an Islamic social power in order to remove the social-political obstacles and

⁸⁰ Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 102.

⁸¹ Andrew McGregor, “Jihad and the Rifle Alone: Abdullah Azzam and the Islamist Revolution.” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23, no. 2 (2003): 92–113.

⁸² Turner, *Religious Ideology and the Roots of the Global Jihad*, 116.

⁸³ Sayyid Qutb and Albert Bergesen. *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 14.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Qutb, *Milestones*, 6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 106–107.

implement God's will.⁸⁸ Interestingly, Qutb's work can be found in many bookstores throughout the Middle East, and some of his books are considered among the most influential Arabic works in the last century.⁸⁹

The assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat by an Egyptian radical group (al-Jihad) in 1981 was a crucial development in the violent path of Salafi-jihadism. Al-Jihad, initially founded by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, was then led by Muhammad abd al-Salam Faraj (1954–1982). Faraj, who represented a radical wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, highly criticized the organization for attempting to cooperate with the Egyptian government.⁹⁰ He believed that al-Sadat's death would spark a revolution in Egypt, and in fact, the assassination of the Egyptian president by al-Jihad permanently changed the nature of the Islamist struggle.⁹¹ Faraj, heavily influenced by ibn Taymiyya and Qutb, did not just consider jihad equal to the other five pillars of Islam, but he considered jihad as the most vital pillar.⁹²

Jihad was further re-conceptualized by al-Qaeda's radical leadership. Abdullah Azzam (1941–1989), the co-founder of al-Qaeda (initially known as *Maktab al-Khidmat*) and a former Muslim Brotherhood member, was the first al-Qaeda leader involved in redefining the concept of jihad. In *Defense of the Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman*, Azzam separated jihad against the unbelievers into two types: offensive and defensive, and then clearly laid out the conditions when they should be invoked. Furthermore, Azzam re-conceptualized the traditional view of jihad as a collective duty, to an individual duty (*fard ayn*) that must be carried out by "every Muslim in the earth."⁹³ He also synthesized al-Qaeda's vision in these lines:

Every principle needs a vanguard to carry it forward and, while focusing its way into society, puts up with heavy tasks and enormous sacrifices.

⁸⁸ Qutb, *The Sayyid Qutb Reader*, 14.

⁸⁹ Benjamin, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 63.

⁹⁰ Turner, *Religious Ideology and the Roots of the Global Jihad*, 117.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Benjamin, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 77.

⁹³ Abdullah Azzam, "Defense of the Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after Iman," Religioscope, accessed August 1, 2017, <http://english.religion.info/2002/02/01/document-defence-of-the-muslim-lands/>.

There is no ideology, neither earthly nor heavenly, that does not require a vanguard that gives everything it possesses in order to achieve victory for this ideology. It carries the flag all along the sheer endless and difficult path until it reaches its destination in the reality of life, since Allah has destined that it should make it and manifests itself. This vanguard constitutes al-Qaeda al-Sulbah for the expected society.⁹⁴

The next most important change in the Salafi-jihadist ideology was initiated by Ayman al-Zawahiri—the current leader of al-Qaeda. In *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, which is also al-Qaeda's manifesto, al-Zawahiri argued that the primary targeting should shift from the “near enemy” (Middle Eastern countries) to the “far enemy” (e.g., The United States). He considered jihad as an efficient tool and argued that “the method of martyrdom operations is the most successful way of inflicting damage against the opponent and the least costly to the mujahedeen in casualties.”⁹⁵ Moreover, al-Zawahiri managed to make a linkage of the local objectives (e.g., the Palestinian struggle) to the ones of the Global Jihad.⁹⁶ Al-Zawahiri, worried that Western concepts such as nationalism or socialism were dominating local conflicts, argued that these concepts deviate from the true path of Islam and must be eliminated.⁹⁷ Also, like many other Salafi-jihadists, al-Zawahiri has highlighted the importance of controlling a territory. He explained that “the jihad movement must adopt its plan on the basis of controlling a piece of land in the heart of the Islamic world on which it could establish and protect the state of Islam and launch a battle to restore a rational caliphate based on traditions of the Prophet.”⁹⁸ It must be noted that most of al-Zawahiri's theoretical approach is drawn from Sayid Qutb; therefore, key concepts like jihad and *jahiliyya* comprise the essence of al-Zawahiri's thinking.

⁹⁴ Abdullah Azzam. “Al-Qaidah al-Sulbah.” *Al-Jihad*, no.41 (1988), 46.

⁹⁵ Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, serialized in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (London), December 2–10, 2001, trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-NES-2001-1202.

⁹⁶ Turner, *Religious Ideology and the Roots of the Global Jihad*, 118.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*.

