



# THE WAR FOR SUPREMACY OF THE JIHADIST MOVEMENT

Intra-movement rivalry in jihadist media, 2011-2016

Master Thesis, 28-07-2017

MA History of Society, Global History and International Relations

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. D. Douwes

Second reader: Dr. G. Oonk

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Jasmin Seijbel

Student number: 385331

Jaseijbel@live.nl

## **Abstract**

Syria today is torn by a major civil war and does not yet have the prospect of peaceful solution. The Syrian civil war is an offshoot of the Arab Spring, the widespread protests which began in Tunisia in 2010 and spread across the region. The civil war in Syria proved to be the right circumstances for several jihadist movements, and they have been able to establish themselves in the country. This research focuses on intra-movement rivalry and framing between ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra during the ongoing civil war in Syria. The main research question is: What discourse have al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra adopted in their media expressions in order to legitimize jihadist differentiation and the use of violence, both symbolic and real, against their jihadist competitors? The main conclusion is that jihadist use a defectional discourse in order to legitimize jihadist differentiation and the use of violence against their jihadist competitors. ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra have adopted and developed a radical discourse, which I have called the defectional discourse. They make use of the notion of takfir to legitimize violence, claiming the 'other' is not a pious Muslim. This defectional discourse interacts with a political and religious salafist discourse, drawing on early Islamic history and early Islamic religious texts.

*Key Words: intra-movement rivalry, Syria, civil war, Iraq, framing, sectarianism, ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda, jihadism, salafism, discourse*

## Table of content

---

Abstract .....	1
<b>1. Introduction and methodology .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Introduction of the topic.....	4
1.2 Methodology and approach.....	5
1.2.1 Research question & sub-questions.....	5
1.2.2 Sources.....	6
1.2.3 Media analyses.....	7
1.2.4 Methodology.....	7
1.2.5 Relevance of the research .....	9
1.2.6 Transliteration.....	10
1.3 Theoretical concepts.....	10
1.4 Religious concepts .....	15
1.5 Online jihadi media.....	16
<b>2. The Roots of militant Islam.....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 Historiography.....	19
2.1.1 Islamic modernism .....	20
2.1.2 The Islamic tradition of Salafiyya and Wahhabism .....	23
2.1.3 Jihadist thinking.....	26
2.2 The ties that bind al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra .....	28
2.2.1 The establishment of al-Qaeda.....	28
2.2.2 The roots of ISIS .....	29
2.2.3 Jabhat al-Nusra joins the stage.....	31
2.2.4 Ideological differences, ISIS differentiation from al-Qaeda.....	33
<b>3. Syrian civil war.....</b>	<b>35</b>
3.1 Arab Uprisings and the civil war in Syria.....	35
3.2 Role of jihadists in the protest and violence.....	37
3.3 Mapping the situation in Syria.....	39
3.4 Regional context of the civil war.....	40
3.5 Sectarianism and the Syrian civil war .....	42
<b>4. Framing and Othering .....</b>	<b>44</b>
4.1 The media methods of ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Jabhat al-Nusra.....	44

4.2 Shaping identities .....	47
4.3 Othering enemies and the use of invectives .....	51
4.4 Case study: al-Urduni .....	56
4.5 Ideological differences .....	60
4.6 Conclusion .....	61
<b>5. Justifying violence and rebel infighting .....</b>	<b>62</b>
5.1 Friendly period .....	62
5.2 Rebel infighting during the Syrian civil war .....	64
5.3 The establishment of the Caliphate .....	67
5.4 Jabhat al-Nusra cuts ties with al-Qaeda .....	70
5.5 Conclusion .....	71
<b>6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Primary Sources .....	77
Secondary literature .....	79
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>82</b>
Appendix I: Glossary .....	82
Appendix II: The Ties that bind al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra .....	85
Appendix III: Time line .....	86

# I. Introduction and methodology

## I.1 Introduction of the topic

Until recently Syria was home to the largest, most complex and arguably most powerful collection of Sunni jihadist movements in modern history. During the civil war, Sunni jihadist could conquer big parts of the country, but currently they are crumbling, losing territory and power. Syria's unique status in Islamic prophecies, relating to its central role as the source of battles that will precede the end of the world, has been a major attraction for jihadist recruits from over 100 countries during the last couple of years.<sup>1</sup> The Syrian civil war has proven to be the perfect opportunity for jihadist movements to rise. The aim of my research is to study the intra-movement rivalry between these Sunni jihadist movements during the ongoing Syrian civil war. By analysing the discourse used by Sunni jihadist organisations in their media, framing their rivals, I will try to shed light on this complex contemporary history. My research will focus on al-Qaeda, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra. The Islamic State also known as ISIS, ISIL and Daesh<sup>2</sup> has adopted a radical discourse in which their enemies are generally depicted as enemies of Islam, legitimizing extreme and symbolic violence.<sup>3</sup> ISIS is known for its brutal beheadings and symbolic destruction of religious sites and shrines, which are deemed important for Shia Muslims, Christians or other religious groups. Jabhat al-Nusra, also known as the al-Nusra Front was until the summer of 2016 the al-Qaeda branch in Syria. They were renamed Jabhat Fath al-Sham,<sup>4</sup> and Jabhat Fath al-Sham were again renamed in December 2016, while merging with other jihadist factions in the region. Nowadays the organisation's name is Ha'yat Tahrir al-Sham. Al-Qaeda in Iraq, later Islamic State in Iraq became ISIS; because of these developments it becomes even more interesting to see how these movements position themselves in relation to 'the other'. The three groups have strong ideological and historical ties, especially al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra share commonalities. Jabhat al-Nusra, ISIS and al-Qaeda, equate rival groups as anti-Islamic to undermine the rivals' credibility. My research

---

<sup>1</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the evolution of an insurgency*. Oxford University Press, 2016:12.

<sup>2</sup> ISIS means Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham or Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. ISIL stands for Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Daesh is used to refer to ISIS in the Arab world and it is an abbreviation of the Arab words, al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi-l-Iraq wa-l-Sham.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of symbolic violence represents the way in which people play a role in their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of ideas and structures. In the case of the jihadist symbolic violence this for example is the destruction of a shrine or mosque. With extreme violence I mean for example the beheadings of rivals and suicide bombings employed by the jihadist organisations.

<sup>4</sup> In December 2016, Jabhat Fath al-Sham has merged with smaller Syrian factions and rebranded itself as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

focuses on Syria and to a lesser extent Iraq, in this area ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra operate on a large scale.

The first chapter is conceptual, in this chapter I will explain the aim and the relevance of the research I have conducted, as well as explain my methodology and introduce relevant theoretical concepts. I will also shortly introduce some, and elaborate on important religious concepts. To gain more insight into the contemporary outings of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra a historical framework is needed, therefore chapters two and three deal with the broader context of the research. The second chapter discusses the development of the jihadist ideology and the history of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Chapter three entails an overview of the Syrian civil war. Chapters four and five hold my own analyses. Finally, chapter six holds the conclusion of the research I have conducted. I have included appendices, a time line and a glossary.

## **1.2 Methodology and approach**

The following part of the thesis consists of the methodology and approach I used in order to conduct the research. I explain what kind of questions I will try to answer, the sources I use to do so and I will explain the conceptual framework. Also, I explain some important theoretical and religious concepts.

### **1.2.1 Research question & sub-questions**

The main research question is: What discourse have al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra adopted in their media expressions in order to legitimize jihadist differentiation and the use of violence, both symbolic and real, against their jihadist competitors?

In order to answer the main research question, I have come up with several sub-questions. I have split my research into two parts. The first part is divided into two chapters. Chapter two contains the broader context of my research and an introduction to the movements I will analyse. Questions answered in this part are; What are the origins of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra? How do these jihadist movements relate to the mainstream Sunni historical discourses? And what are the origins of the modern salafist movement? Chapter three entails the regional context and discusses the Syrian civil war. I will answer these questions concerning the historical and regional context in which these movements came into being and operate, with the use of secondary literature.

The second part contains the analyses and is also divided into two chapters. To

answer the questions in this part I have analysed primary sources. Questions I aim to answer in chapter four are; How does the media methodology of al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS work? In what way is intra-movement framing and rivalry visible in media production of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra? How do ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra frame the 'other'? How do ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra describe themselves? To what extent is contemporary Muslims extremism legitimized by the use of traditional Quranic teachings and prophetic traditions found in the hadith? In chapter 5 I will answer the questions; How does ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra justify violence against other Muslims and how do they use the notion of takfir? And what is the relation between the discourses and the situation on the ground; do shifting alliances, certain armed confrontations etcetera have impact on the discourse or the other way around? Chapter 6 is the conclusion.

### **1.2.2 Sources**

The main sources I will use are several online magazines published by Islamic jihadist groups like *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* both published by the Islamic State. *Al-Risalah* the online magazine published by Jabhat al-Nusra. I will also use *Inspire* and *Resurgence* both published by al-Qaeda. These magazines can be found online in PDF form. All these magazines are, amongst others, collected by Aaron Y. Zelin and posted on his website *jihadology*<sup>5</sup> a clearinghouse for jihadi primary source material. Also, videos and other propaganda material, produced by the jihadist movements can be found on this website. Statements made by either the leadership or spokesmen of al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra or ISIS, can be found on the website of *the global terrorism project*.<sup>6</sup> A project of the Political Science department of Haverford College in Pennsylvania. In order to conduct the research, I have read 14 *Dabiq*'s, 5 *Rumiyah*'s, 11 *Inspire* magazines, 2 *Resurgences*, 4 *al-Risalah*'s, several statements, and watched about a dozen videos. The magazines differ in size, some issues are more than 80 pages long, while others only count 40 pages. Statements in general are 2 to 3 pages long, but some are over 5 pages long. Also, the length of the videos differs greatly, while some are only 5 minutes, others are over half an hour. My thesis will be based on qualitative research, meaning my research will examine why and how, instead of what, where and when something happened.

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://jihadology.net/> (accessed on 16-01-2017).

<sup>6</sup> <https://ds-drupal.haverford.edu/aqsi/> (accessed on 23-03-2017).

### **1.2.3 Media analyses**

Usually, we think of the relationship between media and (social) movements as a transaction between two complex systems. Both try to accomplish a different goal.<sup>7</sup> In order to conduct the research I have defined the jihadist groups as social movements. Social movements want the media to communicate their messages to the public, while media look at these movements as potential sources of news. Movements need (mass) media to widely publicize their activities, this helps movements to mobilize support, achieve validation and attract potential allies and supporters. ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra do not use mainstream media to achieve this, they have developed and publish their own magazines.

We should keep in mind that traditional media analysing does not apply automatically to my research. Today the internet serves as 'printed press' for many movements. ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra use the internet to publish statements, magazines, videos etcetera, this does not mean it acts as original printed press, because web content can be spread fast and easily. The internet provides movements with an outlet for their visions, ambitions and intentions. Visitors to the web are provided with information and analysis that is not found in mainstream media.<sup>8</sup> I also need to keep in mind that anyone can post anything on the internet. Therefore, I need to evaluate all the information based on appropriateness for my specific subject. I need to make sure that the sources are of reliable quality and I need to check the identity of the author.<sup>9</sup> Also, I need to be aware of the intended reader. The intended or implied reader is a function of the message or text. With this I mean that a text written for teenage girls is differently written from a text for jihadist. The intended reader is not fixed in the text, but exists in the imagination of the author.

### **1.2.4 Methodology**

To answer my central question I will use the method of discourse analysis as well as the concept of framing. Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to analyse written, vocal or sine language. Through close reading of magazines published by al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra and analysing their use of other media I will try to understand their way of thinking. Close reading entails a careful and sustained interpretation of a text or a passage of

---

<sup>7</sup> Croteau, David, and William Hoynes. *Media/society: Industries, images, and audiences*. Sage Publications, 2013 :241-243.

<sup>8</sup> Croteau et al., *Media/society: Industries*: 241-243.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Alastair G. "Testing the surf: Criteria for evaluating internet information resources." *Public-Access Computer Systems Review* 8, no. 3 (1997): 5-23.



a text. My research is both descriptive and comparative. In order to answer my research questions, I will analyse the discourses used by the three groups and throughout the analyses I will compare them with each other. I will try to shed light on the different forms of framing used by the groups and compare their methods with one another. Framing comprises a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies, organize, perceive and communicate about something in the world. Framing involves a social construction of a social phenomenon. Media, politicians, social and political movements all frame in a certain way.<sup>10</sup> I will elaborate more on framing and intra-movement framing later in this chapter.

Since I want to discover the discourse adopted by al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra in their media expression in order to legitimize differentiation and the use of violence, both symbolic and real against their jihadist competitors, I will use an analytical methodology or narrative analysis developed by Karin Willemse, which she calls 'con/text analysis against the grain'. According to Willemse this method allows for discovering multi-layeredness within texts.<sup>11</sup> She explains in her work that 'reading against the grain is a tool for identifying alternative voices, identities, and perspectives in texts, and thus alternative subject positions within the dominant discourse. Con/text analysis is a tool that allows for more complexity and multiplicity.'<sup>12</sup> It is important to analyse the text in relation to its context, this helps to understand the complex ways in which people deal with and negotiate dominant discourse. The general view behind this kind of analysis is, that: 'People continuously reflect on dominant discourses even when referring to common sense knowledge, whereby these discourses are not only acknowledged, but often negotiated and even adjusted.'<sup>13</sup> By using this method I will be able to find for example sudden turns and silences in texts. I will use the following aspects of this methodology in my analysis, intertextuality, focalisation, and argumentation. These form the analytical tools for the analysis of these texts. Building blocks of dominant (moral) discourse is called intertextuality. Focalisation is the subject narrating a position within a narrative. While locating shifts of focalisation in the texts you can determine how a certain text is in fact an assembly of multiple texts and multiple viewpoints. This will help find discourses and sub-discourses that are at work in a text. Argumentation is

---

<sup>10</sup> Scheufele, Dietram A. "Framing as a theory of media effects." *Journal of communication* 49, no. 1 (1999): 103-122.

<sup>11</sup> Willemse, K., *One Foot in Heaven, Narratives on Gender and Islam in Darfur, West-Sudan* (Leiden: Brill 2001) 20-33.

<sup>12</sup> Willemse, *One Foot in Heaven*, 20-33

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

the negotiation of the subject's position as allotted by the dominant discourse.

Argumentation can stretch the boundaries of the dominant discourse and finding alternative (sub) discourses and subject positions in a text.

### **1.2.5 Relevance of the research**

The exceptional growth of jihadist militancy is a major source of concern and probably will be in the future. Its emergence, expansion and consolidation is therefore a subject that must be better understood. My research aims to contribute to the better understanding of the broader context. My research concerns contemporary history. ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra are currently active in Syria and Iraq. My analysis extends from 2011, from the outbreak of the Civil War in Syria, until December 2016, when Jabhat Fath al-Sham (Jabhat al-Nusra) merged with different smaller factions and renamed again. The historical militant background can be traced back to 1960's. I also describe the establishment of al-Qaeda in the 1970's and the history of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Intra-movement rivalry is currently very important in the Middle Eastern conflict. Several books are written on al-Qaeda and Muslim extremism, both academic and journalistic. Much has been written about the phenomenon that is ISIS and its (supposedly) slick media production, its brutal levels of violence and its apocalyptic rhetoric. Jabhat al-Nusra has not been researched as extensively as the other two. Scholars have analysed media use of Islamic jihadist groups, but not much has been written on how these groups frame each other and on intra-movement rivalry between these three movements. I aim to find out how these groups legitimize themselves in relation to and by contrasting with 'the other'.

Studying the actions of organizations like ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda turns up valuable information concerning the organisation's goals and strategies. For example; the manner of a group's communication action affords information that enables us to add to and deepen our knowledge on issues as the group's organisational strength, ideology, the skill level of its members and capacities.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Torres Soriano, Manuel R. "The road to media Jihad: The propaganda actions of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 1 (2010): 72-88.

### **1.2.6 Transliteration**

I have transliterated names and concepts derived from the Arabic language as often used in standard English literature. This is a simplified version of the transliteration used in most scientific publications, which includes a variety of additional symbols and signs. Arabic words in unabridged English dictionaries are not italicised. Other Arabic words are italicised on in the first instance. When I quote passages from primary sources you may find different spelling. For example, *mujahidin* is often spelled as *mujahedeen*, or for that matter as *mudjahideen*, either with or without capital.

### **1.3 Theoretical concepts**

The research revolves around several theoretical concepts. Framing is one of the most important theoretical concepts within my research. According to D.A. Scheufele framing is a concept characterized by empirical vagueness. Scheufele states that lack of a commonly shared theoretical model underlying framing causes this vagueness.<sup>15</sup> It is important to define what is meant by the concept of framing, since the concepts plays such a big role in my research. Framing is a theoretical concept used in the media, the social sciences, by people etcetera. Framing comprises a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives on how individuals, groups, and societies, organize, perceive and communicate about something in the world. Framing is also a means to analyse, therefore, it also has a methodological dimension. Framing involves a social construction of a social phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> Media, politicians, social and political movements, they all frame in a certain way. Islamic jihadist organisations often develop and adopt a radical discourse in which they frame their enemies as enemies of Islam, legitimizing violence. For terrorist movements, the process of framing is an important tool to legitimize their ideology and actions like suicide bombings, beheadings of people or annexing territory.

Rivalry between Islamic terrorist groups plays a significant role in the current Middle Eastern problems. Therefore, intra-movement framing contests are getting more important. The integrity and assertion of authority by radical Muslim groupings like ISIS are central to the process of framing. In order to create leadership credibility, one very important component is discrediting rivalling groups. Islamic terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS frame each other. They link the other group with negativity to undermine the rivals'

---

<sup>15</sup> Scheufele, Dietram A. "Framing as a theory of media effects." 103-122.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.103-122.

credibility.

A movement - a group, a faction or a clique, a network cluster, sub-movement, organization – asserts its authority to speak on behalf of an issue or constituency by emphasizing the perceived knowledge, character and logic of its popular intellectuals while attacking those of rivals. According to Quintan Wiktorowicz four framing strategies are relevant to the credibility of popular intellectuals can be identified: vilification – demonizing competing popular intellectuals; exaltation – praising ingroup popular intellectuals; credentialing – emphasizing the expertise of in-group intellectuals; and decredentialing-raising questions about the expertise of rivals.<sup>17</sup>

But what is intra-movement framing? Social movements are not monolithic entities. According to Mayer and McCarthy they are represented by a multitude of actors with often competing tactics, strategies, and goals. Whether you study religious movements, revolutionary movements or social reform movements, you will always find a variety of social movement organizations or groups linked to each other, linked to segments of supporting constituencies, competing among themselves for resources and (symbolic) leadership, sharing facilities and resources at other times, developing stable and differentiated unions, occasionally merging into ad hoc coalitions, and occasionally engaging in an all-out war against each other.<sup>18</sup> In the case of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, the fragmentation of sacred authority in Islam means that these movements pay special attention to credibility. The complexity of religious debates over religious authority, permissibility of violence etcetera places religion at the heart of context over meaning, since they are responsible for interpreting Islam.

Another important concept is othering. Social identity is partly formed by exclusion. We define ourselves not only by what we are, but also by what we are not.<sup>19</sup> The concept othering was first introduced as a systematic theoretical concept by Spivak in 1985. The concept draws upon the understanding of the self which is a generalization of Hegel's master-slave dialectic as developed in his work *Phanomenologie des Geistes*. According to Sune Qvortrup Jensen, Hegel is often read as a theory of self and other in which the

---

<sup>17</sup> Wiktorowicz, Quintan. "Framing jihad: Intramovement framing contests and al-Qaeda's struggle for sacred authority." *International Review of Social History* 49, no. S12 (2004): 159-177.

<sup>18</sup> Zald, Mayer, and Robert Ash Garner. "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay, and Change. In Mayer Zald and John D. McCarthy (Eds.), *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*, (pp. 121-41). New Brunswick." (1987): 121-141.

<sup>19</sup> Tosh, John, and Sean Lang. *The pursuit of history: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history*. Pearson Education, 2010: 282-283.

juxtaposition towards the other constitutes the self.<sup>20</sup> According to Hanna Adoni and Sherrill Mane we shape images of others because of our own experiences, our social environment and influence of third parties, as for example the media. Media's influence on imaging is sizeable. Media influences people's minds and the way people think about certain things. Media writes or shows us items about topics they think their audiences considers important, this means there is some form of interaction between the media and the consumers of media.<sup>21</sup> Othering is an important part of shaping these images and imaging. John Tosh states that every form of social identity is partly shaped by exclusion. He means that people and groups are shaped both by what they are and what they are not. Often the negative aspects of the 'other' are emphasized.<sup>22</sup> Jean-François Stazak defines otherness as follows: 'Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("us, the self") constructs one or many dominated out-groups ("them, other") by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination.'<sup>23</sup> Othering is the process which leads to otherness.

A concept which has a close relation to othering is identity. Identity can be defined both as: the fact of being who or what a person or thing is: *he knows the identity of the bombers* and the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is: *he wanted to develop a more distinctive Islamic identity*. So identity is both something that is a given, but you can also develop your own identity or a group's identity. According to Fischer-Rosenthal it is necessary for people to refer to oneself, the use of 'I'. However, there must be an oppositional word to give meaning: 'you'. With 'I' there is 'you' and with 'us' there is 'them'. According to Fischer-Rosenthal identity is a reaction to the necessity of positioning oneself in order to make the essence of that particular thing recognisable and distinguishable.<sup>24</sup>

Identity relates to identity politics. The concept has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the common experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. These social groups typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Identity politics refers to political positions based on the interest and perspectives of social groups with which people identify.