Abu-Muhammad al-Maqdisi is described by scholars as the “godfather of Jihadi-Salafi movement”,⁹⁹ “the key contemporary ideologue in the jihadi intellectual universe,” and “the most influential living jihadi theorist.”¹⁰⁰ Al-Maqdisi’s most important contribution to Salafi-jihadism is the development of the concept of *al-wala wa-l-bara*, turning it into a theory of enmity against the apostate rulers of the Islamic world.¹⁰¹ In addition, Al Maqdisi has written extensively about *takfir*. But unlike Sayid Qutb, who considered the entire society to be stepped in *jahiliyya*, al-Maqdisi applies *takfir* only on the rulers and the people that are directly engaged in assisting the regime and its laws (e.g.: police officers).¹⁰² In *Democracy: A Religion*, Al-Maqdisi argues that “democracy is an innovated religion, where its parents are false lords and its followers are slaves,” therefore, people who support the democratic process should be considered polytheists.¹⁰³ Lastly, al-Maqdisi is well known as the spiritual mentor of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. However, the two of them had also their disagreements, especially when it came to the application of *takfir*. Unlike al-Zarqawi, who hugely depended on the use of *takfir* to excommunicate people in general, al-Maqdisi has constantly condemned Muslims who use extreme forms of *takfir*.¹⁰⁴

B. CONCLUSIONS

The philosophies of many Salafi-jihadist groups are founded upon an historical lineage of Islamic thinking, beginning with the ideas of Ibn Taymimiyya up to the contemporary thinkers. ISIS and other Salafi-jihadist groups have been successful in making a connection between past and present Salafi-jihadist ideology in order to

⁹⁹ Wagemakers, “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi,” 282.

¹⁰⁰ William McCants et al., *Militant Ideology Atlas: Executive Report*, (New York, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2006), <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a458483.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Wagemakers. “A Purist Jihadi-Salafi,” 287.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁰³ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Democracy: A Religion*. Trans. Abu Muhammad al-Maleki and Abu Sayf Muwahhid (At-Tibyan Publications, n.d.), 20.

¹⁰⁴ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “Why I Have Not Yet Called Them Kharijites, Despite Them Being Worse than the Kharijites,” *Jihadology* (blog), accessed August 1, 2017, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5ammad-al-maqdisc4ab-22why-did-you-not-call-them-kharijites-until-now-although-they-are-worse-than-the-kharijites22.pdf>

legitimize their causes and motivate supporters. Therefore, understanding the evolution of the ideology can help the coalition forces fighting ISIS to conceptualize its ideology and to make accurate estimates about the future trends of the ideology.

IV. THE IMPACT OF ISIS ON SALAFI-JIHADIST IDEOLOGY

Al Qaeda and ISIL [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] and groups like it are desperate for legitimacy. They try to portray themselves as religious leaders—holy warriors in defense of Islam. That’s why ISIL presumes to declare itself the “Islamic State.” And they propagate the notion that America—and the West, generally—is at war with Islam. That’s how they recruit. That’s how they try to radicalize young people. We must never accept the premise that they put forward, because it is a lie. Nor should we grant these terrorists the religious legitimacy that they seek. They are not religious leaders—they’re terrorists. And we are not at war with Islam. We are at war with people who have perverted Islam.

—President Barack Obama¹⁰⁵

In the previous chapters, we provided background information on Salafi-jihadism and the evolution of this ideology, and we summarized the ideas of the prominent Salafi-jihadist thinkers that have shaped the ideology to its current form. In Chapter IV, we combine insights from primary and secondary sources in order to depict ISIS’s “contribution” to the Salafi-jihadist ideology.

Initially, we briefly discuss how ISIS emerged and managed to draw global attention. We then examine ISIS’s contribution to Salafi-jihadist ideology by analyzing the individual component parts of a terrorist organization, including ideology and strategy, territory, leadership, recruitment, and finance. Discussing one variable at a time enables us to better examine and describe the amount of significant change that ISIS tries to impose on the Salafi-jihadism. At the end of this chapter, we discuss about the prospects for ISIS’s ideology.

A. BACKGROUND: HOW DID ISIS EMERGE?

In 2014, ISIS announced the so-called “Islamic Caliphate,” and, from 2014 to 2017, the group managed to control large parts of western Iraq and eastern Syria. Inside the group’s controlled territories, ISIS has set up its own unparalleled terror regime. The

¹⁰⁵ Barak Obama, “Remarks by the President in Closing of the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism,” States News Service, February 18, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/remarks-president-closing-summit-countering-violent-extremism>

group has also inspired so-called “lone-wolf” attacks by either sympathizers or rare followers in Western countries. ISIS has installed its state of barbaric terror through the beheadings of many victims from all religions, the videos of executions by drowning, burning victims alive, shootings, and the rape of the Yazidi (and other) women. At present, fortunately, the group has almost faded from Iraq and soon enough from Syria; however, whether its legacy will fade with the territory the group controls remains highly questionable.

ISIS is known by many acronyms and names: ISIS, ISIL, IS, and Daesh. ISIS stands for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and this is how the group was generally identified after it captured Mosul in 2014. The name asserts that the group controls Iraq and Syria. On the other hand, ISIL stands for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and is an exact translation of how the group refers to itself in Arabic—al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham. Levant is the English term for al-Sham, which refers to the region of greater Syria (a territory from southern Turkey to Egypt).¹⁰⁶ However, the group’s preferred name is IS, which stands for Islamic State. Among other things, this term signifies that the group is not limited to just Syria and Iraq and attempts to reach to all the Muslims in the world. Lastly, Daesh—the term used in the Middle East to refer to the group—is the acronym for the group’s name in Arabic, and is commonly used to challenge ISIS’s legitimacy.¹⁰⁷

The origin of ISIS can be traced to 2000, when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi established Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ) with the intent of fighting the Jordanian government;¹⁰⁸ however, it was the 2003 Iraq invasion that transformed the small militant group into the leading Salafi-jihadist organization. In fact, the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States is considered by many scholars and subject matter experts as the

¹⁰⁶ Mohamad Abu Ruman, “Daesh or ISIS,” Al ghad News, accessed on September 30, 2017, <http://www.alghad.com/search.php?search=abu+ruman>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ahmed S. Hashim, “The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate,” *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 4 (2014): 69.

main factor that led to the formation of ISIS.¹⁰⁹ This process was further accelerated by the decision of Paul Bremer—the United States appointed director of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq—to dissolve the Iraqi Army and to initiate the de-Ba’athification policy. The policy left many of the Sunni military men and civil servants, who were undisputedly loyal to Saddam Hussein, without a job. JIJ, known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (or AQI) after al-Zarqawi officially pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden in the late 2004,¹¹⁰ quickly exploited the moment by drawing these Iraqi secular forces under a common cause to conduct joint insurgencies against the U.S. troops and a sectarian war against the Shia in Iraq.