---

<sup>20</sup> Jensen, Sune Qvortrup. "Othering, identity formation and agency." *Qualitative studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 63-78.

<sup>21</sup> Adoni, Hanna, and Sherrill Mane. "Media and the social construction of reality: Toward an integration of theory and research." *Communication research* 11, no. 3 (1984): 323-340.

<sup>22</sup> Tosh et al., *The pursuit of history*. 282-283.

<sup>23</sup> Stazak, Jean-François. 'Otherness/Othering' in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Elsevier 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Fischer-Rosenthal, Wolfram. "The problem with identity: Biography as solution to some (post)-modernist dilemmas." *Comenius* 15, no. 3 (1995): 250-265.

This includes ways in which people's politics is shaped by aspects of their identity through social organizations and movements. These organisations can be based on for example culture, education, gender, race or religion. The term identity politics was coined during the Civil Rights Era.<sup>25</sup> According to Lui and Hilton we need a better understanding of the role of representations of a group's history play in identification with a group.<sup>26</sup> Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra's histories are linked as I will explain in chapter two, therefore the work of Lui and Hilton is relevant. They state that groups make ingroup-serving attribution concerning history. History provides us with narratives that can tell us who we are. A group's representation of its own history will entail its sense of what the group was, is and what the group ought to be, thus its history is central to defining the social identity of peoples, especially in how they relate to other peoples. History defines a trajectory which helps us construct the essence of a group's identity, and how it relates to others.<sup>27</sup>

The last theoretical concept I will introduce is sectarianism. Sectarianism is a term often applied to describe religious and political relations in the Middle East. Ussama Makdisi states that sectarianism is an expression of modernity.<sup>28</sup> Its origins lie in the intersection of European colonialism in the nineteenth century and modernization of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup> Sectarianism was first applied to the civil conflict in Ireland. Makdisi uses the concept in the Middle Eastern context. He argues that Middle Eastern sectarianism finds its roots in Ottoman Lebanon. The local Lebanese society was opened to Ottoman and European discourses of reform, this made religion the site of a colonial encounter between the Christian West and the Islamic Ottoman Empire. This encounter changed the meaning of religion in the Lebanese society because it emphasized sectarian identity as the only validation of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims.<sup>30</sup> Sectarianism can be defined as the division between different groups, through for example religion, ethnicity or culture. This often leads to hatred, discrimination and violence. There are various definitions of sectarianism. Sectarianism as commonly used in scholarly literature covers a broad range of social and political arrangements that intersect with other

---

<sup>25</sup> Heyes, Cressida, "Identity Politics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

<sup>26</sup> Liu, James H., and Denis J. Hilton. "How the past weighs on the present: Social representations of history and their role in identity politics." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 44, no. 4 (2005): 537-556.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 537-556.

<sup>28</sup> Makdisi, Ussama. *The culture of sectarianism: community, history, and violence in nineteenth-century Ottoman Lebanon*. Univ of California Press, 2000: 2-4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* 2-4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 2-4.

designations such as religious, communal, ethnic, nationalist, partisan, clannish and familial. According to Dick Douwes sectarianism has proven to be less suitable to explain societal and political patterns and processes, but on the other hand no alternative seems to be available that covers the complex interplay between religion and politics.<sup>31</sup> Sectarianism refers to discrimination or hatred resulting from perceived differences between groups or subdivisions within a group, and is often associated with violence. My research focuses solely on Sunni Muslim jihadism and therefore I focus on differences between subdivisions within a group (the Sunni Muslim jihadist discourse). It is important to emphasize that sectarianism is not a homogenous phenomenon. Raymond Hinnebusch explains that sectarianism is an identity marker combined with norms, the balance between these components makes for differences in intensity, producing at least three major variants of sectarianism - banal, instrumentalized and militant.<sup>32</sup> Banal sectarianism is a relatively un-politicized identity marker in multi-sectarian societies. This type of sectarianism operates on the local level, with few national implications, therefore banal sectarianism is compatible with sectarian co-existence and with state and supra-state identities. Instrumentalized sectarianism is the politicization of sectarian differences for instrumental ends: political entrepreneurs are incentivized to instrumentalize sectarianism to mobilize sects in intra-state competition over resources and individuals to use sectarianism to gain access to clientele networks. Militant sectarianism has an intense normative content, seeks to impose (universalize), if need be by force, a one true interpretation of religion in the public sphere; it demonizes those who do not comply as infidels and often embraces martyrdom for the cause. Militant sectarianism plays a crucial role in my research, since it seeks to impose an absolute interpretation of religion upon the public arena. Hinnebusch states militant sectarianism in the Middle Eastern context is jihadism. In my thesis therefore I will use Hinnebusch's definition of militant sectarianism: 'Militant sectarianism – in the Muslim world jihadism – has an intense normative content, seeks to impose (universalize), if need be by force, a one true interpretation of religion – usually a fundamentalist one – in the public sphere; it demonizes those who do not comply as infidels and often embraces martyrdom for the cause'.<sup>33</sup> The main indicator of militant sectarianism in the jihadist context is the denunciation of the other as an unbeliever. It critiques all people who do not satisfy as a group member therefore

---

<sup>31</sup> Douwes, Dick. Religion and citizenship in Lebanon and Syria (working paper).

<sup>32</sup> Hinnebusch, Raymond. 'The Sectarian Revolution in the Middle East.' *Revolutions: global trends and regional issues* (2016): 122-125.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 122-125.

becoming the 'other'. Unlike the two other forms whereby a pact can be negotiated, the public religious view that is often strived for within militant sectarianism cannot be compromised.<sup>34</sup> Hinnebusch adds that the militant form of sectarianism flourishes in conditions of social insecurity and power struggles. It is fostered in areas where states fail or even civil wars can be endorsed across borders by trans-state movements and discourses.<sup>35</sup>

#### **I.4 Religious concepts**

Religious concepts play a significant role in the jihadist discourse. These concepts are used in religious and jihadist discourse, not in academic discourse. I will use and refer to more religious concepts than I discuss in this part, these concepts can be found in the glossary and are explained in footnotes.

Jihad has many definitions, varying from a personal inner battle on how to live your life as a good Muslim to a holy (defensive) war when the collective Islamic community (*umma*<sup>36</sup>) is being attacked.<sup>37</sup> I will briefly give some examples of the different forms of jihad. There is the inner battle against the evil within yourself *jihad al-nafs* and against the devil inside you *jihad al-Shaytan*. The educational or preaching form of jihad is *jihad al-tarbiya*. Words can spread Islam, *jihad al-lisan* or it can be spread by pen which is named *jihad al-qalam*. We call the spread of Islam by sword *jihad bi'l-sayf*.<sup>38</sup> Among contemporary militant jihadists jihad means that believers have the obligation to fight unbelievers and apostasy in society and even outside of society.<sup>39</sup> Lucas Catherine and Kareem el Hidjaazi explain that militant jihadists link the concept of jihad inextricably to colonialism.<sup>40</sup> In the historiography it will become clear why these concepts can be linked. They also argue that jihad is a buzzword and rests on a bad translation. A Muslim who is practicing jihad should be called mujahid, not jihadist.<sup>41</sup> The exact meaning of jihad depends on the context. Jihad is the only legal warfare in Islam, carefully controlled by Islamic law. To justify jihad against other Muslims, extremist brand them unbelievers for their neglect in adhering to and or enforcing a particular

---

<sup>34</sup> Hinnebusch, Raymond. 'The Sectarian Revolution in the Middle East.': 122-125.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 122-125.

<sup>36</sup> Umma: the Islamic umma originally described Muhammad's community. It is commonly used as a term to describe the collective community of Islam.

<sup>37</sup> Douwes, Dick. *De Islam, een kleine geschiedenis*. Prometheus, 2016: 37.

<sup>38</sup> Catherine, Lucas and Kareem el Hidjaazi. *Jihad en Kolonialisme*. Epo uitgeverij 2015: 11.

<sup>39</sup> Douwes, *De Islam*: 37.

<sup>40</sup> Catherine et al., *Jihad en Kolonialisme*: 11.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 11.



interpretation of Islam.<sup>42</sup> Jihad in this modern sense is more ideological; jihadist believe that the Islamic world is in a crisis. This crisis needs to be ended by eliminating all Western influence in the Muslim World; the reconquest of the Islamic World and the establishment of a (global) caliphate with the introduction of Sharia. This type of jihad is only practiced by a small minority of extremist Muslims and most believers are more moderate and disapprove of this ideology. In this thesis, when referred to jihad, I refer to the more modern neologism of the word jihad, the violent jihad as used by militant extremists.

*Takfir* refers to the practice of excommunication. In some specific cases it is possible for Muslims to declare someone an unbeliever or infidel. For example, when someone specifically says there is no God or when someone states that there have been more prophets after Mohammed, who is considered to have been the Seal of Prophets, being the last. Declaring someone an unbeliever or infidel is named *takfir* in Islam.<sup>43</sup> Some modern radical movements like al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra use a broader definition of *takfir* to legitimize their extreme violence. Therefore these organisations are sometimes called *takfiris*. *Takfir* is the pronouncement that someone is an unbeliever, a *kafir*, and therefore no longer a Muslim. In the modern era *takfir* is used for sanctioning violence against leaders of Islamic states who are perceived as inadequate religious, in other words they are not religious enough. Nowadays *takfir* has become a central to the ideology of militant jihadist groups.<sup>44</sup>

### **1.5 Online jihadi media**

Aaron Y. Zelin has conceptualized online jihadi media. He states that there have been four different phases of jihadi media since 1984.<sup>45</sup> According to Zelin, there has been a shift in the ownership of production and consumption of jihadi media. During the mid-1990's until early 2000, jihadi groups had the monopoly on producing and disseminating jihadi material online. The onset of forums changed the playing field. Forums allowed administrators, who relate to jihadi organizations, to have influence on the content of the forums by deleting threads or

---

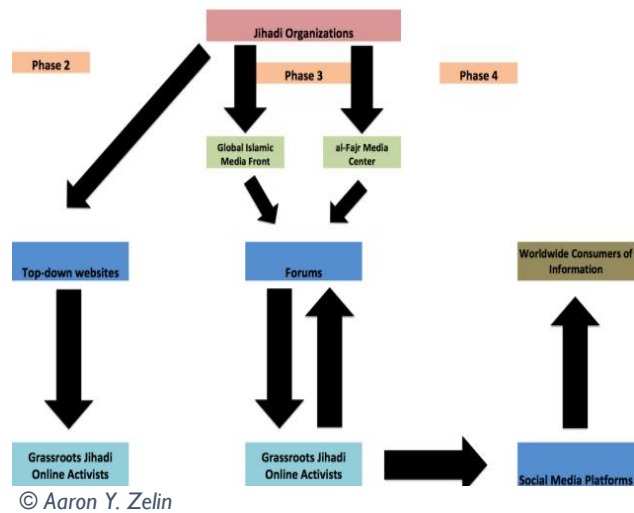
<sup>42</sup> 'Jihad.' In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1199> (accessed 27-01-2017).

<sup>43</sup> Douwes, *De Islam*: 24.

<sup>44</sup> 'Takfir' In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2319> (accessed 27-01-2017).

<sup>45</sup> Zelin, Y. Aaron, 'Inchoate Conceptualization of Jihadi Media' 31-5-2001: <https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2011/05/31/inchoate-conceptualization-of-jihadi-media/>

banning members. Individuals who are not connected directly with al-Qaeda or other organizations could now not only consume what was posted, but also comment on those threads or post their own content. The most recent developments and the creation of social media platforms as Twitter, Facebook, etc. completely upended the old control over the production of online jihadi media, as a



result the ideology of global jihadism is no longer an elitist clique. Zelin argues that it does not matter if al-Qaeda is officially on social media, it has a whole army of online media entrepreneurs that spread its message. The forums are the hub where the organization meets the grassroots, which is why although social media platforms are the nodes that bring the global jihadi message to non-global jihadists the forums will not become obsolete. It is a place where the global jihad is headquartered online. The social media platforms are where the product or ideas are sold. It has opened a whole new recruiting ground that exposes the global jihadi message to anyone, whereas before, one had to knowingly want to be exposed to the global jihadi movement by going to the forums. These individual online entrepreneurs can replicate their message multiple times. We may be in a golden age of online dawa<sup>46</sup> to the global jihadi social movement.<sup>47</sup> The jihadist use very modern technology to propagate salafism. As I will explain in chapter two, the salafist ideology aims at ‘purifying’ Islam, from all foreign and modern influence. Salafists re-enact the early Islamic period, where there was no such thing as internet or social media. This makes the internet and media usage of these groups interesting and you could say paradoxical.

This research focuses primarily on media where the jihadist organisation has a complete monopoly on the content, media which is published by the organisations themselves. The magazines that are central are published, written, edited and designed by al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra or ISIS. The aim is to find out how al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra frame each other, the research will not be equally representing these organisations, simply because ISIS has published more than al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra. It would not be a

<sup>46</sup> Dawa means proselytizing, missionary work. Both to non-Muslims and to Muslims who are regarded as having fallen from the path of ‘true’ Islam.

<sup>47</sup>Zelin, Y. Aaron, ‘Inchoate Conceptualization of Jihadi Media’.

representation of the truth if I were to use an equal number of sources from each organization.

Studying the propaganda actions and media usage of a terrorist organisation can yield valuable information concerning the organization's goals and strategies. Therefore, it is very useful to try and understand how these organisations make use of media. It is a useful approach also in terms of helping understand many other, less obvious phenomena. For example; the manner of a group's communications action affords information that enables us to add to and deepen knowledge on issues as diverse as the group's organisational strength, capacities, resources and the skill level of its members.

## 2. The Roots of militant Islam

In this part I will discuss the main notions of the salafi jihadist ideology and its main thinkers. I will discuss important thinkers as al-Wahhab, al-Afhgani, Qutb and others. Then I will address the four aspects of jihadism, jihad, *jahiliyya*, *hijra* and salafism. Finally, I will analyse the establishment of ISIS and its ideological differences and separation from al-Qaeda. The questions I answer in this chapter are: What are the origins of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra? How do these jihadists movements relate to the mainstream Sunni discourses? And what are the origins of the salafist movement?

### 2.1 Historiography

Mahmood Mamdani explains in his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* that before modern political Islam appeared, Islamic reformers had felt that colonialism was the key challenge facing contemporary Muslims.<sup>48</sup> Roxanne L. Euben agrees with this and states that Islamic political thought is complex and variegated, split with disagreements, contradictions, and discontinuities that cannot be easily summarized.<sup>49</sup> She explains that the modern period for the Islamic umma<sup>50</sup> is influenced by the spread of European power in the Middle East. What according the Euben most distinguishes Islamic thinkers of the eighteenth to the twenty-first century from previous generations is the extent to which they are engaged in two dialogues, one across history and one across culture. Muslim political theorists were and are engaged in a series of debates within Islamic tradition about the nature of political authority. According to Euben they struggled with the relationship between reason and revealed knowledge. Islamic scholars thought about the proper way to be a Muslim. During and after the confrontation with European empires, these thinkers also had to engage with the West's claim to embody modernity. With the arrival of the Europeans, Euben explains, the challenge became immediate and concrete.<sup>51</sup> Islam became more political during the modern times. Muslims were cautious for the Europeans, they felt that new developments in their societies threatened the moral, cultural and religious welfare of the umma.<sup>52</sup> According to Dick

---

<sup>48</sup> Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the roots of terror*. Harmony, 2005: 45-46.

<sup>49</sup> Euben, Roxanne L. 'Modern and Contemporary Islamic Political Theory'. *The Oxford handbook of political theory*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2008: 297-311.

<sup>50</sup> Umma: the Islamic umma originally described Muhammad's community. It is commonly used as a term to describe the collective community of Islamic Peoples.

<sup>51</sup> Euben, 'Modern and Contemporary Islamic Political Theory': 297-311.

<sup>52</sup> Armstrong, Karen. *Islam: geschiedenis van een wereldgodsdienst*. De Bezige Bij, 2009: 152.

Douwes modern discussions in the Islamic world about the relation between religion and state developed as a response to the European economic and political dominance in the Middle East and Asia. Political Islam, therefore is also a colonial product.<sup>53</sup>

### 2.1.1 Islamic modernism

Islamic modernism refers to a primarily nineteenth century stream of thought that took shape during the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the expansion of European political and economic power. While European countries needed centuries to become modern, inhabitants of the colonized areas were forced to modernize rapidly.<sup>54</sup> These modernizing attempts did find some resistance. The sense of threat from the outside changed the debates which had occupied Muslim thinkers in prior centuries. One question in particular was asked frequently among Muslim political thinkers: ‘to what extent can Islam be considered modern?’<sup>55</sup> Islamic thinkers posited a golden age in the earliest generations in Islamic History. They sought to go back to those foundations of Islam to protect their culture against the intrusion of Western colonialism. Islamic modernist scholars as Muhammad Abduh and Jamal tried to tackle this challenge by redefining and portraying Islam as the ‘rational religion’, and characterizing science and modernity as universal rather than western. Euben explains that al-Afghani and Abduh both thought that scientific discoveries are objectively true and essential to strengthen the Islamic community and the survival of the Islamic community. They witnessed the ways in which rationalism, science, and philosophy often assisted Western arguments and demonstrated Muslim backwardness and justifying European political, cultural and economic dominance. The Islamic scholars challenged this idea and drew upon Islamic history to show that science is as much Islamic as it is European. They rejected the division of the world into Islamic science and European science. Al-Afghani: “science is a noble thing that has no connection with any nation, everything that is known is known by science, and every nation that becomes renowned becomes renowned through science. Men must be related to science, not science to men” (al-Afghani 1968).<sup>56</sup> According to Mamdani, al-Afghani highlighted modernity’s contradictory impact. His religious vision came to be informed by a very modern dilemma. Muslims needed modern science, which they would have to learn from the Westerners they opposed. On the other hand this

---

<sup>53</sup> Douwes, *De Islam*: 37.

<sup>54</sup> Armstrong, Karen. *Islam*: 219.

<sup>55</sup> Euben, ‘Modern and Contemporary Islamic Political Theory’: 297-311.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 297-311.

necessity was proof of the inferiority and decadence.<sup>57</sup>

Al-Afghani and Abduh thought that the survival of the Muslim umma and the thoughts on which it is founded depended on the compatibility of Islam and reason. They stated that those who saw essential enmity between Islam and critical reason from the history of Islamic practice have in fact mistaken a debased Islam for the true faith. The Prophet Mohamed and the Quran encourage the pursuit of knowledge. The Prophet emphasized the necessity to pursue knowledge of the material world as necessary for survival and well-being of the umma. Al-Afghani and 'Abduh's rereading of the authentic Islam as rational must be understood within a long tradition of *tajdid* (Renewal) and *islah*<sup>58</sup> (Revival) in Islamic history, one that has been ongoing from the ninth century to the present.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand al-Afghani can be seen as a rational modernist, but on the other hand he also was a precursor of salafism, because he tried to resist Western power by drawing on early Islam.

For some Islamic scholars and thinkers modernist attempts to render Islam compatible with a set of Western achievements and standards are cause and consequence of Islam's loss of power. Sayyid Qutb saw these arguments as no more than defensive attempts to justify the relevance of Islam given the obscurantism of Muslim scholars on the one hand and attacks from Western and Eastern secularists on the other. Implicit in such apologetics, Qutb argues, is that Islam is on trial because it is somehow in need of justification. According to the Iranian religious thinker Khomeini, such 'xenomaniacs' have been seduced by the technological and material achievements of the West. By betraying Islam from within, they deepen and intensify the obedience of Islam to Western power.<sup>60</sup> Almost all Sunni jihadist fundamentalism is based on Sayyid Qutb's thinking.<sup>61</sup> Therefore his thinking is important since ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra claim to be Sunni Muslim movements.

Through the eyes of Khomeini and Qutb modernity as defined and universalized by Western culture and power is a global pathology. It is a 'disease' that weakened the true

---

<sup>57</sup> Mamdani, *Good Muslim, bad Muslim*: 45-46.

<sup>58</sup> Renewal and revival or reform as defined in the Oxford Islamic Studies Online: "The Arabic terms *ihya* (revival) and *tajdid* (renewal) are typically used in the context of modern Islamic movements, although they have premodern roots. Premodern renewal was usually associated with a designated renewer (*mujaddid*) who, according to hadith, would come at the beginning of each century to renew Muslim faith and practice. The modern call for revival and renewal derives from perceptions of backwardness and stagnation in Muslim societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Islamic thinkers encourage a renewed commitment to Islamic values and practice as the means to achieve development and progress." 'Revival and Renewal.' In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2009> (accessed 27-01-2017).

<sup>59</sup> Euben, 'Modern and Contemporary Islamic Political Theory'. 297-311.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 297-311.

<sup>61</sup> Armstrong, Karen. *Islam*: 252.

essence of Islam and destroyed Muslims' capacity to recognise their illness. Central to this pathology is modern rationalism, where reason not only decides the methods by which humans can know the world, but also defines what is valuable and worth knowing in terms of what is knowable to humans. Afghani took rationalism as a given, to which Muslims needed to adjust themselves. Islamist thinkers on the other hand emphasized the danger rationalism posed to revealed truths and the survival of the umma built upon them.<sup>62</sup> For both Khomeini and Qutb, the legitimate exercise of political power depends always upon the ruler's commitment to upholding the sharia, Islamic Law.<sup>63</sup> According to Qutb, Nasser the president of Egypt, was not a true Muslim. His words and deeds showed that he was an infidel and according to Qutb, Muslims had the obligation to overthrow such a government.<sup>64</sup> The main difference between Khomeini and Qutb is that Khomeini is a Shiite Islamic scholar and Qutb as one of the leading members of the Muslim brotherhood is a Sunni Muslim activist. Since Qutb inspired Sunni jihadists I will explain his ideology more thorough in the following paragraphs.