AQI’s brutal tactics, especially against the Shia, created a great gap between the group and al-Qaeda’s leadership. This gap expanded when the Mujahedeen Shura Council, which was established by al-Zarqawi just before he was killed in 2006,¹¹¹ changed the name of the organization from AQI to the Islamic State in Iraq (or ISI) without consulting with the al-Qaeda leadership.

The Arab Spring, particularly the uprising in Syria, greatly affected the further transformation of ISIS. In 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the current leader of ISIS, emerged as the leader of ISI. Soon after the Arab Spring erupted among many Arab countries and, later, when the uprising in Syria against Assad turned into a civil war, the ISI entered Syria, renaming itself as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (or ISIS). The rebranding further angered al-Qaeda’s leaders because the organization already existed in Syria as the al-Nusra Front. The two groups then fought each other for some time until ISIS officially broke with al-Qaeda, while the al-Nusra Front remained loyal to al-Qaeda. In 2013, ISIS moved to capture two major Syrian cities: Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. Then, in 2014, the group captured Mosul in Iraq, announced the establishment of the Caliphate, and asked all Muslims to pledge allegiance (bay’ah) to the new Caliph—Abu Bakr al-

¹⁰⁹ Glenn E. Robinson, “The Four Waves of Global Jihad, 1979–2017,” *Middle East Policy* 24, no. 3 (2017): 78.

¹¹⁰ Hashim, “The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate,” 71.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

Baghdadi.¹¹² As of May 2017, ISIS has lost 70 percent of the area it controlled in Iraq and 51 percent of its territories in Syria (see Figure 2), compared to the territories the group controlled in August 2014.¹¹³

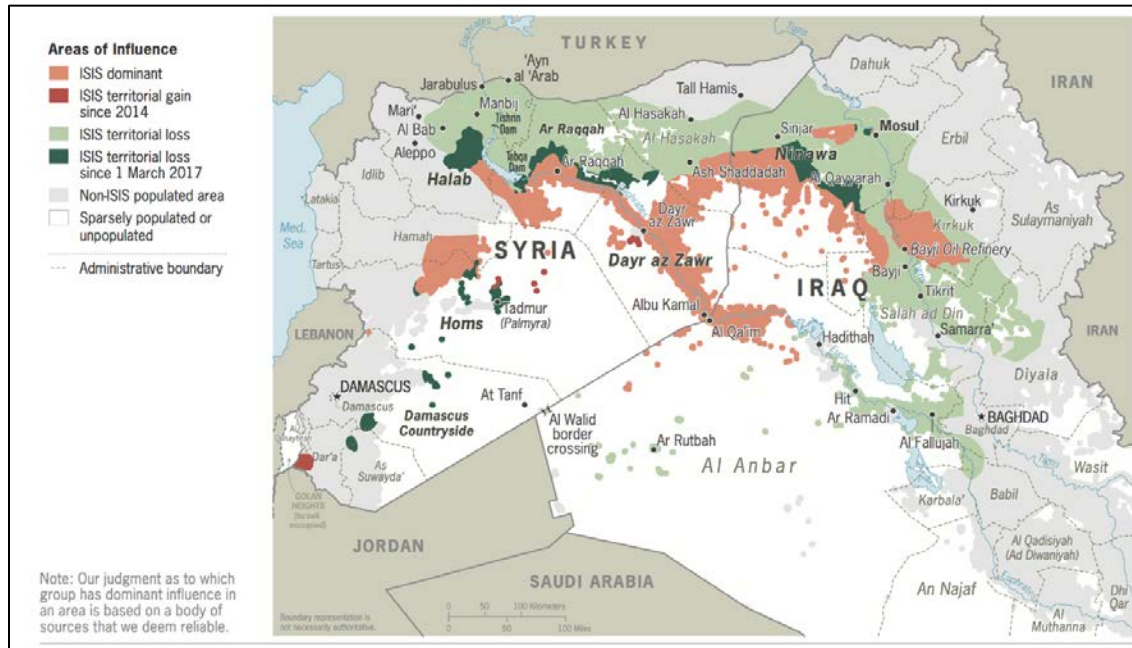


Figure 2. ISIS-controlled territories (as of May 2017).¹¹⁴

B. ISIS’S IDEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION

In this section, we examine ISIS’s contribution to Salafi-jihadist ideology by analyzing the individual components of a terrorist organization, including ideology and strategy, territory, leadership, recruitment, and finance.

¹¹² Haifa Al Maashi, “Non-violence in Islam versus Daesh’s Violence” *Gulf News*, September 27, 2014, <http://gulfnews.com/opinion/thinkers/non-violence-in-islam-versus-daesh-s-violence-1.1390804>

¹¹³ “Daesh Areas of Influence – May 2017 Update,” The Global Coalition, accessed on October 2, 2017, http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/maps_and_stats/daesh-areas-of-influence-may-2017-update/.