Cleveland and Bunton describe in their book *A History of the Modern Middle East* the revival of Islam during the 1970s and 1980s. They describe this period as the starting point of religious fundamentalism. The authors state that it is hard to pinpoint the rise of Islamic fundamentalism to one single event or even a country or date. Political Islam developed in different ways in different countries.<sup>65</sup> The newly developing ideas often were influenced by ideologies and cultures can be traced back to the West. Starting in the 1970s, Islam became increasingly used as a political tool. Inspiration was often found in the thought and writings of Sayyid Qutb. Qutb transformed from a secular literary figure to an independent Islamist.<sup>66</sup> Qutb stated that the primary function of government was to ensure the reinforcement of the law of God. If the government failed to do so, they were no longer Islamic and the true Muslims were thereby legitimized to destroy them by whatever means in order to restore the sharia. Qutb was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. His execution was commissioned by Nasser<sup>67</sup> in 1966. Cleveland and Bunton distinguish the spread of Qutb's ideas as the onset of the spread of political Islam throughout the Middle East.<sup>68</sup> Qutb insisted

---

<sup>62</sup> Euben, 'Modern and Contemporary Islamic Political Theory'. 297-311.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 297-311.

<sup>64</sup> Armstrong, Karen. *Islam*: 251.

<sup>65</sup> Cleveland, William L., and Martin Bunton. *A history of the modern Middle East*. Hachette UK, 2016: 440-449.

<sup>66</sup> Musallam, Adnan. *From secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the foundations of radical Islamism*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005: 1-5.

<sup>67</sup> Gamal Abdel Nasser was the president of Egypt from 1952 until his death in 1970.

<sup>68</sup> Cleveland et al., *A history of the modern Middle East*: 440 - 449.

that the survival of the umma depends on overcoming the pernicious influence of jahiliyya (ignorance of divine guidance).<sup>69</sup> Jahiliyya refers both to the time before Islam or the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula, as well as areas or communities who have fallen from 'true' Islam. According to Qutb jahiliyya can be overcome, therefore Muslims need to be redeemed from the fragmentation that plagues the rational and modern West. It is essential that Muslims recapture universal, constant and a priori unity of religious and political authority in Islam. Qutb argued that jihad involves both persuasion and coercion, the first is appropriate for friends and coercion is suited for enemies. According to Qutb, only physical force will remove the political, social and economic obstacles to the establishment of the Islamic community. According to Mamdani, Qutb's ideas have a great resemblance with Marxism-Leninism, because Qutb argued that jihad is a process beginning with the organization of a vanguard, followed by a withdrawal that would set the stage for organizing and finally a return to struggle.<sup>70</sup> According to Euben, Qutb was preoccupied with modern phenomena as rationalism, Marxism and Liberalism. She explains that his very understanding of jahiliyya and divine sovereignty are defined in terms of modernity. His arguments incorporate many of the terms and concerns of his opponents, while he insists on philosophical purity. As an example, Euben gives his concern for material equality. This echoes precisely the communist and Arab socialist systems he despises.<sup>71</sup> According to Adnan Mussalam Qutb's controversial thought still influences current Islamic resurgence and today's jihadist movements, jihadist find inspiration in his ideology.<sup>72</sup> Next to Qutb's different use of the concept jahiliyya, he also had different ideas on the notion of takfir. As explained before, Qutb believed that you could liquidate political leaders and others if they were not righteous Muslims.

### **2.1.2 The Islamic tradition of Salafiyya and Wahhabism**

Wahhabism is a term with various connotations, but in general it refers to a movement that seeks to purify Islam. In the West, the term is being used mostly to describe the form of

---

<sup>69</sup> 'Pre-Islamic period, or ignorance of monotheism and divine law. In current use, refers to secular modernity. Sayyid Qutb interpreted jahiliyya as the domination of humans over humans, rather than submission of humans to God. The term denotes any government system, ideology, or institution based on values other than those referring to God. To correct this situation, such thinkers propose the implementation of Islamic law, values, and principles. Radical groups justify militant actions against secular regimes in terms of jihad against jahiliyya' In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito. Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1157> (accessed 27-01-2017).

<sup>70</sup> Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, bad Muslim*: 57-58.

<sup>71</sup> Euben, 'Modern and Contemporary Islamic Political Theory': 297-311.

<sup>72</sup> Musallam, *From secularism to Jihad*: 1-5. and Armstrong, *Islam*: 252.



Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia, which has spread to various parts of the world. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a religious scholar from Saudi Arabia is the founder of the *Wahhabiyya*.<sup>73</sup> The Saudi discourse plays a significant role in my research because of Wahhabism, the interpretation of Islam that dominates Saudi public discourse. Saudi Arabia is the centre of doctrinal anti-shiism.<sup>74</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab established an alliance with the al-Saud dynasty in the mid-eighteenth century. The Wahhabi ideology aims to purify Islam. Anti-Shiism is one of the fundamentals of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, and of the domestic and foreign policies of the Saudi state.<sup>75</sup> One of the main principles in Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab doctrine is his idea of takfir. Abd al-Wahhab stated that believers should declare Muslims as infidel if they did anything that would harm or infringe on the sovereignty of the absolute authority.<sup>76</sup> Anti-shiism is until today very common in the Saudi government and amongst many Saudi citizens. This is partly due to the textbooks used in schools, in which Shia Muslims, sects and religions other than Sunni Islam, are described as unbelievers. These groups are framed in children's schoolbooks as those that reject the oneness of God.<sup>77</sup> Saudi Arabia has a central position in the Muslim world; both Mecca and Medina are found in Saudi Arabia, two of Islam's most holy places. Also the Saudi media empire is very strong and gained importance way beyond Saudi Arabia, therefore anti-Shiism gained importance and an audience beyond Saudi Arabia as well, influencing salafi-jihadi groups and feeding sectarian conflict around the world.<sup>78</sup> Believers who adhere to this branch of Islam prefer to call themselves 'unitarians' or 'salafiyya'.

Salafiyya is a reference to the followers and companions of the prophet, salaf means ancestor. The salafism discourse sees the first and second generation Muslims as the righteous ones. These Muslims were living when Mohammed was living, they were in his presence and witnessed his charisma and wisdom. Salafi Muslims want to restore the early Islamic period. According to salafist, salafism is not a movement within Islam, it is Islam. In time and by influences by other local cultural traditions and ideologies the Islamic ideas have watered. salafism is, according to salafists, the pure uninfluenced Islam. Salafism can be seen both as centuries old and backwards, but also as a more recent phenomenon. The terms

---

<sup>73</sup> Matthiesen, Toby. *Sectarian gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that wasn't*. Stanford University Press, 2013: 74.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>76</sup> Crooke, Alastair. "You Can't Understand ISIS If You Don't Know the History of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (2015): 56-70.

<sup>77</sup> Matthiesen, *Sectarian gulf*: 74.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

wahhabism and salafism have distinct historical roots, but recently have been used interchangeably. By some Wahhabism is considered the Saudi form of salafism. According to Febe Armanios, modern salafist beliefs have roots in a reform- oriented movement in the early twentieth century, this movement grew more conservative over the years. In line with puritanical Islam, salafists believe that religious authority lies directly in the Quran and Mohammed's practices, not in the commentaries which interpret these sources.<sup>79</sup>

According to Yayha Hakim the salafist Wahhabi doctrine could rise and spread after 1979, after the invasion of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.<sup>80</sup> Ibrahim Warde agrees and states that sectarianism exploded after 1979 a turbulent year in which the Iranian revolution started and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.<sup>81</sup> After 1979 groups like al-Qaeda and the Taliban appeared. The rise of these groups was made possible by the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, they supported these groups financially and militarily. The rise of these groups also coincided with the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The relations between Iraq and Iran worsened and developed into the Iraq-Iran war lasting a little bit over eight years. Between 1981 and 1989 both sides suffered terrible losses. This rift reflects the split between Arabs. Iraq and the Gulf states and on the other hand Iran in alliance with Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine.

Hakim states that the two salafist movements, al-Qaeda and the Taliban paved the way for salafist takfiri groups like ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and a number of smaller groups currently operating in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>82</sup> Rohan Gunaratna states that al-Qaeda's jihad is although presented in divine and religious terms, it was in the service of social justice.<sup>83</sup> Jihad in the name of God was the means to rid the Muslim Nation of injustice and to obtain freedom. Al-Qaeda has also intertwined its jihadi ideology with the theology of martyrdom. Al-Qaeda operatives believe that Allah guides and rewards those who sacrifice themselves for a noble and holy cause. Al-Qaeda is motivated not by power, wealth and fame, but rather by the ideological belief in the purification of Islam through violent struggle. The only means that is left is 'by pen and gun, by word and bullet, by tongue and teeth.'<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Armanios, Febe. "The Islamic traditions of Wahhabism and salafiyya." Congressional Information Service, Library of Congress, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> Hakim, Yahya. "The Hashemite-Umayyad Divide and its Impact on the Future of Islam." *The Muslim World* 106, no. 1 (2016): 83-96.

<sup>81</sup> Warde, Ibrahim. "Wagering on Sectarianism: The Political Economy of Extremism." *The Muslim World* 106, no. 1 (2016): 205-216.

<sup>82</sup> Hakim, The Hashemite-Umayyad Divide: 83-96.

<sup>83</sup> Gunaratna, Rohan. "Al Qaeda's ideology." *Current trends in islamist ideology* 1 (2005): 59.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-67.

### 2.1.3 Jihadist thinking

John Turner states that salafi jihadism is the best term to describe the ideology of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Salafi jihadism is a religious and political ideology, based on a fundamentalist conceptualisation of Islam, that form the actions of such organisation as al-Qaeda.<sup>85</sup>

The attempts of Muslim movements to embody an Islamic State or society is not new. The idea of Islamic unity originates from the draft of the constitution of Medina in 622, however this unity has never existed. With the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, following by Western colonialism and the later establishment of states by a Western model, the idea of Islamic unity and an Islamic state slowly disappeared. However, this idea never totally disappeared. On the other hand, as explained previously, frustration against the governments which were seen as marionettes of the West grew. During the post-Ottoman period attempts to reconstruct a caliphate failed, this stimulated the creation of a new Islamic identity using religion as legitimization and driving power. The existing anti-Western views resulting from the colonial period were used to strengthen religious nationalism.<sup>86</sup> Al-Qaeda's, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra's ideology builds upon the Islamic dream of creating a caliphate ruled by sharia.

Jihadist ideology builds on four central doctrines. These are jahiliyya, hijra, jihad, and salafism.<sup>87</sup> Jahiliyya, the state of ignorance, the condition of the Islamic world prior to Muhammad's revelations from God. It is a reference, used by the prophet, to Arabia before Islam when it was still in a state of ignorance. It has been rediscovered by salafi-jihadists as the state in which the contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim world dwells. The reappearance of jahiliyya started after the period of the Prophet and the following 'justly guided' caliphs. The notion of jahiliyya provides a concept for framing 'the other' as godless and corrupt and should therefore be exterminated. Hijra is the migration of Muhammad with his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E.. Hijra is of great importance in Islam, and marks the start of the Islamic calendar. The migration was essential to escape the state of jahiliyya. Only after the hijra has been completed, the real Islamic society can be

---

<sup>85</sup> Turner, John. *Religious ideology and the roots of the global Jihad: salafi Jihadism and international order*. Springer, 2014: 106-108.

<sup>86</sup> Turner, John. "From cottage industry to international organisation: the evolution of salafi-Jihadism and the emergence of the Al Qaeda ideology." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010): 542-543.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 542-543.

established.<sup>88</sup> After the hijra is completed, jihad can be realised. Jihad is literally translated as the effort or the struggle, specifically the struggle in the path of God. Salafism refers to the first generations of Muslims and their unflawed Islam. Muslims who consider themselves salafists, wish to return to this state of Islamic practice and adopt a puritanical and literal reading of Islam. Only through embracing this uncorrupted tradition of Islam, can you escape the condition of jahiliyya. Salafist reject all innovations after the first generations of Islam, such as conciliations with local practices, popular religious customs or the philosophical interpretation of religious matters.<sup>89</sup>

The more modern religious writers, after Afghani, that influenced the ideology of the salafi-jihadists are Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda and Sayyid Qutb, who I have mentioned before.<sup>90</sup> After living in the US and joining the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutb made a link between the Islamic world and the West, framing the West and especially the United States as the root of all evil. Qutb merged the core elements of the salafi thought (jahiliyya, hijra and jihad), with a political ideology that reflected his resentment towards the West. Qutb's ideas represented a framework for revolution that eventually would manifest itself in the form a new caliphate ruled by sharia law. His work not only attacked the West on political, economic and material grounds, but also constructed the idea of cultural oppression that influenced many Muslims and jihadist groups.<sup>91</sup>

The principle ideological mechanism that enables militant jihadist to justify killing other Muslims is takfir. Central to takfir is the distinction between genuine and nominal Muslims. To the militants, their violence is not against coreligionists, but people who have betrayed their creed and, therefore, are no longer considered Muslims. Militant jihadist divide their coreligionist into roughly four categories.<sup>92</sup>

- *Tawaghit* (singular *taghout*), Muslim regimes that do not rule in accordance with sharia law and are obstinate in their refusal to heed calls to return to Islam. They cease to be member in the community of the faithful, but they repress the true believers that work towards establishing truly Islamic states.<sup>93</sup>

- *Murtadin* (singular *murtad*), Muslims who are working for the tawaghit and other infidels,

---

<sup>88</sup> Turner, Religious ideology and the roots of the global Jihad: 106 -108.

<sup>89</sup> Turner, From cottage industry to international organisation: 542-547.

<sup>90</sup> Musallam, From secularism to Jihad: 1-5.

<sup>91</sup> Turner, From cottage industry to international organisation: 549- 550.

<sup>92</sup> Moghadam, Assaf, and Brian Fishman, eds. *Fault lines in global jihad: organizational, strategic, and ideological fissures*. Taylor & Francis, 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Rajan, VG Julie. *Al Qaeda's global crisis: The Islamic state, takfir and the genocide of Muslims*. Routledge, 2015.

such as foreign powers. Murtagh are often members of the security services, the army, government employees and anyone who sustains the ruling regime either directly or indirectly.<sup>94</sup>

- *Mushriken* (or *mubdi'een*), Muslims who violate the principle of monotheism.<sup>95</sup>

## **2.2 The ties that bind al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra**

The appearance of al-Qaeda at the beginning, in the 1990's, challenged modern Islamic discourse and introduced a new dimension of extremism in the modern Islamic discourse. This was reflected in the terminology that sanctifies absolute loyalty to Allah alone, a theology realised by continuous jihad and perpetual martyrdom and in attacks targeting the Western world, but also nations in the Arab and Muslim world who did not apply the sharia.<sup>96</sup> Al-Qaeda once was the uncontested leader of global jihadism. Nowadays, more organisations have joined the stage.

### **2.2.1 The establishment of al-Qaeda**

Al-Qaeda emerged from the mujahidin movement that pit jihadist against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the late 1970's. Al-Qaeda was founded in 1980 by Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, in 1989 Osama bin Laden took control of the organisation.<sup>97</sup> The organization is one of the longest-operating and largest militant jihadist organisations in the world. Al-Qaeda has grown to become an organization with affiliates and supporters all over the world. The organizations have carried out some of the most violent and infamous attacks. Al-Qaeda seeks to rid the Muslim world of foreign influence and establish a sharia-based Islamic government.

Osama bin Laden joined the fighting in 1980. As the son of a wealthy Saudi businessman he was able to provide funding for the cause, which made him an important member of the jihad.<sup>98</sup> Bin Laden managed to establish a presence in the region, he built a training camp that became the elite camp for Afghan Arab mujahidin. It was named *al-Qa'ida*

---

<sup>94</sup> Rajan, *Al Qaeda's global crisis*.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Hatina, M. (2012). Redeeming Sunni Islam: Al-Qa'ida's Polemic against the Muslim Brethren. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39(1): 101-113.

<sup>97</sup> Byman, Daniel. *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the global jihadist movement: what everyone needs to know*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2015: 76.

<sup>98</sup> 'al-Qaeda' *Mapping Militant organisations*, Stanford University:  
<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/21> (accessed on 28-05-2017).

*al-Askariyya* (the military base), it created a safe haven for jihadist, both for al-Qaeda and other Islamist militants, facilitating networking between al-Qaeda and other groups.

In the intellectual development of the organisation, Osama bin Laden played a marginal role, the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri became responsible for designing the al-Qaeda ideology.<sup>99</sup> Zawahiri had battled the Egyptian government as the leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the organization developed ties with al-Qaeda by Ayman al-Zawahiri. The relationship between Bin Laden and Zawahiri became strong and many considered Zawahiri as the deputy head of al-Qaeda.<sup>100</sup> Zawahiri managed to bind jihadist movements associated with more nationalist causes with al-Qaeda's more international cause. He provided the fighters with an identity through constructing a distinct ideology. He made use of the ideas of Qutb, who embraces jihad, jahiliyya, the salafist doctrine and the Hijra as essential parts of his philosophy. Zawahiri's ability to link local objectives to the purpose of the global jihad has turned out to be his most beneficial contribution to the al-Qaeda creed. He thereby discards the use of Western notions such as nationalism and socialism, and concentrates on unifying all movements under the single battle for the liberation of the umma.<sup>101</sup>

The organization had to deal with two setbacks since 2011: its leader, Osama bin Laden was killed by the United States in May 2011 and mid-2014 ISIS established a caliphate, a long time al-Qaeda goal although not in the same form.<sup>102</sup> After the US invasion of Iraq, al-Qaeda in Iraq became one of the movements strongest affiliates. The centre of gravity had begun to shift to the affiliate groups and al-Qaeda struggled to revive reputation. Proxy groups preached al-Qaeda's ideology without al-Qaeda's approval. After bin Laden died Ayman al-Zawahiri became al-Qaeda's leader.

## 2.2.2 The roots of ISIS

ISIS roots are tied with the history of al-Qaeda. The Islamic State, in full the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS or ISIL)<sup>103</sup> is a salafi-Jihadist militant organization in Syria and Iraq whose

---

<sup>99</sup> Turner, From cottage industry to international organisation: 552.

<sup>100</sup> 'al-Qaeda' *Mapping Militant organisations*, Stanford University: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/21> (accessed on 28-05-2017).

<sup>101</sup> Byman, *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the global jihadist movement*: 76.; Turner, From cottage industry to international organisation: 552.

<sup>102</sup> Wright, Robin et al, *The jihadi Threat ISIS al Qaeda and Beyond*. Wilson Center and United States institute of Peace, 2016: 10-11.

<sup>103</sup> Al-Sham the region bordering the eastern Mediterranean Sea, usually known as the region of Syria: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Cyprus and the Turkish Hatay Province. The Levant is an approximate

goal is the establishment and expansion of a caliphate. The organizations roots can be traced back to the late 1990's. In 1999, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of ISIS was released from prison. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a Jordanian who radicalized in prison. Zarqawi was in prison for drug possession and sexual assault. After his release, he travelled to Afghanistan with the intention of joining the fight against the Soviets, there he linked with al-Qaeda. He had set up a first base in the province of Herat close to the Afghan-Iran border. In 2002 Zarqawi and his followers travelled through Iran and entered Iraq. They set up camp in the north.<sup>104</sup> The group was a participant in the Iraqi insurgency during the American occupation. First as *Jama't al-Tawhid wa'al-jihad* and then, after swearing fealty to al-Qaeda, as al-Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>105</sup> Zarqawi made contact with other jihadist organizations, he established some strong bonds. The organization declined until 2011 due to pressure from Iraqi and US forces, after 2011 it began to grow through its involvement in the Syrian civil war and in 2013 it changed its name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham. A year later ISIS established a caliphate. The organizations first attempted to establish an Islamic State or caliphate in Iraq in the mid-2000s failed. The second attempt in Syria in 2013 was also unsuccessful. Finally, in 2014 after a 15 year process Abu Bakker al-Baghdadi declared himself the new caliph and ISIS had established a caliphate.<sup>106</sup>

Al-Qaeda in Iraq engaged in sectarian killings that al-Qaeda opposed as theologically illegitimate and alienating to Sunni populations. Al-Qaeda wanted to promote a unified Islam against the West, but al-Qaeda in Iraq prioritized killing Shiites and other Muslims. Al-Qaeda in Iraq considered these people infidels and apostate Muslims and therefore deserved death, they applied the notion of takfir. Al-Zawahiri warned al-Zarqawi that sectarian killings of Shiite civilians would not be acceptable to the Muslim population.<sup>107</sup> Al-Zarqawi was killed in an airstrike in 2006 and after his death the organization rebranded as the Islamic State of Iraq. In 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and Islamic scholar from Iraq, was selected as the new leader.<sup>108</sup> According to the authors of the recently published article *The Jihadi Threat: ISIS Al-Qaeda and Beyond*, the Islamic State of Iraq had spent years rebuilding (new internal leadership and campaigning assassinations to intimidate security forces). In 2013 they

---

historical geographical term referring to an even larger area in the Eastern Mediterranean. In its widest historical sense, the Levant included all of the eastern Mediterranean with its islands, it included all of the countries along the Eastern Mediterranean shores, extending from Greece to Cyrenaica.