¹¹⁴ “Daesh Areas of Influence – May 2017 Update,” The Global Coalition, accessed on October 2, 2017, http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/maps_and_stats/daesh-areas-of-influence-may-2017-update/.

1. Ideology and Strategy

ISIS's strategy, mostly drawn from the Salafi-jihadist ideology, follows a distinctive path to achieve its goals. The Salafi-jihadist groups' ultimate objectives—as defined by their ideologies—are to overthrow the secular ruling regimes in Muslim countries, unite all the Muslims under one state, and impose Sharia law. ISIS, however, has its unique implementation mechanism of the Salafi-jihadist ideology it claims to follow.¹¹⁵ Daniel Byman asserts that “the group’s ideology is instrumentalized, twisted, and subordinated to other goals, enough that it is difficult to use ideology to predict the Islamic State’s actions.”¹¹⁶ In that light, a discussion of the primary strategic and ideological differences that ISIS brought to the Salafi-jihadist arena follows.

First, ISIS's strategy has prioritized sectarianism and the mass application of *takfir* to excommunicate Muslims, which has also been a real weakness for ISIS. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ibn Taymiyyah was the first Salafi-jihadist thinker to discuss the concept of *takfir*, and he argued to his fellow Muslims that fighting the Mongols—the false Muslims—should be a priority over fighting the infidels.¹¹⁷ ISIS, however, took this concept and further expanded it. The organization has used a social polarization strategy—sectarianism—as a means of boosting recruitment,¹¹⁸ and is using the *takfir* concept in order to back up its strategy. Al-Zarqawi's letter to Osama bin Laden best explains ISIS's sectarianism strategy:

These [the Shia] in our opinion are the key to change. I mean that targeting and hitting them in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the

¹¹⁵ Interview with Jordanian Directorate of Military Intelligence, August 2017.

¹¹⁶ Daniel Byman, “Understanding the Islamic State—A Review Essay,” *International Security* 40, no. 4 (Spring 2016): 136.

¹¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu'a Fatwa*, 412–418.

¹¹⁸ Brian Fishman, *The Master Plan: ISIS, al Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 43.

inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death at the hands of these Sabeans.¹¹⁹

In contrast to al-Qaeda, a group that wants to reach out to the *ummah* and drag them into its cause, ISIS's ideology has supported excessive religiosity and expanded the *takfiri* circle to include most of the Muslims in the world.¹²⁰

Second, a propaganda campaign and the professional use of media are additional strategies that distinguish ISIS from the other Salafi-jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda. Lina Khatib asserts that "propaganda is both a tool of recruitment for the organization and a tool of war that is often used to supplement military action, and sometimes to compensate for it."¹²¹ In fact, the horrific violence ISIS releases for the general public to see is just one example of the group's propaganda campaign. Furthermore, the group uses elements of ideology to strengthen its relations with the local population and control its territory.¹²² Soon after invading a new territory, ISIS engages in actions seen as promoting Sharia law.¹²³ These actions reflect the ideology it claims to represent and increases the group's legitimacy in the eyes of the local population.

The media wing of ISIS distinguishes this group both qualitatively and quantitatively, in terms of the number of periodicals, media coverage, and high professionalism in this field, when compared to other terrorist organizations.¹²⁴ Although ISIS advocates for a return to the practices of the first three generations of Muslims, the organization has made use of the rapid evolution in communication, the Internet, and social media to spread its ideology and recruit new members. The organization has established many media companies, such as al-Fourqan, al-Itessam, al-Hayat, Ajnad, Turjman, al-Saouriti, al-Batar, Caliphate, and al-Byan. It is also adept at using social

¹¹⁹ Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, "Letter to Osama bin Laden," U.S. Department of State, last modified February 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm>. Sabeans are known as people who have switched their religion. It is common for jihadists to mis-identify Sabeans as Shia.

¹²⁰ Interview with Jordanian Directorate of Military Intelligence, August 2017.

¹²¹ Lina Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy, Lasting and Expanding," *Carnegie Middle East Center* (June 2015): 11.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Interview with Jordanian Directorate of Military Intelligence, August 2017.

media including YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.¹²⁵ In fact, ISIS's media campaign is so sophisticated that it has triggered a massive counter messaging campaign from the Global Coalition partners. The Global Counter ISIS Coalition Communications Working Group "regularly convenes over 30 member countries with media and tech companies to share information and strategies to counter violent extremist messages online and present positive alternative narratives."¹²⁶ These efforts have had mixed success. For example, although Twitter has managed to close down more than 635,000 ISIS-related accounts,¹²⁷ the organization continues to create new accounts as a method of outreach.¹²⁸

2. Territory

The establishment of the proto-caliphate is the most visible accomplishment that distinguishes ISIS from the other Salafi-jihadist groups. While other Salafi-jihadist groups only operate within single territories, ISIS has managed to control various territories. ISIS's main goal, unlike al-Qaeda's, has been capturing, holding, and then governing more territory.¹²⁹ The group challenges the postcolonial borders placed by the European powers after the dissolution of Ottoman Empire and aims to rebuild a pan-Islamic state and expand it (*baqiya wa tatamaddad*).¹³⁰

The territory under ISIS control, particularly Syria, was also a very important part of the overall ISIS propaganda. ISIS ideologues proclaim that the apocalypse is underway, and Syria (Dabiq) is where the final battle will take place between the forces of God and His enemies.¹³¹ Moreover, Syria was also the heart of the Umayyad dynasty, one of most important of Islam's dynasties that ruled the caliphate from 661–750 CE.¹³²

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ "The Global Coalition - Working to Defeat ISIS," Department of State, March 22, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/03/268609.htm>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy," 11.