<sup>104</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, 2.

<sup>105</sup> <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1>

<sup>106</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, 2.

<sup>107</sup> Wright et al, *The jihadi Threat ISIS al Qaeda and Beyond*: 19.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

changed their name to Islamic State of Iraq and Sham. This name change was part of an effort to affirm control over fighters it had dispatched to Syria in 2011 and to formally expand its statehood project into Syria. Many of ISIS fighters disagreed with the unilateral announcements by al-Baghdadi and pledged allegiances with al-Qaeda or Jabhat al-Nusra. These fighters shared Jabhat al-Nusra ideas, and where in the opinion that al-Badhdadi should have consulted the umma, before establishing a caliphate. This resulted in a period of infighting. ISIS continued to pursue its statehood project despite appeals from restraint from other jihadist organizations. In June 2014 ISIS announced a caliphate, the organization established a bureaucracy with institutions based on its particular interpretation of Islam.<sup>109</sup>

### 2.2.3 Jabhat al-Nusra joins the stage

The Syrian jihad is about more than ISIS alone. Various other jihadist groups have made the country their base, many of which are led by veteran jihadists, who often have al-Qaeda experience.<sup>110</sup> One of these groups is Jabhat al-Nusra. According to Charles R. Lister, Jabhat al-Nusra has been able to settle in Syria. And the organization has become tacitly accepted and militarily powerful.<sup>111</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra, also known as the al-Nusra Front or Jawlani Front<sup>112</sup> is an affiliate of al-Qaeda, formed in 2011 and announced formally in 2012.<sup>113</sup> Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani, the organisations leader is a veteran jihadist who has been fighting the Americans since 2003 as an al-Qaeda in Iraq member. He fought side by side with Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, one of the founding fathers of ISIS. Jawlani has spent time in camp Bucca, just as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>114</sup>

Jabhat al-Nusra seeks to overthrow the Assad regime and establish an Islamic state that is governed by sharia law. In 2014 Jawlani stated that the group would not declare such a state until it had consensus from the mujahidin and the scholars. Al-Nusra is very Syria focused, but still supports establishing multiple Islamic emirates and al-Qaeda caliphate overtime.<sup>115</sup> During the first months of the Syrian civil war the relationship between al-

---

<sup>109</sup> Wright et al, *The jihadi Threat ISIS al Qaeda and Beyond*: 10-19.

<sup>110</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, 261-271.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-271.

<sup>112</sup> Jawlani is the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra. He was Emir of the Jabhat al-Nusra from 23 of January 2012 until 28 July of 2016, when Jabhat al-Nusra renamed to Jabhat Fath al-Sham he became Emir of that organization. Currently he is Chief commander of Hay'at Tharir al-Sham.

<sup>113</sup> Wright et al, *The jihadi Threat ISIS al Qaeda and Beyond*: 20-21.

<sup>114</sup> Oudheusden, van Jan, *Het Midden-Oosten, een kleine geschiedenis*. Bert Bakker, Amsterdam, 2016: 193.

<sup>115</sup> 'Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham' *Mapping Militant organisations*, Standford Univeristy: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/493#note46> (accessed on 15-05-2017).



Jawlani (Nusra-leader) and al-Baghdadi (leader ISIS) remained good according to Sami Moubayed. When Jawlani formed Jabhat al-Nusra in 2012, al-Baghdadi complained, but saw the development as a small defection.<sup>116</sup>

The organization pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in April 2013. Quickly, the al-Qaeda branch in Syria became one of the most powerful rebel groups in Syria and the strongest affiliate of al-Qaeda.<sup>117</sup> However, ISIS advances in Iraq and later its establishment of a caliphate have presented an existential challenge to al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra. During the Syrian civil war, ISIS had shown to be an enemy of the entire Syrian insurgency by late 2013. Jabhat al-Nusra on the other hand had redefined itself as a jihadist organisation enjoying a broad base of acceptance within Syria's opposition-supporting community.<sup>118</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra started loosening and limiting their ties with al-Qaeda. Recently, mid 2016 Jabhat al-Nusra rebranded and named itself Jabhat Fath al-Sham. The organization distanced itself from al-Qaeda and claims no longer to be an affiliate.<sup>119</sup> But analysts argue that the group's decision to end its affiliation and change names did not indicate an ideological split with al-Qaeda but was part of a strategy to increase the group's appeal within Syria. Jabhat Fath al-Sham changed name again in December 2016. The organization absorbed many smaller factions and changed its name to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which means the Committee for the Liberation of Syria.<sup>120</sup>

While having historical and ideological ties, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra are in open war with ISIS. The organizations have adopted a radical discourse in which framing their enemies plays a significant part. Their enemies are generally depicted as enemies of Islam, legitimizing extreme and often symbolic violence. The main ideological difference between al-Qaeda and ISIS is that al-Qaeda is primarily focusing on 'the West' as the enemy, while ISIS also states that Muslims who do not live according to the organisation's ideology and rules are the enemies. Al-Qaeda is leaning more towards an approach of getting the blindsided Muslims back on track, they are not the enemy, and they just need to find the righteous path. ISIS openly despises, for example, Shia Muslims, while al-Qaeda tends to be more moderate regarding other Muslims.

The graph added as appendix II, shows the ties between the three organisations, first

---

<sup>116</sup> Moubayed, Sami. *Under the black flag: At the frontier of the new jihad*. IB Tauris, 2015: 117.

<sup>117</sup> Wright et al, *The jihadi Threat ISIS al Qaeda and Beyond*: 20-21.

<sup>118</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, 261-271.

<sup>119</sup> Wright et al, *The jihadi Threat ISIS al Qaeda and Beyond*: 20-21.

<sup>120</sup> 'Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham' *Mapping Militant organisations*, Stanford University: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/493#note46> (accessed on 15-05-2017).

ISIS was an affiliate of al-Qaeda, when Jabhat al-Nusra was formed as an affiliate of al-Qaeda, they were allied with ISIS. In 2014 al-Qaeda distanced from ISIS and later that year, ISIS established its caliphate. During 2014 Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS clashed heavily during the period of rebel infighting in the Syrian civil war, the two went from allies to enemies. During the summer of 2016, Jabhat al-Nusra distanced itself from al-Qaeda, to gain more leverage among the Syrian population. Al-Qaeda today has become more an idea or a concept than an organization; an amorphous movement tenuously held together by a loosely networked transnational constituency rather than a monolithic, international terrorist organization.<sup>121</sup> It is important to understand that what is referred to as the 'al-Qaeda network' is in reality a conglomerate of a number of terror groups and their cells, of varying autonomy but who share a common ideology and who cooperate with each other.<sup>122</sup> Al-Qaeda is not as much an organized institution, but an association of loose networks. The al-Qaeda name holds a certain prestige in jihadi circles, inspiring other to act in its name. Being an al-Qaeda affiliate means as much as identifying with the organization, not that Jabhat al-Nusra is under direct control of the al-Qaeda leadership.

#### **2.2.4 Ideological differences, ISIS differentiation from al-Qaeda**

Al-Qaeda seems to be the main exponent of the salafi-jihadism movement, but many other groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, have formed along the same ideological lines. After the 2003 invasion, many jihadist moved to northern Iraq to participate in the fight against the American troops. As a result, the Islamic State began as an Iraqi movement, under the leadership of the Jordanian jihadist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In 2004 Zarqawi pledged alliance with al-Qaeda and the group took on the name al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Bin Laden and Zawahiri underlined the importance of hitting US targets whereas Zarqawi, and after his death in 2006 the new leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, focused on a sectarian war and attacking Sunni Muslims they considered apostates. When the Syrian conflict erupted in 2011, Iraqi jihadists exploited the chaos by setting up new bases of operations, raising money from external players, and gathering new recruits for their cause. Benefiting from the anti-Sunni rhetoric employed by both the Assad regime and the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki,

---

<sup>121</sup> Jackson, Brian A. "Groups, networks, or movements: A command-and-control-driven approach to classifying terrorist organizations and its application to Al Qaeda." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 241-262.

<sup>122</sup> Jackson, Brian A. "Groups, networks, or movements: 241-262.

Baghdadi's organization grew in popular support and consequently its ranks.<sup>123</sup>

As the years passed by, and especially after the appointment of al-Baghdadi, the differences in ideology between al-Qaeda and ISIS grew exceptionally. First, al-Qaeda sees the establishment of an Islamic state as a future goal in contrast than a direct one like ISIS does. Although al-Qaeda has used violence and vicious attacks more than once, ISIS's use of ritualized violence and sadistic war crimes to establish a totalitarian rule of terror, differs from al-Qaeda's practices. Their extensive use of violence aligns with their aim to purify the land and bring about a millenarian rupture is, on this scale, absent from al-Qaeda's ideology. ISIS is out to eliminate the Sunni society from other cultural influences through demolishing other religious and ethnic groups like the Kurds, Shi'a, Christians and Yazidis. As a result, there is great discordance between al-Qaeda and ISIS about the aggressive stance towards the Shi'a as well as the indiscriminate slaughtering of Muslims. Zawahiri prioritized the struggle against the United States and its allies, and discourages the attacks against non-combatants, including minorities like Shi'i Muslims. On the other hand, Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda and ISIS have a common enemy. The three resist the west and in particular the United States. In the Middle East, they also have common enemies, Shia Muslims, Iran, Alawites and in Syria ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra both fight Assad's regime.

---

<sup>123</sup> Roland Gömöri. "ISIL—the New Face of Terrorism." *Defence* (2015): 58.; Byman. *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the global jihadist movement: what everyone needs to know*: 163- 167.

### 3. Syrian civil war

Syria today is torn by a major civil war and seems without the prospect of a peaceful solution. This civil war is an offshoot of the Arab Spring, the widespread protests which began in Tunisia 2010 and spread across the region. The Syrian Civil War is an important factor in my research. Syria is the stage where al-Nusra and ISIS clash, and the organisations make smart use of the uprisings in Syria. Also the time frame I use is roughly the period of the Syrian civil war. The analyses start with the onset of the civil war and the establishment of Jabhat al-Nusra during 2011 and 2012, until December 2016, when Jabhat al-Nusra merges with other jihadist factions. Also shifting alliances on the ground play an important role in the research I conduct, therefore an overview of the Syrian civil war is needed. In order to be able to answer the question: what is the relation between the discourses and the situation on the ground; do shifting alliances, armed confrontations, et cetera have an impact on the discourse or the other way around? I need to explain the situation on the ground. While writing the civil war is still ongoing, therefore this chapter does not contain a complete overview of the conflict.

#### 3.1 Arab Uprisings and the civil war in Syria

The year 2011 is an important year for the Middle East and North Africa. Citizens of several countries took to the streets and confronted their corrupt and dictatorial leaders, opting for profound social and political change. The Arab spring started as a peaceful protest, but led to a violent uprising in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. In Syria the Arab Spring, led the country into a violent civil war. The Assad regime in Syria had demonstrated in previous years its refusal to reform. According to Charles T. Lister many people thought that Syria would escape the uprisings we call the Arab Spring, but they were wrong. In early 2011 small protests began.<sup>124</sup> On March 15th 2011 demonstrations began in Damascus, Syria's capital city. People demanded the release of political prisoners. The agitation began in the Southern city Dara, police had tortured youth who, motivated by the uprising in Tunis and Cairo, had written texts and battle cries on walls with graffiti in the city of Dara.<sup>125</sup> In Dara, a former stronghold of the Baath party, the confrontation between protesters and heavy handed security forces escalated, resistance quickly spread via tribal networks and sparked sympathy protest in

---

<sup>124</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, preface.

<sup>125</sup> Oudheusden, *Het Midden-Oosten*: 187-220.

other parts of Syria which started a spiral of revolt that the regime would never be able to fully control.<sup>126</sup>

Syrian authorities were merciless and tried to squash the demonstrations to the ground. Many Syrians who had taken to the streets in support of political freedom and self-representation were threatened, arrested and attacked with teargas or live ammunition. Lister states that the refusal by local and national governments for open dissent encouraged the escalation of the protest. In its early stages the Syrian revolution mobilized around topics such as liberty, freedom, anti-corruption and democratic governance. The protests were peaceful, with men and women, young and old contributing towards a movement for change. Security forces were aimed at suppressing this expanding revolution, not only consolidating opposition to the Assad regime, but also encouraging the mobilisation of local militias, such as the Free Syrian Army.<sup>127</sup>

From March 2011 the call for freedom spread over the country. The regime bloodily suppressed demonstrations, with snipers killing participants of protest marches. The suburbs of Damascus, Homs and Hama became the stage of protest and street fights. Slowly the protest took the shape of an insurgency, during the summer of 2011 it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of people went to the streets. The resistance started forming militant forces; in July 2011 the Free Syrian Army (FSA) started to take shape, being supplemented by former soldiers from the Assad regime. The FSA was the first organised resistance movement, and received support from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, the United States, and some European countries.<sup>128</sup> The city of Homs played an important role, former members of the Syrian military teamed up with the resistance and formed a rebel stronghold. Government forces attempted to regain control of Homs from majority Sunni armed rebels, as they had previously completed in Hama and other large towns. In October 2011, Assad started an offensive, and his elite soldiers directed the city with tanks and armoured vehicles, starting an outburst of violence. Massive resistance by the people of Homs turned the conflict into a 'city siege'.<sup>129</sup> Some Syrians still supported Assad, among them were Christians, Shia, Druze, but also middle class Sunni Muslims in, for example Aleppo and Damascus. These people feared revenge of the militant Sunni, so they formed their own militant organisations to protect their cities or neighbourhoods. Not all Sunni Syrians plotted against Assad, some

---

<sup>126</sup> Hinnebusch, Raymond. "The tangent of the Syrian uprising." *Ortadoğu Etütleri* (2014): 4.

<sup>127</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, 261-271, preface.

<sup>128</sup> Oudheusden, *Het Midden-Oosten*: 187-220.

<sup>129</sup> Bhardwaj, Maya. "Development of Conflict in Arab Spring Libya and Syria: From Revolution to Civil War." *Washington University International Review* 1, no. 1 (2012): 76-97.

Sunni Muslims were part of his administration or part of the Syrian Army. During 2012 and 2013 the amount of deaths rose quickly. The rebels and the FSA could not do much, with their Kalashnikovs, against the Assad's heavy arsenal of weapons.<sup>130</sup> Assad enjoyed the support of a part of the Alawite population, parts of the Syrian middle class, and Christian and Shia Muslim minorities, but his brutal ways of oppressing the resistance made him lose moral authority.<sup>131</sup>

### **3.2 Role of jihadists in the protest and violence**

Jihadists started to enter the stage after both Assad and the resistance movement failed to 'win'. Assad proved unable to squash the resistance, and the resistance failed to obtain and occupy central Syria and Damascus. This power vacuum set the stage for jihadist to enter the battlefield, and from early 2013 salafists and jihadists started to play a role at the forefront of the scene. They started to become the main players of the resistance against the Assad regime. The regional jihadist organisations started to recruit foreign fighters and soon their ranks were filled with fighters from Russia, North Africa and Europe, and these fighters were able to enter Syria through Turkey. In early 2013 an estimated 3000 foreign fighters were active in Syria, they could enter the country almost effortlessly since the Syrian authorities lost control of the border with Turkey close to Damascus.<sup>132</sup>

Two of the main jihadist players in the civil war are ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Al-Qaeda established a branch in Syria in 2011, and in early 2012 they officially announced Jabhat al-Nusra as their Syrian affiliate.<sup>133</sup> The well organised Jabhat al-Nusra appeared to be moderate, their aim was to form a 'greater' Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Israel and a part of Iraq), which would be ruled by sharia law. Jabhat al-Nusra claimed to be rooted in the region and appeared to be caring for the Syrian population and portrayed itself as incorrupt. Jabhat al-Nusra's first series of attacks on government buildings in Homs, proved they were less moderate than they first seemed, they slaughtered civilians after a militant offensive in Homs. Isis joined the Syrian civil war in 2013, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (leader of ISIS) officially announced the extension into Syria. Because of the ongoing civil war it was rather easy for ISIS to set foot on the ground.<sup>134</sup> In eastern Syria, there was already an

---

<sup>130</sup> Oudheusden, *Het Midden-Oosten*: 187-220.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-220.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-220.

<sup>133</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, 185-195.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-195.

infrastructure for jihadists. The eastern Syrian city of Deir ez-Zor functioned as a kick-start. Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq, had established training camps and shelter surrounding the city in previous years. The main difference in relation to the civil war with ISIS is that Jabhat al-Nusra prioritized defeating Assad and therefore was willing to cooperate with other organisations, as they wanted to win territory in Syria. Jabhat al-Nusra's fighters are mostly Syrians (70%) while ISIS fighters are recruited abroad. Another difference between the two is that ISIS is even more brutal, and known for its beheadings. In early 2014, the two organisations clashed heavily.<sup>135</sup>

Early 2013, ISIS took the city of Raqqa, which they made their capital. ISIS moved quickly and conquered many cities, and in late 2013 the inhabitants of ISIS controlled territory was roughly estimated at 3 million people. An important battle during 2014 was the Syrian- Kurdish city of Kobane, near the Turkish border. After ISIS marched towards the city, Kurdish fighters prepared for battle, they fought until well into 2015. ISIS was not able to keep control of the city, but they did occupy most of the border regions, where many Yezidi's lived. The small ethnic minority was expelled, imprisoned or held hostage, and the Yezidi women were made slaves.<sup>136</sup> After several months of ISIS aggression and hostile acts against rival insurgent factions, 2014 began with a major offensive against ISIS. From the 4<sup>th</sup> of January onwards moderate rebels, jihadist rebels, FSA aligned factions fought against ISIS's control of territory, eventually also Jabhat al-Nusra fought against ISIS. Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front distributed statements blaming the infighting on ISIS prior violent behaviour against other Muslims.<sup>137</sup> While the infighting continued and intensified, senior al-Qaeda veterans began emerging in northern Syria alongside Jabhat al-Nusra. At the end of February 2014, ISIS began counteroffensives against rival factions in Deir ez Zour. ISIS targeted a number of attacks on key commanders and headquarters in Aleppo and Idlib. ISIS also assaulted the credibility of the al-Qaeda leadership, claiming al-Qaeda had deviated from the Islamic path. At the same time, opposition forces launched offensives against Assad in Hama, Latakia, Quneitra and Aleppo.<sup>138</sup>

Other groups joined the conflict, such as Ahrar al-Sham, which was profiting from donations from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar. This group was rather conservative and focused on Syria as the home country. Also, next to many smaller jihadist factions, the

---

<sup>135</sup> Oudheusden, *Het Midden-Oosten*: 187-220.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-220.

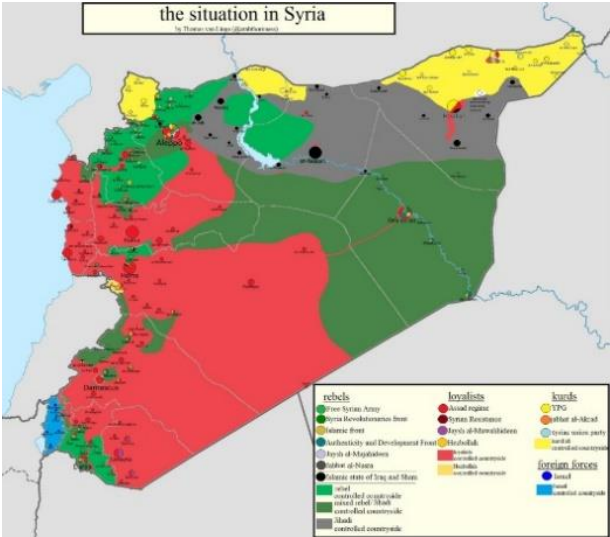
<sup>137</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, 185.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

Islamic Brotherhood in Syria appeared on the stage in 2013. In 2015 some movements decided to cooperate an form and alliance, and sometimes the secular FSA worked together with the jihadist. The FSA wanted to keep its cooperation to a minimum, since the organisation would lose credibility and western support if they associated with jihadism. During 2015, an estimated 150.000 people were fighting against Assad, separated over approximately 1500 different organisations and factions, some small operating in villages, some bigger operating in different parts of Syria.<sup>139</sup> Syria had changed into a patchwork of areas held by either one of the rebel factions or by Assad and his regime.

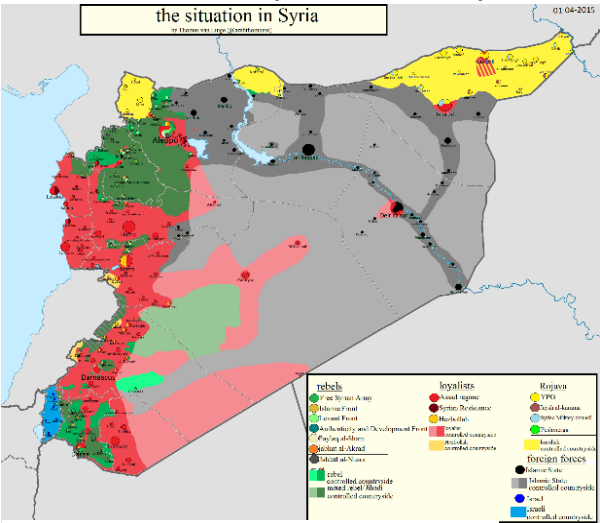
**3.3 Mapping the situation in Syria**

The first map shows the situation on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2014, this was during the period of rebel infighting. The ISIS campaign against Syrian Kurdistan is ongoing. The second map dates from April 2015, a lot has happened. The map shows an enormous loss for Assad. The regime lost a significant amount of territory in favour of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Also, the Syrian Revolutionary front lost territory in favour of ISIS. Homs, once the capital of revolution, surrendered to the Syrian Arab Army and Hezbollah. The rebel jihadist offensive in the



© Thomas van Linge

north west of Syria is pushed back by the Syrian Arab Army and the National Defence Forces. The infighting and ideological strife between Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS is still ongoing at the time and reached new heights, therefore there are some shifts in rebel controlled territory. The map shows increase of ISIS territory in the north of Syria, but the jihadists also lost territory to

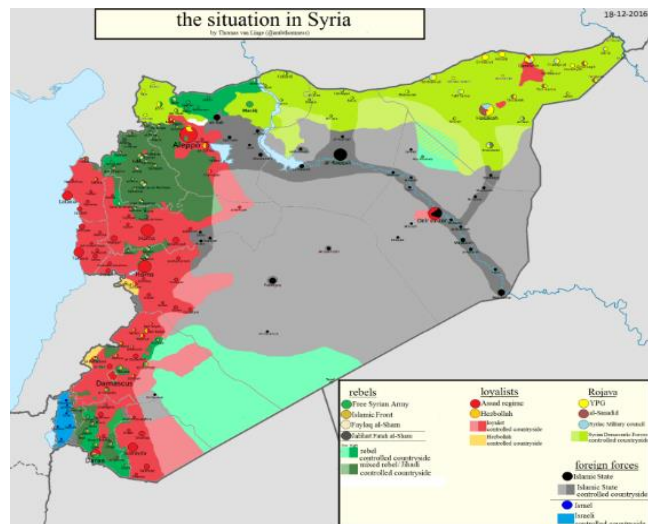


© Thomas van Linge

<sup>139</sup> Oudheusden, *Het Midden-Oosten*: 187-220.



Assad and his regime. Furthermore, we can see that Jabhat al-Nusra occupies more territory than it did before. The final map shown on this page dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2016. The map shows territories lost for both Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. YPG has lost almost all its territory to the Syrian Democratic Forces.



© Thomas van Linge

### 3.4 Regional context of the civil war

The Syrian Civil war knows different layers, first the situation on the ground, the rebels against Assad, the regional context and finally rivalry between the United States and Russia/China. The rift between the United States and Russia and China, I will leave out of consideration in my thesis, but the regional context needs some attention.

An important driver of the Syrian civil is the involvement of other countries in the Middle East. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and to a lesser extend the United Arab Emirates are involved in important aspects of the civil war, their role influences the calculations, positioning, behaviour and fortunes of fundamental Syrian players.<sup>140</sup> According to Emile Hokayem, the regional competition has revealed and deepened the fault lines that cross Syrian politics and society, also it has exacerbated the polarisation of the Middle East.<sup>141</sup> The regional division is between Shi'i and Sunni Muslims, with Syria and Iran on one side and Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states on the other. The Sunni regimes, feared Iran and thought that the country agitate their Shia societies. The Saudi kingdom sympathises with the Sunni insurgents, and as a member of the Arab League, the kingdom took the lead in finding a solution, with the condition that Assad would be replaced.<sup>142</sup> According to Hokayem, the contest between the two countries has shaped the conflict in profound, lasting and unintended ways. Their competition has enduring strategic, ideological, sectarian and political dimensions that preceded, have affected and have been amplified by the struggle over

<sup>140</sup> Hokayem, Emile. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." *Adelphi Papers* 54, no. 447-448 (2014): 39-70.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-70

<sup>142</sup> Oudheusden, *Het Midden-Oosten*: 187-220.

Syria.<sup>143</sup>

The division between Iran and Saudi Arabia is both religious and of political nature. The religious component is the ancient division between the Shia and Sunna, both countries, see themselves as the true holder of Islam, Iran being Shi'i and Saudi Arabia being Sunni Muslim. The political division has been shaped during several wars in the region. Grasping the nature of the Iranian-Saudi struggle is central to understanding the Syrian conflict. It is often portrayed as either a purely sectarian, pitting Sunnis against Shiites, or a traditional competition for regional hegemony. The truth is that the contest fuses elements of identity politics and geopolitics, states Hokayem. Iran and Saudi Arabia are both authoritarian theocracies that claim leadership of the region and the Islamic world. Both countries have fostered ideological and operational networks across the Middle East. According to Hokayem, the decade long deployment of sectarianism as an instrument of power has a perverse effect, one that transcends and obliges geopolitical considerations.<sup>144</sup> During the Syrian civil war, Iran is one of the most important pillars of the Assad regime. It provides weapons and militants, Saudi Arabia on the other hand supports the opposition. The multifaceted assistance has been key to the political survival of both the fragmented rebellion and Bashar al-Assad.<sup>145</sup> According to Hokayem, without foreign support they would not have survived until now, at least not in their current form.<sup>146</sup> Iran has proven to be more competent and committed than its Gulf rivals; the expertise and strategic skills it deployed in support of the regime has facilitated Assad's recovery from serious setbacks in 2012. On the other hand, the civil war has exposed not only the political and operational limitations of the Gulf countries, but also rivalries among them.

The Syrian war is often described as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. But the divergence between Gulf states, in particular Saudi Arabia and Qatar have a significant impact on the political and armed opposition. Qatar's calculations and behaviour have been shaped by expectations from the Gulf states and rifts among them. The contest between Qatar and Saudi Arabia has proven to be damaging for the Syrian opposition and the overall effort to overthrow Assad.<sup>147</sup> Qatar and Turkey encouraged to adopt political reforms and broaden his government to include mainstream Islamist without fundamentally changing the system. Qatar and Turkey hoped that this would benefit their Muslim Brotherhood allies,

---

<sup>143</sup> Hokayem, "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." 39-70.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 39-70.

<sup>145</sup> Oudheusden, *Het Midden-Oosten*: 187-220.

<sup>146</sup> Hokayem, "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." 39-70.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 39-70.

who were on the rise throughout the region. Assad proved unwilling to Islamist participation in his government or to part ways with Iran. The strategy assumed that the Brotherhood has significant influence on Syrian society, despite the widespread resentment of the movement. By late summer 2011, Gulf preferences had been shifted from on balance favourable to the Assad regime, to frustration with Assad. The Gulf monarchies aimed at mobilizing the Arab league and were were in favour of regime change.<sup>148</sup>

After ISIS joined the civil war, the organization has meaningfully affected competition in the Middle East, and has exposed the contradictory positions of the regional powers. The ISIS advance during 2013 and 2014 in both Syria and Iraq has led many Middle Eastern states to change policy. It is highly unlikely that ISIS will reduce regional differences and conflicts, as the positions of Iran and Saudi Arabia have not significantly changed. The Saudi Kingdom has prioritized the removal of Assad, seeing it as a necessary means to fight ISIS and solve the problems in Syria, while Iran claims that defeating ISIS requires the acceptance of the Assad regime and a consensus against Sunni extremism.<sup>149</sup> Therefore the rift between the two countries is growing and the regional problems are far from solved.

### **3.5 Sectarianism and the Syrian civil war**

The Syrian protests were initially spearheaded by educated urban youth, often of rural cross-sectarian origins. The Syrian uprising was non-violent, calling for a democratic civic state and making cross-sectarian appeals. The regime chose to ignore this and reach a pact with soft-liners in the opposition, choosing, instead, to instrumentalize sectarianism, depicting the protestors as jihadist and takfiris. The regime portrayed itself as the defender of secularism, in order to rally its minority and bourgeois base, who indeed became more alarmed as the uprising radicalized. The regime seems to have released key jihadists from jail, who quickly assumed leadership of jihadist movements, which seems to be a deliberate ploy to discredit the opposition. As the conflict turned more violent, the middle class who had promoted civic identity were marginalized between regime violence and the mobilization of undereducated, unemployed rural youth highly susceptible to the salafist message. The civil war led to a transformation of jihadist identity, activist turned fighters, bolstered by jihadi influx. As explained in the paragraph before, this led the competitive intervention of Sunni powers in the conflict on the side of the opposition and Iran and Shia militias on the regime

---

<sup>148</sup> Hokayem, "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." 39-70.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. 39-70.

side, combined with sectarian discourse in the regional media amplified sectarian representations of the conflict. As order broke down, the security dilemma kicked in with the fear of 'the other' leading all to seek protection in their identity group. This led to the creation of militias and sectarian cleansing in neighbourhoods. Syria has become the epicentre of a region-wide sectarian bipolarization between Sunni and Shia in which all were pressured to take sides.<sup>150</sup>

With the division of the country into regime and the opposition controlled areas, a dynamic that Hinnebusch calls 'competitive state formation' emerged, with each side trying to assert its right to rule. The Assad regime had adapted to civil war by adopting a more violent, exclusivist and de-centralized form of neo-patrimonialism. The most effective counters to the regime are the charismatic armed movements, recruiting through jihadist ideology, extreme sectarian discourse, but also with certain bureaucratic capabilities. While ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra are the most radical and effective, the differences in doctrine and practices between them and the likes of Ahrar ash-Sham is only a matter of degree. Their recruitment pool is the vast underclass that was subjected to regime violence and sees itself fighting for survival or without any economic alternative to employment as fighters. These movements' visions of order are broadly similar, charismatic authoritarian leadership; effective in mobilizing activist followers; yet exclusionary of all those who do not accept their visions of Islam. The main difference is between the Syria-centric jihadists who want to make Syria a jihadist state and ISIS which seeks a trans-state caliphate, between those that accept 'Sykes Picot'<sup>151</sup> and ISIS which would overthrow it.<sup>152</sup>

In light of this research Sunni-Shia sectarianism is important to understand the ongoing civil war and its rhetoric. But intra-movement rivalry between the jihadist movements also is a form of sectarianism.

---

<sup>150</sup> Hinnebusch, Raymond, 'Sectarianism and Regime Type in Syria' University of St. Andrews: <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/conference/sessions/panel-6c/> accessed on 11-07-2107.

<sup>151</sup> The Sykes Picot agreement dates from 1916 and was an agreement between the United Kingdom and France. The agreement defined their mutually agreed spheres of influence and control in the Middle East. The agreement was based on the premise that the Triple Entente would succeed in defeating the Ottoman Empire during World War I. The deal, is still mentioned when considering the region and its present-day conflicts. Contemporary jihadist reject the Sykes Picot agreement.

<sup>152</sup> Hinnebusch, Raymond, 'Sectarianism and Regime Type in Syria' University of St. Andrews: <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/conference/sessions/panel-6c/> accessed on 11-07-2107.

## 4. Framing and Othering

In this chapter I will answer the following questions: How do ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra describe themselves? And how do ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra frame the 'other'? And in what way is intra-movement framing visible in the media production of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra? And to what extent is contemporary Muslim extremism legitimized by the use of traditional Quranic teachings and prophetic traditions found in the hadith? I will answer these questions with the use of identity, framing and othering as theoretical concepts. This chapter gives a concise overview on how the movements view themselves, and how they shape images of the 'other', and the extent to which these images relate to the ideological differences explained in chapter two.

### 4.1 The media methods of ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Jabhat al-Nusra

Dabiq, Rumiya, Inspire, Resurgence and al-Risalah and statements and reports reveal how the movement frames and justifies its activities to particular audiences. Marcin Styszynski argues that ISIS could not succeed without its propaganda and communication strategies. Styszynski states that ISIS is the first jihadist organization which effectively exploits propaganda and media tools like internet websites, online journals and social media. ISIS communication strategy reflects the following channels; liturgical speeches and classic Arabic rhetoric, official media channels, internet forums and social media, and encrypted communication.<sup>153</sup> While analysing it is important to keep the intended audience in mind; I need to be aware that I as researcher am not necessarily the intended reader. The statements and articles I analyse are written for jihadist sympathizers and/or members of rival factions.

ISIS periodicals are published and promoted primarily in English, with translations into other languages, such as French, German, Russian, and Arabic. Dabiq lends insight into ISIS's claim to religious authority based on political control. Dabiq and al-Risalah explain how ISIS relates these programs to the requirement for military control. Magazines are not the only media ISIS uses, they publish on jihadi forums, they use twitter, Facebook and they have a news agency; al-Amaq. Al-Amaq News is a pro-Islamic State media outlet that emerged in August 2014 reporting on ISIS's activity in Syria. Dabiqs and Rumiya's content carefully builds off a basic set of Islamic religious concepts such as, 'khalifa', 'takfir' and 'hijra', but also

---

<sup>153</sup> Styszynski, M. (2016). ISIS Communication Strategy. *Przegląd Strategiczny*, (9), 171-180.

hadiths' and the Quran are often cited and used to argue for or against something. As such, it is likely that the magazine aims to communicate both to enemies and to potential ISIS supporters in the West. The target audience essential message of the Dabiq series differs significantly from the Western-language messaging campaign of al-Qaeda. Begun in 2010, al-Qaeda's English-language magazine Inspire does articulate religious justification of the organisation's actions.

Dabiq's first issue, published digitally on the 5 of July 2014 (a month after the fall of Mosul), narrates the ideology upon which ISIS is founded. The issue provides readers with battlefield updates, administrative reporting, and religious commentary. Dabiq's first issue, *The Return of the Kalifah* was published in the Islamic year 1435 during the month Ramadan. The Islamic calendar<sup>154</sup> starts when Muhammed and his followers migrated from Mecca to Medina and established the first umma, this is called the hijra. The name of the magazine is taken from a hadith: "As for the name of the magazine, then it is taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab (Aleppo) in Sham. This place was mentioned in a hadith<sup>155</sup> describing some of the events of the Malahim (what is sometimes referred to as Armageddon in English). One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders will take place near Dabiq".<sup>156</sup> The second edition and following issues follow the same format. The main effort of this outreach campaign appears to be the explanation for the caliphate's existence. Rumiya also is an online magazine published by ISIS for propaganda and recruitment. The magazine has replaced Dabiq and was first published in September 2016. The name Rumiya (Rome) refers to a Hadith in which Prophet Muhammed said that Muslims would conquer Constantinople and Rome.

Inspire is a magazine published by AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), and the first issue was published the summer of 2010, by al-Malahem Media. The magazine is published in English and is one of the many ways al-Qaeda uses the internet to reach its audience. Inspire in al-Qaeda's words "This Islamic Magazine is geared towards making the Muslim a mujahedeen in Allah's path. Our intent is to give the most accurate presentation of Islam as followed by the Salaf as-Salih<sup>157</sup>. Our concern for the umma is worldwide and thus we try to touch upon all major issues while giving attention to the events unfolding in the Arabian Peninsula as we witness it on the ground. Jihad has been deconstructed in our age

---

<sup>154</sup> The Islamic or Hijri calendar is a lunar calendar consisting of 12 months in a year of 354 or 355 days.

<sup>155</sup> A collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Koran.

<sup>156</sup> 'Introduction' *Dabiq* no. 1, July 2014: 11.

<sup>157</sup> The pious predecessors.

and thus its revival in comprehension and endeavour is of utmost importance for the Caliphate's manifestation."<sup>158</sup> The mention of the establishment of a caliphate proves its importance for the jihadist discourse. Numerous international and domestic extremists motivated by radical interpretation have been influenced by the magazine *Inspire*. The magazine is an important brand-building tool for all al-Qaeda branches and affiliates. The media method of al-Qaeda and ISIS differs in ideological approach the main difference between the two is that al-Qaeda is primarily focussing on 'the West' as the enemy, where ISIS also states that Muslims who do not live according to the organisation's ideology and rules are the enemy. Al-Qaeda is leaning more towards an approach of getting the blindsided Muslims back on track - they are not the enemy, they just need to find the righteous path. However, *Inspire* specifically focuses on encouraging lone-wolf Western-based terrorists to attack the West. *Inspire* serves more as a how-to guide for individual attacks than an articulation of an overall religious, military, and political vision.<sup>159</sup> Al-Qaeda guides jihadists from all over the world to perform attacks: "We finally call upon the Muslims in America to take up arms in defence of their religion and the Islamic umma. Lone jihad is not monopolized by al-Qaeda or any other group, therefore we call upon all active jihadi groups, to adopt and build upon the idea of Lone jihad and call towards it."<sup>160</sup>

Jabhat al-Nusra publishes *al-Risalah* magazine, and it roughly follows the same format as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, but it differs from *Inspire* because the magazine is more regionally orientated. *Risalah* means message, either oral or written; letter, essay, treatise, monograph. It is a literary/scholarly form of varying length and content found in a wide range of fields, including theology<sup>161</sup>. *Al-Risalah* magazine most likely refers to a divine message. The magazine frames the West, in particular the United States and its allies as the enemy, naming them crusaders, just like ISIS and al-Qaeda. But the format of the magazine focussed more on the jihad in Sham, just like ISIS, while al-Qaeda actively promotes attacks in the West. *Al-Risalah* is first published in July 2015. *Al-Risalah* Media also published statements either by spokesmen of the organisation or Jawlani, the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra.

ISIS is more regionally orientated, while also depicting the West as its enemy and

---

<sup>158</sup> 'Letter from the editor' *Inspire*, no. 1 June 2010: 2.

<sup>159</sup> Gambhir, Harleen K. "Dabiq: The strategic messaging of the Islamic State." *Institute for the Study of War* 15 (2014).

<sup>160</sup> Orlando operation, *Inspire Guide*, 17-6-2016: [https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/al-qacc84\\_idah-in-the-arabian-peninsula-22inspire-guide-orlando-operation22.pdf](https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/al-qacc84_idah-in-the-arabian-peninsula-22inspire-guide-orlando-operation22.pdf) (accessed on 20-04-2017).

<sup>161</sup> 'Risalah.' In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, [http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2019?\\_hi=1&\\_pos=1](http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2019?_hi=1&_pos=1) (accessed 27-06-2017).

performing attacks in Western countries the organisation focuses also on establishing a caliphate and openly despises in particular Shia Muslims, while al-Qaeda tends to be more moderate regarding other Muslims. Both organisations could not succeed without appropriate propaganda and communication strategies that enable them to recruit and inspire insurgents, including foreign volunteers. Propaganda techniques play a crucial role in motivation and agitation process that encourages young people to join the battlefield in Syria and Iraq and to carry out terrorist attacks in the West.

Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) now the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, published a media training guide on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2011. The al-Furqan foundation, the media arm of ISI, which is at the time still an affiliate of al-Qaeda, published the guide for individuals wishing to engage in the media jihad. The introductions to the guide and the episode each emphasize the importance of media work in jihad, and encourage those individuals who cannot participate in physical jihad to contribute to the cause in ways of the media. Media jihad allows the fighters to combat enemy propaganda, incite others to participate in jihad and support the mujahidin, and 'vex' the enemy.<sup>162</sup>

The media usage of the organisations is roughly the same. All three publish a magazine, statements by leaders and spokespeople. Jawlani (al-Nusra leader) has also appeared on al-Jazeera, he was being interviewed. ISIS also makes use of propaganda videos, but that difference is mostly due to the fact that they have established a caliphate and have the need to show the mujahidin and the world that life in the caliphate is good. Inspire is more a guide and Dabiq, Rumiya, Resurgence and al-Risalah are more a glossy. The difference of their media usage is merely ideological and not methodological.

## 4.2 Shaping identities

ISIS members are righteous Muslims and the readers of Dabiq are as well. After the establishment of the caliphate ISIS felt the need to explain their actions to their audience. In the foreword to the second issue of Dabiq named *The Flood* the author of the foreword states that readers must have some questions regarding their responsibility towards the caliph. The author states that the first priority must be to perform hijra from wherever the reader is located to the Islamic State. If for whatever reason people do not have the ability

---

<sup>162</sup> ISI Media Training Guide, 20-05-2011: <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/7290/AQI20110520.1.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20-04-2017).



to perform hijra, you should organize pledges of allegiance in your location. Aron Y. Zelin states that ISIS portrays themselves as winners, competent and pious, while its enemies are portrayed as unjust and unbelievers.<sup>163</sup> ISIS portrays the caliphate as the only place where you can be a true Muslim. People from all ages and backgrounds perform hijra to the Islamic State. The eighty year old Imam Muhammad Amin spent most of his life in Turkmenistan, but decided to make hijra to the Islamic State, with his grandsons, daughter and wife, after seeing a video of the killing of his son next to the mujahidin. He appears in a video named 'Go Forth, Whether Light or heavy - Wilayat Halab'. The title of this propaganda video is a reference to the Quranic verse 9:41: "Go forth, whether light or heavy, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the cause of God. That is better for you, if only you knew."<sup>164</sup> In the video Muhammad Amin is interviewed. The imam explains that he was subject to oppression in Turkistan at the hands of the Chinese Tawaghit for sixty years. Muslim women wearing hijab are beaten and arrested. The female members of the family therefore had to stay inside of the house, and Muslims were not allowed to openly practice their religion. The oppression and not being able to perform jihad was the reason for this man to perform hijra to the Islamic State. "We came to the land of Khilafah and are happy with what it is upon."<sup>165</sup> Even though the man was imam in Turkistan<sup>166</sup>, he explains not being able to have follow true Islam completely, now he is in the caliphate. "Before I reach Sham, some people have told me to join some specific groups. They said, that the nations of kufr have gathered against the Islamic State and they bomb it every day. I told them if sixty disbelievers gathered against one Muslim, what would our obligation towards him be? It's the same as if sixty nations gather against one state. If we don't support the Islamic State we will see the recompense for abandoning it on the day of judgement."<sup>167</sup> The man says that he, despite his old age, went to training camp and after receiving a weapon he asked for permission to fight in battles. He regrets not getting permission. Apparently what ISIS wants to tell with this narrative is both that ISIS is a place where everybody is accepted, but also that they take

---

<sup>163</sup> Zelin, Aaron Y. "Picture or it didn't happen: A snapshot of the Islamic State's official media output." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015).