¹²⁹ Robin Wright et al., "The Jihadi Threat: ISIS, al Qaeda, and Beyond," United States Institute of Peace (December 2016/January 2017): 11.

¹³⁰ Gerges, *ISIS: A History*, 224.

¹³¹ Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement*, 171.

¹³² Ibid.

Therefore, the establishment of the caliphate in Syria and Iraq, and the declaration of Raqqa as the capital of the caliphate, further increases the legitimacy of ISIS in the eyes of Salafi adherents. Al-Baghdadi, in his Mosul sermon, emphasized the importance that the caliphate had and said that it was a communal obligation that had not functioned properly for about 1,000 years.¹³³

Beyond its use for propaganda purposes, broad territorial control has enabled ISIS to exploit the financial resources of the areas it controls, increase the recruiting rate, and build up its terrorist networks.¹³⁴ Consequentially, different from efforts targeting other Salafi-jihadist organizations that operate as sleeper cells and in small groups, the fight against ISIS requires conventional military operations rather than security forces to liberate the areas and the people under the group's occupation.¹³⁵

3. Leadership

The establishment of the caliphate and, most importantly, the selection of the right person to become the ruler—the Caliph—are crucial strategic steps that ISIS used to increase its legitimacy in the eyes of Salafi-jihadist adherents. The Caliph is considered the successor of the Prophet in ruling the Muslim nation (*umma*), and there are many *hadiths* stating that the Prophet's successor should be from his Qurashi family. Historically, the Caliph was responsible to adopt the Muslim law (Sharia) over the Muslim community; therefore, he was considered as the symbol of the authority of the Sharia. Moreover, he was also known as the commander of the faithful (*amir al-mu'minin*), responsible to defend and expand the Muslim territory, and to lead the prayers (as the Imam).¹³⁶

ISIS pays particular attention when it chooses its leaders in order to legitimize the group's activities. On June 2014, a few days before the establishment of the Caliphate,

¹³³ Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants."

¹³⁴ Interview with Colonel Mazin Farayah, Chief of Strategic Operations Branch, Jordanian Armed Forces, August 2017.

¹³⁵ Interview with Colonel Farayah, August 2017.

¹³⁶ Adress Ahmad," Nathreyat Al Khelafh Fe Al Feqih Al slami," *Islam Online*, accessed October 2, 2017, <https://islamonline.net/12695>

Abu Muhammad al-Adnani—a now-deceased former senior leader and the official spokesperson of ISIS—explained in an audio message that:

The shūrā council—resolved to announce the establishment of the Islamic khilāfah, the appointment of a khalīfah for the Muslims, and the pledge of allegiance to the shaykh [sheikh], the mujāhid, the scholar who practices what he preaches, the worshipper, the leader, the warrior, the reviver, descendent from the family of the Prophet, the slave of Allah, Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Awwād Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Muhammad al-Badrī al-Hāshimī al-Husaynī al-Qurashī by lineage, as-Sāmurrā’ī by birth and upbringing, al-Baghdādī by residence and scholarship. And he has accepted the bay’ah [pledge of allegiance]. Thus, he is the imam and khalīfah for the Muslims everywhere.¹³⁷

In fact, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has two critical credentials that distinguish him from other Salafi-jihadist leaders, and that ultimately led to his selection as a Caliph. First, al-Baghdadi’s family has long claimed to descend from the Prophet Muhammad’s tribe of Qurashi through the Prophet’s grandson Husayn (*al-Bayt*, the house of the Prophet).¹³⁸ Second, al-Baghdadi holds a Ph.D. in Islamic History from the University of Baghdad, which makes him an expert in *al-Fiqh* (Islamic law).

4. Recruitment

ISIS’s ideology has been so powerful that it has crossed geographical and cultural boundaries at an unprecedented rate. The group has used different kinds of recruiting techniques, such as financial inducement, intimidation, forced conscription in its controlled areas, and social media in order to increase its ranks.¹³⁹ Even today, ISIS continues to attempt radicalizing people living in Western countries, either by the group’s propaganda or by making direct contact through the Internet, in hopes of convincing sympathizers to launch “lone wolf” terrorist attacks.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, “This Is the Promise of Allah,” *Al-Hayat Media Center*, accessed on October 4, 2017, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5ammad-al-e28098adnc481nc4ab-al-shc481mc4ab-22this-is-the-promise-of-god22-en.pdf>

¹³⁸ Fishman, *The Master Plan*, 149.

¹³⁹ Interview with Jordanian Directorate of Military Intelligence.

¹⁴⁰ Colin P. Clarke, “The Terrorist Diaspora” (Santa Monica, CA: *RAND Corporation*, 2017), <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/HM/HM00/20170713/106224/HRG-115-HM00-Wstate-ClarkeC-20170713.pdf>.