<sup>164</sup> 'Go Forth, Whether Light or heavy- Wilayat Halab' June 2015: <http://jihadology.net/2015/06/03/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-go-forth-whether-light-or-heavy-wilayat-%E1%B8%A5alab/> (accessed on 29-02-2017).

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Turkistan, literally means 'Land of the Turks' in Persian. It refers to an area in Central Asia between Siberia to the north and Tibet, India and Afghanistan to the south, the Caspian Sea to the west and the Gobi Desert to the east.

<sup>167</sup> 'Go Forth, Whether Light or heavy- Wilayat Halab' June 2015: <http://jihadology.net/2015/06/03/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-go-forth-whether-light-or-heavy-wilayat-%E1%B8%A5alab/> (accessed on 27-02-2017).

care of the elderly, they do not just recruit anyone. The old man regrets not getting permission, but now he can enjoy his old days in the caliphate.

The video also shows footage of a hospital and a doctor stating that that the hospitals are better equipped and the doctors' medical skills have improved. "We can treat our brothers injured in battle without any difficulty."<sup>168</sup> The video is propaganda, and the Islamic State is shown from its best side; inhabitants are able to be true Muslims, their children get proper education and medical care is portrayed to be perfect. Also the setting of the video is part of the framing process, the old man is interviewed with green fertile looking land and a beautiful flowering tree in the background, suggesting that the environment in the Islamic State is beautiful and peaceful.

ISIS not only makes its own identity with the use of video footage, their image is also made in statements. Al-Adnani, ISIS former (he is killed) official spokesman addresses the mujahidin in his statements. He praises them for their accomplishments and their won battles and he tries to motivate and protect the fighters from words by their jihadist rivals. He tells them they achieve great things by Allah. "O soldiers of the Islamic State, what a great thing you have achieved by Allah! Your reward is upon Him. By Allah, He has healed the chests of the believers through the killing of the nusayriyyah (Alawites) and rafidah (Shiites) at your hands. He has filled the hearts of the disbelievers and hypocrites with rage through you. What a great thing you have achieved by Allah!"<sup>169</sup> He comforts the ISIS combatants by explaining that the prophet himself had to fight the disbelievers, he was mocked and bullied like just like the mujahidin of the Islamic State. He comforts the fighters by telling them their pain can never be as great as the prophets' pain must have been. "O soldiers of the Islamic State and its sons everywhere, listen and comprehend. If the people belie you, reject your state and your call, and mock your caliphate, then know that your Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) was belied. His call was rejected. He was mocked. If your people fight you, accuse you with the worst of accusations, and describe you with the worst of all traits, then know that the people of the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) fought him, expelled him, and accused him with matters worse than those you

---

<sup>168</sup> 'Go Forth, Whether Light or heavy- Wilayat Halab' June 2015: <http://jihadology.net/2015/06/03/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-go-forth-whether-light-or-heavy-wilayat-%E1%B8%A5alab/> (accessed on 27-02-2017).

<sup>169</sup> Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani ash-Shami 'Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful' September 9, 2014 <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16495/ADN20140922.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 29-03-2017).

have been accused with.”<sup>170</sup>

Jabhat al-Nusra describes righteous Muslims as people who fight for the sake of Allah: ‘he kills and gets killed until he meets Allah’. Jabhat al-Nusra portrays itself as the truly Islamic movement, as ISIS and al-Qaeda do, but they emphasize that they welcome everybody. They profile themselves as the jihadist movement for everyone, even women perform hijra. And even without husbands, they are welcomed. A woman from Great Britain tells in an interview with *al-Risalah* about her hijra to Sham. She explains that at first she expected some difficulties because she was a mum of three children without a husband. She still wanted to fulfil her obligation as a ‘good’ Muslim and perform hijra. A friend of the family brought her in contact with one of the al-Nusra fighters. He promised to marry her upon arrival. “To my surprise, he was willing to take on me, a widow, with my three kids.”<sup>171</sup> Her story tries to counter the thought that women alone are not welcome in the land of Sham, on the contrary, they are welcomed with their children and they will marry one of the mujahidin. The interview is an example of how al-Nusra tries to shape the image of a movement for everyone. In the second issue of *al-Risalah* an Australian foreign fighter who has been active for al-Qaeda for approximately 14 years, since mid-2001, is interviewed. The man at the time when the issue was published, acted on behalf of Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. He addresses the issue of Islamic unity and how al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra deal with the issue. “All of us Mujahideen, distance ourselves greatly from the takfir (extremism) methodology and ideology. We see the Ummah as one, and in a very precarious state. So we are trying to bring the Muslim Ummah into a new age of Islamic honour, and not to differentiate and feel that those that don’t come up to the ‘standard’ of certain people are kuffar and/or appostates.”<sup>172</sup> He clearly talks about ISIS, referring to them as a group who differentiates, while on the other hand Jabhat al-Nusra is a group who includes and tries to bring the umma together.

The leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), one of the oldest branches of the organization, explains that al-Qaeda’s prime concern is defending Islam and Muslim countries. Sheikh Abu Basir Nasir al-Wuhayshi, the leader of AQAP in 2010 is interviewed in the first issue of *Inspire*: “The organization of al-Qa`idah is among these generations of

---

<sup>170</sup> Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami ‘Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful’ September 9, 2014 <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16495/ADN20140922.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 29-03-2017).

<sup>171</sup> ‘Hijra My Story’, *al-Risalah* no. 1 July 2015: 17.

<sup>172</sup> ‘A Call from Usama Hamza Australi’ *al-Risalah* no. 2 October 2015: 11-18.

Muslims who are carrying the responsibility of calling to Islam and defending the holy sites, the religion, honor and land since its foundation before three decades. Since 1990 when the Americans occupied the land of revelation, the youth of the Peninsula of Islam are defending their religion, their holy places and their land which their Messenger, peace be upon him, ordered to expel from it the disbelievers.”<sup>173</sup> During the interview al-Wuhayshi frames AQAP as the most dangerous and effective branch of al-Qaeda. He explains: “Allah has blessed us with effective operations against the transgressing Americans and we ask Allah to grant us more. The interest shown towards AQAP is because of the strategic importance of the Arabian Peninsula. This the place of the revelation, the birthplace of Islam, the land of the two holy Mosques and the blood of the sahaba runs through the veins of its sons.”<sup>174</sup> Sahaba are companions and the word refers to the companions of the prophet Muhammad. Therefore it is a reference to the early Islamic period and fits perfectly in the salafist discourse.<sup>175</sup> This reference to the early Islamic period is used commonly in media published by jihadist, their statements, magazines and videos are full with connotation to the time of the prophet. ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra make use of this discourse.

### 4.3 Othering enemies and the use of invectives

ISIS has many enemies; the ‘Christian Crusader Nations’, *Rafida*<sup>176</sup> (the Shiites), the *Nusayris* (a derogatory word for the regime of Bashar al-Assad, which is perceived as Alawite instead of secular) and the *Sahwa* Coalitions. The difference between Alawites and Sunnis in Syria have sharpened since the beginning of the uprising against the regime and president Bashar al-Assad, whose family is Alawite. The Assad regime is secular, however key positions in his regime and Assad’s army are held by Alawite officers. The reason for the tension between Sunni and Alawite Muslims can be seen as political rather than religious. The Sahwah or Sahawat consist of Sunni Muslims, who resist the Islamic State, especially other jihadi groups.<sup>177</sup> The term Sahwa or Sahawat is a relatively recent connotation; the name comes from Sunni tribes who allied with the United States and coalition forces in Iraq between 2006 and 2011.<sup>178</sup> The military defeats that ISIS suffered at the hands of these Sunni tribes,

<sup>173</sup> ‘Interview with Shayks Abu Basir’, *Inspire* no. June 2010: 13-17.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-17.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-17.

<sup>176</sup> Sunni designation of Shiites, who rejected authority of the first two Caliphs.

<sup>177</sup> “From the Battle of Al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions,” *Dabiq* no. 11, September 2015: 46-59.

<sup>178</sup> Kilcullen, David. *The accidental guerrilla: Fighting small wars in the midst of a big one*. Oxford University Press, 2011: 155.

pushed al-Baghdadi and his organization to the back stages, as the Arab Spring began to topple long-standing Arab regimes left, right, and centre.<sup>179</sup> Sahwa or Sahawat is now used as an invective.

Dabiq has a recurring section named 'The Allies of al-Qa'idah in Sham', the articles are mostly about Sahwa coalitions which either included or allied with Jabhat al-Nusra and its leader Jawlani. The Sahwa coalitions and Jabhat al-Nusra, follow al-Qaeda and its 'so called ideology'. They either address Jawlani as a traitor or as an apostate. They either talk about, 'traitor al-Jawlānī', 'Jawlānī's treachery', 'Jawlānī's betrayal' or the 'apostate Jawlānī front'.<sup>180</sup> In a eulogy for one of the ISIS fighters who first was a member of Jabhat al-Nusra Jawlani is described as someone who sheds the blood of the mujahidin, the dead ISIS fighter saw Jawlani's faults and decided to perform hijra to the Islamic State. "He began witnessing firsthand the emerging signs of misguidance in the policies of al-Jawlani and his cronies, including al-Jawlani's willingness to make concessions in the religion and sell the blood of the mujahidin" Jawlani is seen as a traitor because he entered Syria without Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Baghdadi had the ambition to expand the Islamic State of Iraq into Syria, but al-Qaeda's leadership decided that Jabhat al-Nusra's would be the al-Qaeda branch in Syria. Therefore Jawlani and not Baghdadi expanded into Syria.

Jabhat al-Nusra tries to counter the ISIS acquisition of being Sahawat. They cannot be Sahawat because their blood is spilled for the sake of Allah. "Subhan Allah, how can it be that we want a secular state or a democracy and that we at Sahawat when our blood is spilled for the sake of Allah, and the coalition of crusaders from arabs and non-arabs are bombing us night and day? I am astonished we can be Sahawat when our courts are ruled by the laws of Allah and the people of Hisba are on our streets calling for the good and prohibiting the evil? How can we be Sahawat when the schools of Ahlu Sunnah increase and the schools of Ahlu Bida decrease? How can we be Sahawat when sisters who used to be immodest are now filling the streets of Ash-Shaam with Niqaab?"<sup>181</sup>

ISIS claims to be superior over al-Qaeda, and the process of othering plays a significant role in enemy framing. 'Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group constructs one or many dominated out-groups by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for

---

<sup>179</sup> Moubayed, Under the black Flag: 17.

<sup>180</sup> The Allies of al-Qa'idah in Sham' *Dabiq* no. 7-12. (2015-2016).

<sup>181</sup> 'The Keys of Jannah, a message from shiekh al-Mujahid Abdullah al Muhaysini' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 14.

potential discrimination', as explained in chapter 1.<sup>182</sup> Othering is the process which leads to otherness. In an article published January 2016, in *Dabiq*. ISIS addresses an article published by 'crusader' Micheal Morrel, *Dabiq* quoted the former deputy director of the CIA, "ISIS has gained affiliates faster than al-Qaeda ever did. From none a year ago, there are now militant groups that have sworn allegiance to ISIS in nearly 20 countries. They have conducted attacks that have killed Americans, and they carry the potential to grab large amounts of territory...", paradoxically they use the words of the enemy (USA) to claim superiority over al-Qaeda.<sup>183</sup>

The world is, according to ISIS divided into two camps.<sup>184</sup> The caliphate is portrayed as a space where normality and tranquillity reign. "In the midst of a raging war with multiple fronts and numerous enemies, life goes on in the Islamic State"<sup>185</sup> reads the introduction of an article on the infrastructure of the caliphate. It describes how ISIS cares for its people and followers living in the Islamic State, they draw a parallel to the time of the Prophet who, according to the author of the article in *Dabiq* would appoint a deputy to remain in the city and look after the affairs of the Muslim families.<sup>186</sup> In other articles the good life in the Islamic State is emphasized as well as healthcare, technological advancement and higher education is deemed to be very important in the caliphate.<sup>187</sup> ISIS also stresses the importance of the caliphate being the only state ruled by sharia law.

ISIS is not the only group trying to taunt its enemies. The leader of al-Qaeda, al-Zawahiri refers to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his followers as *khawarij* or *kharijites*.<sup>188</sup> The invective refers to an early breakaway faction of Muslims in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The early secession of Arab tribes refused to accept central authority. These *khawarij* were considered extreme for framing other Muslims as disbelievers because they supposedly were not 'pure' enough in their faith. Al-Qaeda and *Jabhat al-Nusra* use the term as a synonym for 'extremist', or other derogatory adjectives, to describe the members and the leadership of ISIS. For example in the first issue of *al-Risalah* ISIS is described as the *khawarij*, they are wrong in their perception of Islam. "They deviated and deviated others and became the dogs

---

<sup>182</sup> Stazak, 'Otherness/Othering'.

<sup>183</sup> 'In the words of the enemy', *Dabiq* no. 13, January 2016: 46-47.

<sup>184</sup> 'The world has divided into two camps' *Dabiq* no. 1, July 2014: 11.

<sup>185</sup> 'A window into the Islamic State,' *Dabiq*, no. 4, October 2014: 27.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>187</sup> 'Healthcare in the *Khilāfah*' *Dabiq*, no. 9, May 2015: 24.

<sup>188</sup> The *Khawarij* are members of a group that appeared during the first century of Islam, during the first *fitna*. *Khawarij/Kharajites* refers to an early secession of Arab tribes that refused to accept central authority.

of hellfire.”<sup>189</sup> Dogs of hellfire is a reference to a hadith by Abdullah ibn Abu Afa, there is discussion on the authenticity of this hadith.<sup>190</sup> In the same issue of the magazine ISIS is framed treacherous, the author of the article fears an attack of ISIS because Jabhat- al Nusra is fighting the regime. “We have used all our fighters for this operation, I fear that Da’esh (IS) will take advantage of us being busy fighting the regime (and attack us from behind)”<sup>191</sup> eventually the author argues that the mujahidin should not have fear because Allah will protect them. “Oh Mujahideen in the path of Allah! Fear Allah! It is not permissible for a Mujahid to leave the land of Islam, which was liberated by the blood of the Mujahideen, to fall into their (IS) hands unjustly. Regardless of what you consider them, Khawarij, transgressors (Bughat) or a group that refuses the law of Allah (At-Taaifah Al-Mumtaniah), the scholars are unanimous that repelling an aggressor is necessary (wajib) whatever the pretext is they attack us with, and which they use, today they have transgressed against us, killed our Mujahideen and distorted our Jihad. Allah is sufficient for us and he is a good protector from them and what they are doing.”<sup>192</sup>

ISIS tries to counter the acquisition of being khawarij by claiming they are not as aggressive as the khawarij. “Jawlani’s Front, the Front of Betrayal and Treachery they fight us under the claim that we’re aggressors & do not want Shariah court. If we requested only I proof they would not be able to provide it, this claims are false & accusations are false, they’re without proof. And not a single positive attribute was mentioned, as if ISIS is pure evil, and as if all the evil in Syria/Iraq is because of ISIS.”<sup>193</sup> Al-Adnani tries to convince the mujahidin of ISIS innocence in a statement published on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2014, addressing the acquisitions of Jabhat al-Nusra. Abu Bakr and his followers are not khawarij, and if the mujahidin are doubtful, they should come see for themselves. ISIS consequently feels obliged to deny with some vehemence that there are similarities between their own movement and the khawarij. “Be cautious o you who wants to fight Jihad, don’t be deceived and fight the Mujahidin. Our doors are open, come and see for yourself. For by God you will find us the harshest people against extremists and Khawarij. What is unjust is that accusations are thrown at us without proof, & if you ask for proof they will say: A trusted source told me.

---

<sup>189</sup> ‘This is Al Qaeda or have they forgotten?’ *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 27-28.

<sup>190</sup> Ibn Abu Afa supposedly reported: “I heard the messenger of Allah, peace and blessing be upon him, say: ‘The rebels (khawarij) are the dogs of hellfire.’”

<sup>191</sup> ‘Halab under Fire’ *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 31-32.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>193</sup> Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ‘about the allegations made against ISIS’ March 7, 2014 <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16378/ADN20140307.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 29-03-2017).



Subhanallah! What if source is opponent of ours? And if you ask proof for us being Khawarij, they will say because they kill Muslim! Our fighters in Iraq and Syria are waging battles and fighting day and night, our guns do not separate from us even in our sleeps.”<sup>194</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra calls ISIS, the ‘modern khawarij’.<sup>195</sup> Sheikh Abu Mariya al-Qahtani, one of the Jabhat al-Nusra leaders acknowledges faults within al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra. “Yes the organization made mistakes, they accepted Bayah from people who do not carry its ideology or policy or its methodology.” One of these people was Hussayn ibn Mahmoud, an Islamic cleric who spreads his ‘evil dawa to an extremism gang of Khawarij (ISIS)’<sup>196</sup>the problem is that people believe he is part of al-Qaeda, while he has nothing to do with the organization, neither ‘intellectually or organizationally’.<sup>197</sup>

Al-Nusra not only writes articles on ISIS and how unjust and bad the organisation is for the entire umma, they use other art forms to describe their ideology and view on the world and being a good Muslim, such as poems. In the first edition of al-Risalah they published a poem to explain how Jabhat al-Nusra feels about ‘extremist’ who make takfir and declare war against mujahidin. The same issue also consists of an ‘exclusive’ interview with a foreign fighter named Muslim Shishani, who is introduced as an inspiring mujahidin. He has ‘struck fear into the hearts of evil men’ and is a courageous fighter. He has been fighting under the wings of a



© al-Risalah

man who is loved very much in jihadist circles, Khattab Rahimullah. Shishani explains that meeting Khattab changed his life. “The most important lesson, apart from Islamic Knowledge, that I learnt from him was how to deal with the people.” Once Khattab got

<sup>194</sup> Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ‘about the allegations made against ISIS’ March 7, 2014 <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16378/ADN20140307.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 29-03-2017).

<sup>195</sup> Al-Maqalat, ‘Jabhat an-Nusra, ‘Their perfect timing for an unpredicted decision’ <https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2016/07/25/jabhat-an-nusra-their-perfect-timing-for-an-unpredicted-decision/> (accessed on 09-06-2017).

<sup>196</sup> Shaykh Abu Mariyah Al-Qahtani, ‘al-Qaeda those who claim adherence to it.’ <https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2015/06/25/shaykh-abu-mariyah-al-qahtani-al-qaeda-and-those-who-claim-adherence-to-it/> (accessed on 09-06-2017).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.



*shahada* it was very hard for the mujahidin to carry on.<sup>198</sup> Shadada, literally the testimony, is an Islamic creed declaring belief in the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's prophet. The Shadada<sup>199</sup> is recited as the last words by Muslims who are dying. By using this description of Khattab's dying, Shishani emphasizes what a great Muslim his leader was.

#### 4.4 Case study: al-Urduni

Dabiq often includes articles about pledges of allegiance from groups in the Middle East who joined, for example Ansar al-Islam<sup>200</sup>, but also defectors from other jihadist groups, for example Jabaht al-Nusra in Syria. They publish these articles to emphasize their superiority over other jihadist factions. The impression these articles give is that of an unstoppable force, showing that "the mujahidin gain further momentum in their war against the armies of kufr".<sup>201</sup> Defectors are interesting for ISIS because they can explain why they chose to become an ISIS member instead of an al-Nusra fighter. The defector is proof of ISIS superiority, since he experienced the other group and decided ISIS was the better option. In June 2015 Dabiq published an interview with al-Urduni, a former follower of al-Jawlani and a member of Jabhat al-Nusra. I have done a con/text analysis of the interview with al-Urduni and I will try to find similarities in other text.

Al- Urduni is introduced as a brother who broke off from the Jawlani front after Allah blessed him by showing him the contradictions in the methodology and policies of the Jawlani Front.<sup>202</sup> The text is very clearly a producer's project, meaning that the producer (ISIS) has a very clear goal in mind while creating the text. The message Dabiq wants to

---

<sup>198</sup> 'Reaping the Fruits exclusive interview with Muslim Shishani' *al-Risalah* no. July 1, 2015: 37-38.

<sup>199</sup> The Shahada is found on Islamic Flags. Wahhabism used the shahada on their flags since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ibn Saud added a sword to the flag. The modern Flag of Saudi Arabia, introduced in 1973, also has the shahada on it. More radical organisations also used the Shahada on their flags, the Taliban used a white flag with the shahada inscribed in black. The various jihadist organisations have followed this example. The shahada written on a green background has been used by supporters of Hamas since 2000. In 2006, ISIS designed a flag using the shahada phrase written in white on black background. Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda also use the Shadada on their flags.

<sup>200</sup> Al-Ansar means "helpers" - Often seen in conjunction with "Muhajireen" (travellers, those who make hajj). Comes from the people of Medina who welcomed Mohammed and his followers (see, e.g., Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar). They welcomed them after they were forced to leave Mecca in 622. They helped Mohammed with the establishment of the first Islamic community. Ansar al-Islam is one of the many groups fighting in Syria.

<sup>201</sup> 'Dozens of "Nusra" and "Ahrār" fighters repent and join the Islamic State' *Dabiq* ISSUE 7, 2015: 38-39.; 'Wilāyat khurāsān and the bay'āt from the qawqāz,' *Dabiq*, no. 7, February 2015: 36.