The ISIS recruitment strategy has evolved and adapted over time. In the early stages, ISI, somewhat similar to al-Qaeda, paid particular attention to choosing the recruiter and the recruits. The recruiter had to be from the specific area that ISI aimed to recruit; he or she had to be part of the same tribe as the potential recruits; and more importantly, the recruiter had to have considerable knowledge of religion (Quran and *hadith*).¹⁴¹ Waleed al Rawi, a retired general in the Iraqi Army, explains that the group's recruiter was responsible to recruit four other people in order to establish his own jihadi cell.¹⁴² The recruiter was then responsible to set up the recruits' training program—physical, tactical, and Internet and communication training.¹⁴³ Moreover, ISI mostly targeted young people in their twenties, in schools and universities, in mosques, and in charity organizations; those who were not only physically strong, but that also lived under desperate economic conditions.¹⁴⁴

The current recruitment strategy reflects the group's desperate need of new members. The recruitment strategy has transformed into a mass recruitment approach, partly because of what the caliphate represents in theory and partly because of ISIS involvement in fighting on many fronts. In contrast to some other Salafi-jihadist organizations, such as the al-Nusra Front, ISIS does not have a robust vetting process for new recruits that want to join the group.¹⁴⁵ Peter Neumann, Director of the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR), asserts that ISIS' approach toward individual recruits is: "If you're a Muslim, you're already part of the Caliphate. So even if you're too fat, or too old to be a fighter, we'll find something else for you to do. You have a right to emigrate. We'll find a place for you."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Al Rawi, *Al Dawala Al Iraq Al Islamiya*, 83.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁴⁵ Shiraz Maher, "From Portsmouth to Kobane: The British Jihadis Fighting for ISIS," *New Statesman* (November 6, 2014), <https://www.newstatesman.com/2014/10/portsmouth-kobane>.

¹⁴⁶ Mary Anne Weaver, "Her Majesty's Jihadists," *New York Times*, April, 14, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/magazine/her-majestys-jihadists.html>.

Moreover, females have particularly been targeted by ISIS either as recruiters or recruits. Female recruiters play a very influential role, either by recruiting their family members or by supporting members in their close circles.¹⁴⁷ In fact, females, beyond directly recruiting, play an important role in morally supporting family members who have joined ISIS.¹⁴⁸ Female members are also valuable as online agents or in other roles for spreading ISIS ideology.¹⁴⁹ Recently, on October 4, 2017, the Jordanian Supreme Court found guilty a female ISIS member who was attempting to recruit new members through acts of prostitution near some refugee camps in the northern part of the country.¹⁵⁰ The role of women, though, extends beyond recruiting. Al-Zarqawi himself encouraged female membership in his organization by appraising the first female suicide operation in Tel Afar, Iraq, on September 2005.¹⁵¹

5. Finance

ISIS's financial organization and operations are distinct from those of other Salafi-jihadist organizations,¹⁵² and the group's territorial control of a large area in Iraq and Syria has been very beneficial in terms of financial income. Presumably, unlike other Salafi-jihadist organizations that rely on external donation, ISIS's obtains funding generated primarily from the territory that the group has controlled.¹⁵³ ISIS has obtained its revenues from three primary sources, and the diversity of these sources of income has been the group's key to success. ISIS has primarily generated its funding from looting banks, operating local oil infrastructure, and engaging in illicit taxation of goods, extortion, and human trafficking.¹⁵⁴ In mid-2016, ISIS controlled roughly 60 percent of

¹⁴⁷ Al Rawi, *Al Dawala Al Iraq Al Islamiya*, 89.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ "Irbid: Ba'eat Al hawa Tujen Muqateleen LiLatehaq betndeem Daesh Alrhabi," *Saraya News*, October 4, 2017, <http://www.sarayanews.com/article/450553>.

¹⁵¹ Al Rawi, *Al Dawala Al Iraq Al Islamiya*, 89.

¹⁵² Financial Action Task Force, "Financing of the Terrorist Organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)." *FATF*, Paris (2015), 10.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12–17.

the oil wells in Syria, and the oil revenues were estimated at 250 million USD to 350 million USD per year.¹⁵⁵ Second, ISIS has used kidnaping for ransom to generate revenues. The Financial Action Task Force has estimated that ISIS has raised revenue ranging from 20 million USD to 45 million USD through the kidnaping business.¹⁵⁶ Third, ISIS relies on external donations.¹⁵⁷ Although this source of revenue is minimal compared to the two sources mentioned previously, it helps to diversify the organization's financial portfolio. Early on, external donations were clearly coming from sources on the Arabian Peninsula, however, over time, these contributions have waned.¹⁵⁸

C. PROSPECTS FOR THE SURVIVAL OF ISIS'S IDEOLOGY

Whoever thinks that we fight to protect some land or some authority, or that victory is measured thereby, has strayed far from the truth. ... O America, would we be defeated and you be victorious if you were to take Mosul or Sirte or Raqqa? ... Certainly not! We would be defeated and you victorious only if you were able to remove the Quran from Muslims' hearts.

—Abu Muhammad al-Adnani¹⁵⁹

While the fight against ISIS seems to be on a good track, it remains highly questionable whether the end of ISIS will also be the end of the Western struggle against extremist ideology. Many subject matter experts argue that the territorial defeat of ISIS will not be a “true” defeat because the idea of the caliphate will exist long beyond the

¹⁵⁵ Colin P. Clarke et al., *Financial Futures of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017): 8, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/conf/proceedings/CF300/CF361/RAND_CF361.pdf.

¹⁵⁶ FATF, “Financing of the Terrorist Organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),” 18.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵⁸ David S. Cohen, “Attacking ISIL’s Financial Foundation,” *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 23, 2014, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2672.aspx>.

¹⁵⁹ Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, “And Those Who Lived [In Faith] Would Live upon Evidence,” *Jihadology*, May 21, 2016. <http://jihadology.net/2016/05/21/new-audio-message-from-the-islamic-states-shaykh-abu-mu%E1%B8%A5ammad-al-adnani-al-shami-and-those-who-lived-in-faith-would-live-upon-evidence/>

ISIS proto-state.¹⁶⁰ Simon Cottee asserts that “history will assuredly repudiate ISIS, just as it has decisively repudiated the utopian experiment of Soviet communism”; however, he adds that “today’s caliphate supporters can say: the caliphate never failed—it was never tried.”¹⁶¹ Colin Clarke, a political scientist at RAND Corporation, argues that “predictions of the group’s ultimate demise are premature.”¹⁶² Clarke asserts that “ISIS is being forced to change its strategy and tactics, but it has been proactively preparing for the next phase of the conflict.”¹⁶³

Having said that, there is no doubt that ISIS is constantly planning the post-caliphate phase; however, the structure and the way that the resilient group will appear in the future is still a mystery. The Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) of JAF—when asked about the future of ISIS—believes that what remains of ISIS “will build itself again, potentially with new names.”¹⁶⁴ However, the DMI asserts that the new factions will not meet the level of success that ISIS did.¹⁶⁵ It is very likely that ISIS operatives will spontaneously spread throughout the world, targeting the unstable regions such as Libya, Sinai in Egypt, and other countries in Africa in order to establish new areas of operation. This move might rebrand ISIS as an international jihadi movement—a worldwide terrorist network—similar to al-Qaeda. In fact, ISIS already has sympathizers in Afghanistan, and, besides their strongholds in Yemen, the group may try to expand its influence in Iran, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, India, and China. Parallel to that, due to the group’s expertise in digital technology, ISIS will continue to remain a threat in the online world, either by recruiting new members and motivating the existing ones, or by carrying out cyber-attacks.

¹⁶⁰ Simon Cottee, “ISIS Will Fail, but What About the Idea of ISIS?,” *The Atlantic* (March 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/03/idea-of-isis-will-outlive-caliphate/520224/>.

¹⁶¹ Cottee, “ISIS Will Fail, but What About the Idea of ISIS?”

¹⁶² Colin P. Clarke, “How ISIS Is Transforming: Why Predictions of Its Demise Are Premature,” *Foreign Affairs* (September 25, 2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2017-09-25/how-isis-transforming>.

¹⁶³ Clarke, “How ISIS Is Transforming.”

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Jordanian Directorate of Military Intelligence, August 2017.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Another potential course of action that ISIS might pursue is to scatter and ask its sympathizers to conduct “personal jihad” wherever they can. As Professor Glenn Robinson explains in “The Four Waves of Global Jihad, 1979–2017,” “personal jihad” is the fourth and the current wave of global jihad that began with the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, and focuses “on the idea of surviving to fight another day.”¹⁶⁶ This strategy, modeled by a jihadist writer known as Abu Musab al-Suri, focuses on conducting “lone wolf” attacks or remote operations in order to keep hope alive in the minds of Salafi-jihadists and, at the same time, impose a constant threat to their adversaries.¹⁶⁷ ISIS began applying this strategy especially after the group continued losing control of its territories in Iraq and Syria,¹⁶⁸ and it is very likely that ISIS will continue to encourage personal jihad in the future due to the practicality of this strategy. This course of action might be taken in conjunction with the first option discussed previously (i.e., rebrand as an international jihadist movement), or as a completely separate course of action.

A third likelihood is that ISIS might have reached its apex when the group established the proto-caliphate in 2014 and, thereafter, began degrading until the group will soon stop existing. In fact, the available polling data reveal that ISIS has made itself very unpopular in a very short period of time (see Figure 3).

¹⁶⁶ Robinson, “The Four Waves of Global Jihad, 1979–2017,” 82.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

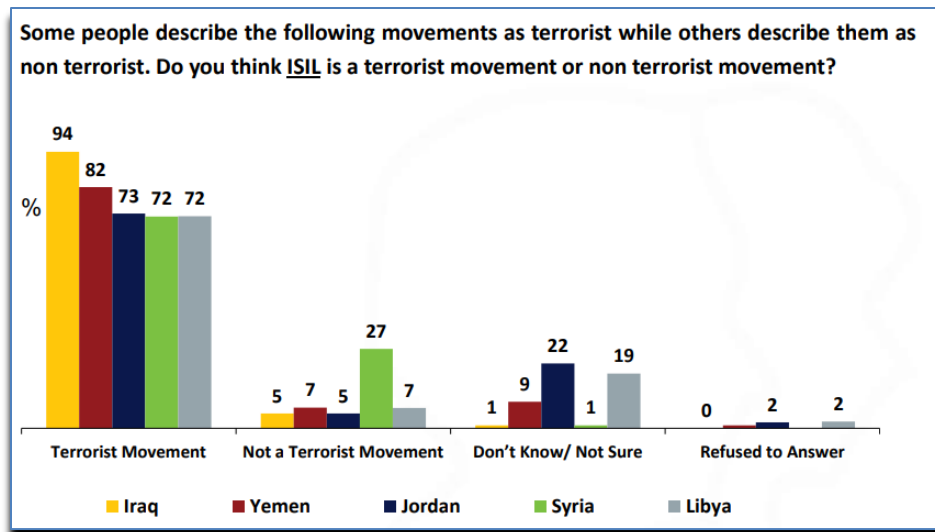


Figure 3. Level of ISIS popularity in the Muslim world (March 2015).¹⁶⁹

ISIS has made a large number of adversaries who are determined to defeat the group. Currently, ISIS is being fought by the Global Coalition’s 73 members, Kurdish forces, Shia militias (e.g., The Popular Mobilization Forces), the Syrian regime and its allies, Syrian rebel groups, and by other Salafi-jihadist groups, such as al-Nusra Front. It is likely that any remaining members of ISIS, after the group loses all its territories, will join other Salafi-jihadist groups.