<sup>202</sup> Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani is one of the leaders of Jabhat Fath al-Sham. Previous he was the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra. When the al-Urduni refers to members of the of the Jawlani front he talks about followers of Jawlani, members of Jabhat al-Nusra.

deliver to its readers is that the Islamic State is the perfect embodiment of Allah's will. This must be true because even the people who are (former) members of rival factions think ISIS is superior. The aim of the interviewer and interviewee is in this case similar, they both want the readers to know that ISIS is the truly Islamic organisation, both ideologically and politically. Al-Urduni explains that he witnessed the leadership of Jabhat al-Nusra support the Free Syrian army with weapons and helped them fight ISIS. He names leaders of different factions in different parts of Syria and Iraq, all of whom were making wrong political choices. He says: "So I decided to keep myself distant and move to the south".<sup>203</sup> He explains that just before he made hijra<sup>204</sup> to the Islamic State, he had spoken with a representative of Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda.<sup>205</sup> Al-Urduni and the representative of al-Zawahiri talked for hours and al-Urduni told him everything he knew about the plots and everything that he thought was wrong with the leadership. "He said to me, 'Well, my respected brother, we know more than what you have said and we have gathered more of these grave matters than you.' So I was shocked! He said, 'Yes, I have with me more than what you have mentioned.' I told him, Subhanallah! On Judgement Day, this will be proof against you!"<sup>206</sup> In this quote the 'I' is al-Urduni and 'he' refers to representative of al-Zawahiri. Allah will condemn his action on judgement day.

Al-Urduni uses a lot of Islamic terminology, knowing his audience is Muslim and ideology plays a significant role in legitimizing actions and decisions. The use of Islamic references to the Koran or Hadith is important to form a discourse. Al-Urduni makes use of the word takfir quite often.<sup>207</sup> He also uses words as *fitna*<sup>208</sup> (meaning something similar to chaos) and sharia (the Islamic Law). Sharia is very important in the Islamic State, they apply the strictest version of Sharia.<sup>209</sup> The use of hijra is also interesting, a connotation to the time of the prophet, he could have said 'moved to the Islamic State' or 'joined the Islamic State'. He specifically chooses to use the word hijra to make a reference to the beginning of

---

<sup>203</sup> 'Interview with Abu Samir al-Urduni' *Dabiq* no. 10, July 2015: 71-77.

<sup>204</sup> Hijra means migration or withdrawal. Typically the concept refers to the migration of Muhammad and his followers/ companions from Mecca to Medina.

<sup>205</sup> 'Interview with Abu Samir al-Urduni' *Dabiq* no. 10, July 2015: 71-77.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-77.

<sup>207</sup> Declaring someone an unbeliever or infidel is named takfir in Islam. Takfir is described as the pronouncements that someone is an unbeliever, a *kafir*, and therefore no longer a Muslim. In the modern era takfir is used for sanctioning violence against leaders of Islamic states who are perceived as inadequate religious, in other words they are not religious enough. Some modern radical movements like al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat Fath al-Sham use a broader definition of takfir to legitimize their extreme violence.

<sup>208</sup> Fitna means chaos, civil strife/war, reference to early Islamic conflicts, as well as the danger of chaos when Islamic law is not applied.

<sup>209</sup> There are different schools of Islamic Law.

Islam, to prove his knowledge of Islam and Islamic history, building the salafism discourse, in which al-Urduni and other jihadist position. Al-Urduni tries to restore and re-enact the early period of Islam and therefore al-Urduni refers to this period in Islamic history. He is building a dominant moral discourse by referring to the early Islamic period.

In the interview al-Urduni talks about the situation in Syria and Iraq around two years prior to the interview, about the period of infighting during the Syrian civil war. The interview is published in 2015, a year before Jabhat al-Nusra distanced itself from al-Qaeda. Jawlani is one of the leaders of al-Nusra and al-Nusra is at the time still a part of al-Qaeda. The leader of al-Qaeda is Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>210</sup> He talks about a period where there supposedly was a plot carried out by leaders from different al-Qaeda branches, they worked with The Free Syrian Army against the Islamic State. In this period al-Urduni was part of Jabhat al-Nusra, which was one of the groups which plotted against ISIS. He criticizes leadership and blames them for not listening to their people. The soldiers of the Jawlani front were not even aware that they were fighting ISIS and they would not have fought them if they would had been aware he explains. According to al-Urduni: “most of the soldiers of the ‘Islamic’ factions that fought the Islamic State at the time did not approve war against it”.<sup>211</sup> Important to note here is the world Islamic in ‘captives’, this shows that he questions if the factions can be seen Islamic. In this sentence he also puts the blame on the leadership, the soldiers have nothing to do with these wrongdoings since they are unaware. In the end al-Urduni claims that he has always been an ISIS fighter in his heart. He states: “I was resolved to return to the ranks of the Islamic State because of what I had seen and heard and because I am a son of the Islamic State.”<sup>212</sup>

The discursive context of the period that the text was written and produced needs some explaining. He does not specifically refer to the period of Mohamed, but by talking about right or wrong leadership and using words such as hijra he does reference the period of the prophet without naming the specific period. Intertextuality is strongly related to the salafist discourse and to being a true believer in the eyes of ISIS’s ideology. Salafists want to go back to the beginning of Islam. The question of righteous leadership is a very old debate within Islam, which refers to the period right after Mohammed died. After Mohammed died, the questions of who his successor should be was coined. This is called intertextuality, by

---

<sup>210</sup> I reference to him as Ayman al-Zawahiri because in the West we know him by this spelling. In the interview in Dabiq his last name is spelled al-Dawahiri.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Interview with Abu Samir al-Urduni’ *Dabiq* no 10, July 2015: 71-77.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.* 72.

referring to righteous leadership he is building a block of a dominant moral discourse. Being a good leader implies being a good Muslim. These features are the product of a larger belief system. He negotiates with the two discourses, the political discourse being the dominant one and the salafist discourse as a sub-discourse. The arguments al-Urduni makes are political, with a reference to religion. He uses words as manmade laws<sup>213</sup> and political takfir<sup>214</sup>. I will name this use of the word takfir a defectional discourse. He uses the word to explain if someone is a true believer or not. Othering is very important in this discourse, he identifies himself as a righteous Muslim, but the others, the members of the Jawlani Front and al-Nusra, especially the leadership is wrong, they are not pious Muslims. He portrays them as infidels and he even goes as far as naming them gang members. Al-Urduni states: "Jabhat al-Nusra is nothing more than a bunch of gang neighbourhoods. Every leader has his own neighbourhood."<sup>215</sup> He is of the opinion that al-Zawahiri has no control over the different al-Qaeda factions, therefore he is not a good leader, hence he is not a good Muslim.

The combination of the words politics and takfir show that al-Urduni negotiates with the two discourses and even combines them. For him good politics, being a good leader implies being a good Muslim, they are the same. So he uses religious argumentation to position people as good or bad political leaders, he stretches the boundaries of the political discourse but also of the salafist discourse both of them are fluid and used interchangeable.

ISIS is not unique in interviewing and publishing articles by defectors. Jabhat al-Nusra does the exact same thing. An anonymous former ISIS fighter explains his journey towards the ranks of Jabhat al-Nusra in an article named 'He found you lost and guided you' (Quran 93:7) "I joined ISIS about eighteen months ago and as soon as I enrolled, it wasn't long before I started to have my doubts about them. Sure, they were fighting Bashar and his allies, but I couldn't quite understand why they were killing the other Mujahideen and their persistence and great desire to make takfir on the other jihadi groups."<sup>216</sup> After more incidents, disagreements with the leadership and consultations with his companions, the anonymous defector had a dream. "I dreamt that I was standing in front of a mountain and as I looked up, I saw a man standing at the top of the mountain. He looked very beautiful and he wore an amamah (scarf or turban) and a pair of unique square-shaped spectacles. I looked at him and he looked back at me and said: 'You and I are going to join Jabhat al-Nusra.'<sup>217</sup>

---

<sup>213</sup> 'Interview with Abu Samir al-Urduni' *Dabiq* no. 10, July 2015: 71-77.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-77.

<sup>216</sup> 'He found you lost and guided you' *al-Risalah* no. 2, October 2015: 58-59.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

At first the jihadist did not believe his dream, he was an ISIS fighter and could not join Jabhat al-Nusra. A year went by and the fighter often worked alongside Jabhat al-Nusra, he managed to stay out of the fitna. In early 2015 he fought alongside the Jabhat al-Nusra against the Nusayris (Alawites and the Assad regime). “One morning, after having been dropped off by the pick-up truck, we were traversing along the muddy path to get to the bottom of the mountain and from there we would then climb the pathway to reach the ribaat(fortress) station at the top. As I climbed the rocky surface, I looked up at the ribaat post a head of me and by Allah, it was just like in my dream: standing at the top of the mountain was the same brother from Jabhat al-Nusra. He stood on the jagged boulders and he wore his square-shaped glasses. Once I spotted him, I started to smile and said to myself: ‘You and I are going to join Jabhat al-Nusra.’”<sup>218</sup> After this revelation, the anonymous fighter left ISIS and joined Jabhat al-Nusra.

#### **4.5 Ideological differences**

On the 9 of July in 2005 Ayman al-Zawahiri al-Qaeda’s main ideologist and current leader of the organisation writes a critical letter to Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), this organisation later becomes ISIS. Al-Zawahiri presents in this letter his strategy of performing jihad in Iraq and win the battle against the foreign invader and his allies (USA). The letter addresses the political situation in Iraq and advocates measures, which will foster unity among al-Qaeda supporters and attract new followers.<sup>219</sup> In this letter the main ideological difference between al-Qaeda and ISIS is portrayed. ISIS is out to eliminate other cultural influences from the Sunni society through dismantling other religious and ethnic groups. As a result, there is discordance between al-Qaeda and ISIS about the aggressive stance towards the Shi’a as well as the indiscriminate slaughter of Muslims. Zawahiri prioritized the struggle against the United States and its allies, and discourages the attacks against non-combatants, including minorities like Shi’i Muslims, Kurds, and Yazidi’s. While al-Zarqawi and his followers think that anyone who does not agree with their ideology, is not a righteous Muslim. Throughout the different articles, eulogies, interviews and statements I have read the ideological difference is visible.

---

<sup>218</sup> ‘He found you lost and guided you’ *al-Risalah* no. 2, October 2015: 58-59.

<sup>219</sup> Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi, 9 July 2005: [https://fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter\\_in\\_english.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_english.pdf) (accessed on 19-04-2017).

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra describe the other as unjust and their own organization as righteous. Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra build on ideology, thoughts and ideas coined in after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In this way they relate to a more mainstream Sunni discourse of dealing with the western influences in the area. The three organisations perceive themselves as righteous believers, true followers of Mohamed and Allah. They shape an identity by referring to the Koran, to hadith, but also to great (former) leaders and/or accomplishments - al-Qaeda for example 'celebrates' 9/11. They also do something similar to frame the other as the wrong organizations. Al-Nusra published an issue of al-Risalah almost completely devoted to the establishment of the caliphate by ISIS, not to celebrate its one year anniversary, but to show everything what was wrong with ISIS and the caliphate. They draw on early Islamic history to claim something is either 'right' or 'wrong'. ISIS takes this one step further and tries to re-enact the early Islamic period, they literally want to try go back in time by establishing a caliphate and rule it by sharia and live as the prophet and his followers supposedly lived.

Al-Risalahs, Inspires Resurgances, Dabiqs and Rumiya's content carefully builds off a basic set of Islamic religious concepts such as, 'khalifa', 'takfir' and 'hijra', but also hadiths' and the Quran are often cited and used to argue for or against something. The name of both Dabiq and Rumiya is taken from a hadith, and the jihadist often refer to traditional Quranic teachings and prophetic traditions found in hadith. They use religion to legitimise political actions. To a certain extent contemporary Muslims extremism is legitimized with the use of religion.

## 5. Justifying violence and rebel infighting

This chapter explains how the three jihadist organisations justify violence against each other. Questions answered in this part of the thesis are: How does ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra justify violence against other Muslims and how do they use the notion of takfir? What is the relation between the discourses and the situation on the ground; do shifting alliances, certain armed confrontations etcetera have an impact on the discourse or the other way around? As explained in the conceptual chapter takfir refers to the practice of excommunication.<sup>220</sup> ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra do apply the notion of takfir, building on Said Qutb's thinking.

### 5.1 Friendly period

During the first period of the Syrian Civil war, Jawlani and al-Baghdadi remained friendly. When Jabhat al-Nusra was formed in 2011 and officially announced in 2012, al-Baghdadi complained a little, since he wanted to expand into Syria, but ultimately saw the development as a small defection.<sup>221</sup> Jawlani later stated that he never wanted to expand into Syria that quickly, but that the circumstances asked for the organization to leave Iraq for Syria. "I never wished to leave Iraq before seeing the banners of Islam raised high on Mesopotamia but the rapidity of the events in Al-Sham prevented us from that."<sup>222</sup>

When Baghdadi officially announced to expand to Syria he included Jabhat al-Nusra and Jawlani, without Jawlani's approval, in the story. He stated that Jabhat al-Nusra and his own organization Islamic State in Iraq were merging and together the two organizations were named the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. It was early 2013, when Baghdadi officially announced to expand into Syria, in an audio speech published on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 2013 named "Give Good News to the Believers", he declared that it was no longer Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), but Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS).<sup>223</sup> Al-Baghdadi pays his respects to Osama

---

<sup>220</sup> For moderate Muslims the question of who is or is not a good Muslim can only be decided by Allah. In some specific cases it is possible for Muslims to declare someone an unbeliever or infidel, when someone specifically says there is no God or when someone states that there have been more prophets after Mohammed, who is considered to have been the Seal of Prophets, being the last. Declaring someone an unbeliever or infidel is named takfir in Islam.

<sup>221</sup> Moubayed, Under the black Flag: 117.

<sup>222</sup> Al-Jawlani, 'audio message' 10-04-2014.

<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16380/AMJ20130410.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20-05-2017).

<sup>223</sup> Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, 'Announcement of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham' 09-04-2013

<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16497/ABB20130409.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20-05-2017).

bin Laden, he claims to have seen in him “a symbol for the Ummah to support the religion of Allah Almighty”, therefore he joined his command. In the same speech he states that Jabhat al-Nusra and his own organization Islamic State in Iraq will merge and together will be the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. “Time has come to declare before the people of Al-Sham and the whole world that Jabhat Al-Nusra is only an expansion for the Islamic State of Iraq and part of it and we are determined after making Istikhara<sup>224</sup> of Allah Almighty and consulting whom we trust in his religion and wisdom to continue in the journey of ascending of the group by passing all that will be said since the pleasure of Allah is above everything, and no matter what happens to us because of that so we declare keeping our trust in Allah abolishing the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and abolishing the name of Jabhat Al-Nusra, and joining them under one name.”<sup>225</sup>

Although Baghdadi spoke about companionship and with admiration about Zawahiri and Jawlani, the leadership of al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra were not pleased with his statement. The day after Baghdadi’s statement, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2013 al-Jawlani, the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra addresses Baghdadi’s speech in an audio message directed to all Muslims. “Muslims everywhere, leaderships of the Jihadi movements and leaderships of the armed factions, people of Al-Sham, sons of Jabhat (Front) Al-Nusra.”<sup>226</sup> The aim of the speech is to explain that Jabhat al-Nusra is not part of ISIS as Baghdadi claimed the day before. Although Jawlani disagrees with al-Baghdadi on the merger, claims not to not have known about it, he speaks with kind words about the Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, “Then Allah Almighty honored me of knowing sheikh Al-Baghdadi that honorable sheikh”.<sup>227</sup>

Both speeches are full of reverence for the early Islamic period and Islamic rhetoric, using words and expressions as: ‘Allah Almighty’, ‘Istikhara’, and ‘Mesopotamia’. Both Jawlani and Baghdadi are building a moral religious discourse, the salafist discourse to claim authority and prove their knowledge on Islam and Islamic history.

---

<sup>224</sup> The prayer of seeking guidance. Istikhara means asking Allah to lead you towards the right direction or lead you towards the right choice.

<sup>225</sup> Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ‘Announcement of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham’ 09-04-2013 <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16497/ABB20130409.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20-05-2017).

<sup>226</sup> Al-Jawlani, ‘audio message’ 10-04-2014. <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16380/AMJ20130410.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20-05-2017).

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.



## 5.2. Rebel infighting during the Syrian civil war

As explained in chapter three, the inter-rebel conflict during the Syrian civil war started after fighting erupted between the Syrian opposition groups, after months of ISIS aggression and hostile acts against rival insurgent factions, a major offensive against ISIS was launched.<sup>228</sup> Early January 2014, the groups clashed heavily in the north of Syria. From the 4<sup>th</sup> of January Free Syrian Army aligned factions, Islamist and salafist organisations fought against ISIS's control of territory, eventually also Jabhat al-Nusra joined. Jabhat al-Nusra issued statements blaming the infighting on ISIS's previous behaviours and its refusal to submit to mediation and judicial investigations, to which ISIS responded with bloodcurdling threats.<sup>229</sup> While the infighting continued and intensified, senior al-Qaeda veterans began emerging in northern Syria alongside Jabhat al-Nusra. At the end of February 2014, ISIS began counteroffensives against rival factions in Deir ez Zour. ISIS targeted a number of attacks on key commanders and headquarters in Aleppo and Idlib. ISIS also assaulted the credibility of the al-Qaeda leadership, claiming al-Qaeda had deviated from the Islamic path. At the same time, opposition forces launched offensives against Assad in Hama, Latakia, Quneitra and Aleppo.<sup>230</sup> After ISIS attacked the headquarters of the *Liwa al-Tawhid Brigade* in Aleppo on the first of February 2014, al-Qaeda distanced itself from ISIS and its actions in Syria. A week later the Nusra front and allied factions launched an offensive against ISIS in the Deir ez-Zor Governorate in Syria. The Syrian conflict and insurgency was witnessing the dawn of a new era, the extremist and the moderates were at each other's throats and the fight against Assad and the regime was demoted to the second rank.<sup>231</sup>

Abu Bakr addresses the infighting in a speech on 19 January 2014. He reassures the jihadist that they are doing the right thing and that it is Allah's test to separate good and evil. "It's from God's tradition and wisdom that the rows of believers and Mujahids is mingled with hypocrites. God will not leave this row mixed with those hypocrites and pretenders and therefore creates Fitnah and trials for them. The row must be melted so that the maliciousness leaves, and be pressured so that the weak building blocks crumble and the lights must shine at it exposing the intricacies and inner personalities".<sup>232</sup> Also he takes on the identity of the victim, ISIS which has fallen prey to the rebels, without their willingness,

---

<sup>228</sup> Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad*, 185.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>232</sup> Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi 'audio message' 19-01-2014.

<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16409/ABB20140119.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 15-06-2017).

they were forced to war, but ISIS will not be defeated. “God knows then you know that ISIS tried everything in its power to stop this war that was launched against us by some rebels. God knows then you know that we did not want this war, or prepared for it and those benefiting from it are the Nusayris and Shia. We were forced into this war and for days we tried to end it even though the betrayal was blatant. This continued until those deceived thought that ISIS was something of the past and that they could take us down.”<sup>233</sup>

Noteworthy, is that although ISIS distanced itself from al-Qaeda during the beginning of the period of infighting and frames Jabhat al-Nusra as untrustworthy and their leadership as misguided Muslims, they do deny putting takfir on Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Sheikh Osama bin Laden in a statement published on the first of March 2014.<sup>234</sup> They even claim credibility of their own shura council by explaining members of the shura committee received training members of al-Qaeda. “The members of the Shura Committee are from the previous Mujahidin who went through trials and tribulations along with Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. These members have shone the spotlight on The Islamic State, and shown the group’s virtues when in al-Qaeda; others in official speeches by the Emir of the Believers, or have been spokespeople for The Islamic State.”<sup>235</sup>

Al-Qaeda states that the conflict became an all-out warfare because of ISIS aggressive nature. “Eventually, this low-level conflict exploded in January of 2014 into all-out warfare between ISIS on one side and many of the Syrian Mujahideen and revolutionaries on the other, who felt they had no choice but to defend themselves and their Jihad against the brazen aggression of ISIS, whose ranks were now swelled by thousands of fighters from other countries who had joined it after arriving in Syria, and who now, instead of helping the Muslims in Syria defend themselves against the murderous regime and topple it (and they will topple it soon, Allah willing), were now posing—through their behavior—an obstacle to the Jihad in Syria.”<sup>236</sup> Zawahiri addresses the issue of the fitna on May 2014. He constructs the history of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi going into Iraq. Throughout the statement, he refers to ISIS ad ISI, denying that the organisation has any legitimacy being in Syria, since they are supposed to be the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), not the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). He also

---

<sup>233</sup> Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi ‘audio message’ 19-01-2014.

<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16409/ABB20140119.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 15-06-2017).