¹⁶⁹ Munqith M. Dagher, *Public Opinion Towards Terrorist Organizations in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya: A Special Focus on Dai’sh in Iraq*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2015), <https://www.csis.org/events/arab-public-opinion-terrorism-ground-view-iraq-syria-jordan-yemen-and-libya>.

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V. CONCLUSIONS

A. THESIS PURPOSE

This thesis asked the following primary question: To what extent does ISIS mark a new stage in the development of Salafi-jihadism?

B. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on a thorough examination of primary and secondary sources, this study concludes that ISIS has introduced three major tenets to the Salafi-jihadism trend, of which only the second one will probably outlast ISIS proto-caliphate. First, sectarianism and the mass application of *takfir* to excommunicate Muslims have been at the core of ISIS's strategy. Although many Salafi-jihadist thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyyah have discussed the concept of *takfir* and argued to their fellow Muslims that fighting the false Muslims should be a priority over fighting the infidels, these ideologues have never supported the extermination of Shia in the way ISIS does. In contrast to ISIS leadership, most of the Salafi-jihadist leaders see the Shia as a group of misguided people who demonstrate *bid'ah* (innovation) rather than as a group of disbelievers who deserve to die.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the famous al-Zarqawi letter to Osama bin Laden best explains ISIS's sectarianism strategy,¹⁷¹ which is also the main divide that the group has with al-Qaeda. Nevertheless, it is most likely that ISIS's excess in the application of *takfir* will not be adopted by other Salafi-jihadist groups in the future because of the negative effects that this "experiment" had on ISIS.¹⁷²

Second, the establishment of the proto-caliphate by ISIS is a huge milestone in the history of Salafi-jihadism. While other Salafi-jihadist groups only allowed themselves to dream about the possibility of establishing a caliphate, ISIS made it happen. Even though

¹⁷⁰ Ayman al-Zawahiri, "Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi (English Translation)," *Combating Terrorist Center* (July 2005), <https://ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Zawahiris-Letter-to-Zarqawi-Translation.pdf>

¹⁷¹ See Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, "Letter to Osama bin Laden," U.S. Department of State, last modified February 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm>.

¹⁷² Interview with Jordanian Directorate of Military Intelligence, August 2017.

there is no doubt that ISIS's proto-caliphate will soon be ended, it is likely that the idea of this achievement will live forever, and, most importantly, it will serve as an encouragement for future generations of Salafi-jihadists' to undertake a similar endeavor.

ISIS's ingenuity to establish a territorial control has been particularly beneficial for the group in terms of propaganda and financial incomes. On the one hand, ISIS, through establishing the proto-caliphate, has reached the hearts and minds of many Salafi adherents, whose ultimate objective is to unite under one Muslim state and impose Sharia law. On the other hand, broad territorial control has enabled ISIS to exploit the financial resources of the areas it controls, thus, becoming "the wealthiest terrorist group in history."¹⁷³ In this regard, because of this high-payoff strategy, ISIS's idea about taking and controlling territory will most likely be incorporated by other Salafi-jihadist groups in the future.

Third, its robust propaganda campaign and professional use of media are additional new characteristics that distinguish ISIS from the other Salafi-jihadist groups. Lina Khatib asserts that ISIS propaganda "is both a tool of recruitment for the organization and a tool of war that is often used to supplement military action, and sometimes to compensate for it."¹⁷⁴ The horrific violence that ISIS released for the general public to see is just one example of the group's propaganda campaign. Moreover, although ISIS advocates for a return to the practices of the first three generations of Muslims, the group has made masterful use of the rapid evolution in communication, the Internet, and social media to spread its ideology and recruit new members. Its media wing distinguishes ISIS, both qualitatively and quantitatively in terms of the number of periodicals, media coverage, and high professionalism in this field, when compared to other terrorist organizations.¹⁷⁵ In fact, the group has used social media not only as a method of outreach, but also to cultivate a sense of legitimacy, which to some extent has given results.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Colin P. Clarke et al., *Financial Futures of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*.

¹⁷⁴ Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy," 11.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Jordanian Directorate of Military Intelligence, August 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Khatib, "The Islamic State's Strategy," 11.

Finally, this thesis concludes that ISIS marks a new stage in the development of Salafi-jihadism. Although ISIS has attempted to leave a permanent legacy (such as sectarianism), we believe the establishment of the Islamic caliphate is the only lasting impact that ISIS will have on Salafi-jihadist ideology. In fact, ISIS's ideology, which is radical even by Salafi-jihadist standards, has been rejected by many Salafi-jihadist leaders and scholars (e.g., bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, al-Maqdisi, etc.). Furthermore, even though ISIS has gained a terrible reputation for its brutalities, the group did succeed in establishing a proto-caliphate, and the memory of this success will undoubtedly outlast the proto-caliphate itself and will inspire future generations of Salafi-jihadists, whether they undertake the same endeavor, or pursue other alternatives.

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