<sup>234</sup> ‘Statement From The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant on the sayings of the deceivers.’ ISIS, 1 March 2014.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> ‘It has become clear that there are elements in this group (ISIS)— and in its senior leadership—who have little or no respect for the sanctity of Muslim life’ *Resurgence* no. 2, June 2015: 45-48.

quotes al-Baghdadi in his statement: “We have studied the message of Shaykh Zawahiri in three stages: \*Consultation with leaders of ISIS in Sham. \*Consultation with leaders of governates of Syria who are members of our Majlis Shura there. \*Studying the message from a Shar’i perspective in our Sharia Commitee. So we decided to stay after it was clear that OBEYING OUR LEADER would be disobeying God and destruction for our Mujahidin. Especially the Muhajireen, so we sought the pleasure of our Lord over the pleasure of THE LEADER..And it’s not said he who DISOBEYS A COMMAND OF A LEADER in which he sees destruction for the Mujahideen...or a sin to God that he has forsaken good manners.”<sup>237</sup> In this quote, Zawahiri explains that Baghdadi knowingly went behind al-Qaeda’s back. Baghdadi legitimizes this political decision with the use of religion. He states that obeying the leadership would be disobeying Allah. Zawahiri claims that al-Qaeda was not aware of the decision made by al-Baghdadi to expand into Syria. He does state to have been satisfied with ISI, but not with ISIS, because it was not established on grounds of consensus of the umma. Zawahiri states that, “Announcing a State was against the orders of the leadership of al-Qaeda who ordered to hide AQ presence in Syria.” He blames al-Baghdadi for the problems and infighting, “The announcement of the state caused a political crises for the people of Sham. When America put Nusra in a terror list the people of Syria came out in demonstrations in support of Nusra. But then they started to denounce this announcement which the leaders of ISIS gave to Assad on a golden plate. And this announcement provoked the other Jihadi groups who felt that ISIS was trying to impose themselves on them.” Also they discredit Jabhat al-Nusra, both directly by fighting them, and indirectly because now Jabhat al-Nusra has been put on the ‘terrorist list’. He orders Jawlani and all mujahidin in Sham to stop immediately with fighting in which there is aggression against the ‘souls of their brothers and all Muslims’, they should focus on the ‘Bathist, Nusayris and Rawafidh’. He requests a stop to the infighting and name calling, both on the ground and in the media. “I also request that everyone stops accusing each other and name calling each other and that everyone accepts an independent court for the issues that happened between them. And causing Fitnah between the Mujahideen in the media and social media (Twitter) and that they are keys for good and closers of evil. And I will end with a reminder and advice. This is for ALL the Mujahideen in Sham, that you stop shedding of Haram Muslim blood. Enough with the killing of leaders of Jihad and their shaykhs. For ALL

---

<sup>237</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, ‘Testimonial to preserve the Blood of Mujahideen in as-Sham’ 03-05-2014. [https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16377/ZAW20140502\\_3.pdf?sequence=1](https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16377/ZAW20140502_3.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed on 13-05-2017).

of your blood is dear to us and we hoped it would be shed in support of Islam.”<sup>238</sup>

During the period of infighting fighters often switched movements. After a town first held by Jabhat al-Nusra was conquered by ISIS, some fighters joined the enemy (ISIS). These defectors are mentioned in the magazines, because they - just as explained in the ‘al-Urduni case study’ legitimise violence against the jihadist opponent. “The mujahidin took control of the town of Albu Kamal after the leadership and fighters of Jawlani’s Front stationed in the town gave bay’ah to the Islamic State.”<sup>239</sup> Giving *baya* means pledging allegiance, an oath of allegiance to a leader, in this case to ISIS. The town is framed as being ‘liberated’ from Jabhat al-Nusra, its inhabitants finally are able to live as god must have intended.

Also, after the period of infighting ISIS refers to the months with outrage and indignation. In an article published in Rumiya in September 2016, they portray themselves as victims of the *sahwa* coalitions. “The enmity of the various factions and the fitnah of strangeness only increased when the *sahwa* launched their war against the Islamic State.”<sup>240</sup>

### 5.3 The establishment of the Caliphate

ISIS declared a caliphate on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2014, approximately a week later Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi delivered a sermon at the Great Mosque in the city of Mosul in Iraq’s Ninawa province. The video show Abu Bakr delivering his speech before the congregation and then leading into prayer. He explains that the mujahidin brothers, after years of conquest, jihad, patience and fighting enemies of Allah, have finally been granted success by Allah and empowered to establish a Caliphate. He ‘nobly’ accepts his appointment of Caliph and states, “I have been plagued with this great matter, plagued with this responsibility, and it is a heavy responsibility. I was placed as your caretaker, and I am not better than you. So if you found me to be right then help me, and if you found me to be wrong then advise me and make me right and obey me in what I obey Allah through you. If I disobey Him then there is no obedience to me from you. I do not promise you, as the kings and rulers promise their followers and congregation, of luxury, security, and relaxation; instead, I promise you what

---

<sup>238</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, ‘Testimonial to preserve the Blood of Mujahideen in as-Sham’ 03-05-2014. [https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16377/ZAW20140502\\_3.pdf?sequence=1](https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16377/ZAW20140502_3.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed on 13-05-2017).

<sup>239</sup> ‘Albu Kamel Liberated’ *Dabiq* no 1, July 2014: 44.

<sup>240</sup> ‘Among the Believers are Men, Abu Mansur al-Muhajir’ *Rumiya* no. 1, September 2016: 14-17.

Allah promised His faithful worshipers.”<sup>241</sup> From that day Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi will be known as ‘Caliph Ibrahim’.

“The goal of establishing the Khilafah has always been one that occupied the hearts of the mujahidin since the revival of jihad this century.”<sup>242</sup> As explained in chapter two, al-Qaeda shares the goal of establishing a caliphate. When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself caliph, ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani described it as “a dream that lives in the depths of every Muslim believer”. He continued, “the legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organisations becomes null by the expansion of the caliph’s authority.”<sup>243</sup> In other words, he rejected all other Islamic groups, they became invalid. After the declaration of the Caliphate by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, many jihadist groups have taken a position either for or against the new entity. Online and through public statements, there has been a debate among influential members of the jihadist community over the issue. The establishment of the caliphate gives ISIS propaganda options and allows it to construct a narrative of the traditional dichotomy of *dar al-kufr* and on the other hand *dar al-Islam*. Which is a rather common narrative in Islam, in classical Islamic law, the major division is *dar al-Islam*<sup>244</sup>, denoting regions where Islamic law prevails and *dar al-harb* (literally house of war), adjoining non-Islamic lands, whose rulers are called upon to accept Islam. ISIS changed *dar al-harb*<sup>245</sup> with *dar al-Kufr*, meaning house of the unbelievers or infidels.

According to ISIS al-Qaeda has stood in the way of the establishment of a caliphate for decades. “During the jihad in Afghanistan against the communists, many of the muhajirin found themselves fighting a war similar to the one being fought in Sham now. Parties with different backgrounds fought a “common” enemy, ignoring all matters that distinguished them from each other, even if those matters were an obstacle in the pursuit of Khilafah.” While al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra blame ISIS for establishing a caliphate, ISIS blames al-Qaeda for unifying the mujahidin to fight the Russians in the Afghan war, differences between different factions were overlooked, ISIS implies that al-Qaeda also embraces people in their battalions who are *kufr*.<sup>246</sup> ISIS does not explicitly name al-Qaeda, but it is clear they are talking about the organisation.

---

<sup>241</sup> ‘Speech Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Mosul’ 05-07-2014  
<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/14272/ABB20140705.pdf?sequence=1>  
(accessed on 13-05-2017).

<sup>242</sup> Al Jazeera, 29 June 2014.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> ‘Territory of Islam’ <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e49> (accessed on 12-07-2017).

<sup>245</sup> ‘Territory of War’ <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e490> (accessed on 12-07-2017).

<sup>246</sup> *Kufr* means unbelief, unbeliever, traditional designation for Christians and Jews; today used more generally.

For Jabhat al-Nusra the establishment of a caliphate by Abu Bakr is reason to frame the organization and its members as being unjust. They should have consulted the umma. Unity is very important in Islam; Muslims pray together, they fast together etcetera. They frame Baghdadi as a criminal in a similar way as ISIS frames al-Nusra as group of gang members, they refer to al-Baghdadi and ISIS as, 'the criminal Baghdadi and his group'.<sup>247</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra legitimizes the use of takfir because ISIS, the so called Khalifa killed the good scholars and their students.<sup>248</sup> The framing strategies vilification, exaltation (praising ingroup popular intellectuals) and credentialing are at work.<sup>249</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra vilifies ISIS by stating ISIS killed the good scholars, their own scholars are being portrayed as the good scholars, emphasizing the expertise of in-group intellectuals. "What is the matter with this Khilafa when it describes the scholars who have laid the foundations and rules of Jihad, as being the leaders of misguidance."<sup>250</sup> Another way in which al-Nusra makes use of the notion of takfir in relation to ISIS is that Abu Bakr-al Baghdadi declared the Caliphate without consulting the other Muslims. Violence against ISIS members is legitimized by a hadith by Bukhari, .... So if any person gives the pledge of alliance to somebody (to become caliph) without consulting the other Muslims, then the one he has selected should not be granted allegiance, lest both of them should be killed.<sup>251</sup>

While using the notion of takfir themselves, Jabhat al-Nusra frames ISIS as misguided in their use of the notion of takfir. "Also, there are those who kill and make takfir on the Muslims unjustly because of a dispute between them and other groups, and they too think that they are fighting for a good cause but they are truly misguided."<sup>252</sup> In an interview with Arab al-Jazeera Jawlani explains that Jabhat al-Nusra differs from ISIS, since they only defend themselves, while ISIS attacks to expand its territory. "Our religion is a religion of mercy, we are not criminal killers, we fight those who fight against us."<sup>253</sup> He continues to explain that they do not make takfir on Muslims. "We do not make takfir on Muslims, excommunicating a Muslim needs a religious decree (fatwa) by those specialized in religious knowledge."<sup>254</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> Abu Faruq al-Muhajir, 'Khilafa One Year On' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 22-25.

<sup>248</sup> 'The Keys of Jannah, a message from shiekh al-Mujahid Abdullah al Muhaysini' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 14.

<sup>249</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Framing jihad: 159-177.

<sup>250</sup> 'The Keys of Jannah, a message from shiekh al-Mujahid Abdullah al Muhaysini' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 14.

<sup>251</sup> Bukhari, 'Limits and Punishments set by Allah' <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/86/57> (accessed on 01-06-2017).

<sup>252</sup> 'The Keys of Jannah, a message from shiekh al-Mujahid Abdullah al Muhaysini' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 14.

<sup>253</sup> 'Interview Jawlani' *Arab al-Jazeera*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnTQbIFX5qw> (accessed on 15-04-2017).

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

During the entire interview Jawlani's face is covered with a veil. You can hear him talk, but you cannot see his face.

#### **5.4 Jabhat al-Nusra cuts ties with al-Qaeda**

Jabhat al-Nusra distanced itself from al-Qaeda in July 2016. According to the group's leader, al-Jawlani, the move is aimed at removing the excuse used by the international community to bombard Muslims in the Levant. Jawlani announced that the organisation broke its link with al-Qaeda and changed its name to Jabhat fath al-Sham in a video message.<sup>255</sup> Jawlani appeared on video for the first time, thanking his brothers in al-Qaeda. He describes both al-Zawahiri and his vice al-Khayr as noble leaders who prioritize the community before the interest of an individual group. He announces that the new organisation aims to fulfil the following: "Work toward establishing the religion of Allah, having his Sharia as legislation, establish justice among all people, strike toward unity with all groups, in order to unify the ranks of Muhajideen and liberate the land of al-Sham of the rule of the Tyrant and his allies. Allah said: 'and hold on to the rope of Allah all of you together and do not be disunited.' Protecting the jihad of Al-Sham and assure its continuity, utilizing all Islamic legitimized means to do so, strive to serve Muslims, attending to their daily needs and ease their hardship in every possible way, ensure security, stability and a honourable life for the general masses."

Before this break al-Risalah was published and the magazine framed al-Qaeda as a truly Islamic organisation. ISIS on the other hand is misguided and their members are seen as unjust Muslims. The biggest problem Jabhat al-Nusra has with ISIS is that they established a caliphate without consulting the Muslim community, so Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was wrong in declaring himself Caliph. This unjust declaration of a caliphate is a reason to kill members of ISIS.<sup>256</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra legitimizes this opinion with the use of a hadith. '... So if any person gives the Pledge of allegiance to somebody (to become Caliph) without consulting the other Muslims, then the one he has selected should not be granted allegiance, lest both of them should be killed.' (Bukhari).<sup>257</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra frames ISIS as not truly Islamic, drawing on history, since a caliphate should only be announced with consensus of the umma. While emphasizing ISIS 'fault', Jabhat al-Nusra builds a discourse, drawing on religion and history in which they frame the 'other' as not truly Islamic.

---

<sup>255</sup> Al-Jazeera, 'Former Leader of al-Nusra Front confirming split from al-Qaeda' aired on 28-07-2016.

<sup>256</sup> 'The Keys of Jannah, a message from shiekh al-Mujahid Abdullah al Muhaysini' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 14.

<sup>257</sup> Bukhari, 'Limits and Punishments set by Allah' <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/86/57> (accessed on 01-06-2017).



Inspire issue 16, the first issue published after the break does not address the split between Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda. It addresses lone jihad, and Muslims in the United States, but nothing is said about developments in the Middle East. Possibly because the break did not mean an ideological split, but merely a strategy to increase the group's appeal within Syria. Analysts argue that the group's decision to end its affiliation and change names did not indicate an ideological split with al-Qaeda but was part of a strategy to increase the group's appeal within Syria. Jabhat Fath al-Sham changed name again in December 2016. The organization absorbed many smaller factions and changed its name to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which means the Committee for the Liberation of Syria.<sup>258</sup>

After the split with al-Qaeda during the summer of 2016, Jawlani conducted an interview with Arab al-Jazeera, after the organisation split from al-Qaeda. In this interview Jawlani said the ISIS is a main threat to Jabhat al-Nusra. When the al-Jazeera journalist asks Jawlani to say something about the split with al-Qaeda, Jawlani answers that Islam demands unity. He explains the need to recognise unity on the ground, "The efforts to join some of the armed forces in one body proved to be extremely effective on the ground"<sup>259</sup> Jawlani does not address the split with al-Qaeda, and he mostly talks about working together with other militant factions. In contrast with the interview Jawlani gave prior to the split, early 2015, Jawlani is recognisable in this video.

## 5.5 Conclusion

There are many differences between Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. The first prioritizes the overthrow of Assad and is willing to work together with other, and not simply jihadist, factions to establish this. Al-Qaeda and ISIS also differ greatly, they have adopted other styles of leadership and different tactics and goals. Al-Qaeda is not as much an organized institution, but an association of loose networks. The al-Qaeda name holds a certain prestige in jihadi circles, inspiring others to act in its name. After ISIS had cut ties with al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda distanced itself from Baghdadi's actions and group, Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS started growing apart. Especially during the period of rebel infighting in the beginning of 2014 the rift between the two grew. While ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra were fighting each other with words and on the ground, the need to legitimize their own organization grew. They needed to

---

<sup>258</sup> 'Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham' *Mapping Militant organisations*, Stanford University: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/493#note46> (accessed on 15-05-2017).

<sup>259</sup> 'Interview Jawlani' *Arab al-Jazeera*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_R27jPPUW8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_R27jPPUW8) (accessed on 16-04-2017).



proof their own superiority. Jabhat al-Nusra uses the framing strategies vilification and exaltation.<sup>260</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra vilifies ISIS by stating ISIS killed the good scholars, their own scholars are being portrayed as the good scholars, emphasizing the expertise of in-group intellectuals.

The world is, according to ISIS, divided into two camps.<sup>261</sup> ISIS seems to believe this much more than both al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra. In ISIS ideology you are either for or against us. Both al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra have the tendency to oversee minor differences while fighting for the greater good.

---

<sup>260</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Framing jihad: 159-177.

<sup>261</sup> 'The world has divided into two camps,' *Dabiq* no. 1 2014: 11.

## 6. Conclusion

Al-Qaeda's roots can be found in Afghanistan, where the mujahidin fought the Soviets during the 1980s and 1990s. ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra both emerged from within al-Qaeda. ISIS was first al-Qaeda in Iraq which became the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), and later the organisation became the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Jabhat al-Nusra was formed during 2011, as an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria. They first allied with ISIS - since the leadership of both organisations shared history. In 2014 ISIS and al-Qaeda separated and a few months later Jabhat al-Nusra, which still was an al-Qaeda affiliate, became one of ISIS' most outspoken enemies.

Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra build on ideology, thoughts and ideas coined in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but their ideas should also be understood within the context of colonialism and post-colonialism, in particular western influences in the region. Modern discussions in the Islamic world about the relation between religion and state developed as a reaction on to the European economic and political dominance in the Middle East and Asia. Political Islam, therefore, is also a colonial product.<sup>262</sup> Mahmood Mamdani explains that before modern political Islam appeared, Islamic reformers had felt that colonialism was the key challenge facing contemporary Muslims.<sup>263</sup> Islamic thinkers of the eighteenth to the twenty-first century are distinguished from previous generation thinkers because they are engaged in two dialogues, one across history and one across culture. Muslim political theorists were and still are engaged in a series of debates within Islamic tradition about the nature of political authority. They struggled - and continue to do so - with the relationship between reason and revealed knowledge. Islamic scholars thought about the proper way to be a Muslim. They felt that new developments in their societies threatened the moral, cultural and religious welfare of the umma.<sup>264</sup> Jihadist argumentation builds on this notion of being besieged and polluted; al-Qaeda draws on an aversion from modernity and everything that is Western, and in particular, American.

Media, politicians, social and political movements, they all frame in a certain way. Islamic jihadist organisations often develop and adopt a radical discourse in which they frame their enemies as enemies of Islam, legitimizing violence. For terrorist movements, the process of framing is an important tool to legitimize their ideology and actions like suicide bombings, beheadings of people or annexing territory. Rivalry between Islamic terrorist groups plays a significant role in the current Middle Eastern problems. Therefore, intra-movement framing contests are getting more important. The integrity and assertion of authority by radical Muslim groupings like ISIS are central to the process of framing. In order to create leadership credibility, one very important component is discrediting rivalling

---

<sup>262</sup> Douwes, *De Islam*: 37.

<sup>263</sup> Mamdani, *Good Muslim, bad Muslim*: 45-46.

<sup>264</sup> Armstrong, *Islam*: 152.

groups. Islamic terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS frame each other. They link the other group with negativity to undermine the rivals' credibility. In the case of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, the fragmentation of sacred authority in Islam means that these movements pay special attention to credibility. The complexity of religious debates over religious authority, permissibility of violence etcetera places religion at the heart of context over meaning, since they are responsible for interpreting Islam.

The three organisations perceive themselves as righteous believers, living like the prophet and the first generations of Muslims, they are true followers of Allah. They shape an identity by referring to the Koran, to hadith, but also to great (former) leaders and accomplishments; al-Qaeda for example 'celebrates' 9/11. There are similarities in the way they frame the other organization as being erroneous. Al-Nusra published an issue of *Risalah* almost completely devoted to the establishment of the caliphate by ISIS, not to celebrate its one year anniversary, but to show everything that was wrong with ISIS and the caliphate. They draw on early Islamic history to claim something is either 'right' or 'wrong'. ISIS takes this one step further and tries to re-enact the early Islamic period, they literally want to try to go back in time by establishing a caliphate and rule it by sharia and live as the prophet and his followers supposedly lived. Jabhat al-Nusra uses the framing strategies vilification and exaltation.<sup>265</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra vilifies ISIS by stating ISIS killed the good scholars, their own scholars are being portrayed as the good scholars, emphasizing the expertise of in-group intellectuals. ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda use the salafist discourse. This discourse entails the use of religious language, referring to the period of Mohammed to build a moral block and it builds on historical knowledge of the early Islamic period.

There are many differences between Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. The first prioritizes the overthrow of Assad and is willing to work together with other factions to establish this. Also al-Qaeda and ISIS differ greatly, they have different styles, different tactics goals and styles of leadership. Al-Qaeda is not as much an organized institution, but an association of loose networks. The al-Qaeda name holds a certain prestige in jihadi circles, inspiring others to act in its name. The rift between Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS grew during the period of rebel infighting at the beginning of 2014. While ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra were fighting each other with words and on the ground, the need to legitimize their own being grew. They needed to prove their own superiority. ISIS believe the world is divided into two camps,<sup>266</sup> much more than both al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra. In ISIS ideology you are either for or against us. Both al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra have the tendency to oversee minor differences while fighting for the greater good.

The jihadists engage statements and media addresses acquisitions made by the other

---

<sup>265</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Framing jihad: 159-177.

<sup>266</sup> 'The world has divided into two camps,' *Dabiq* ISSUE I 2014: 11.

group. Also the issue of name calling and the use of invectives is addressed. When Jabhat al-Nusra frames ISIS as *khawarij*, they write articles and make statements in defence of these acquisitions. Jabhat al-Nusra does the same when they are being called *sahawat*. Al-Qaeda seems to be the wiser organization and condemns wrongdoings, but pleats for a less childish approach towards each other. During the period of infighting Zawahiri addresses the use of invectives and requests a stop. "I also request that everyone stops accusing each other and name calling each other and that everyone accepts an independent court for the issues that happened between them. And causing *Fitnah* between the *Mujahideen* in the media and social media (Twitter) and that they are keys for good and closers of evil. And I will end with a reminder and advice. This is for ALL the *Mujahideen* in Sham, that you stop shedding of Haram Muslim blood. Enough with the killing of leaders of Jihad and their *shaykhs*. For ALL of your blood is dear to us and we hoped it would be shed in support of Islam."<sup>267</sup> Al-Qaeda is less involved in the naming and framing process, this is most likely because they are more internationally orientated than ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra are.

ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al Nusra portray themselves as being rightful Muslims. All three organisations try to re-enact the period of Mohammed. They build a discourse based on references to the early Islamic period, by using words such as *hijra* and *takfir*. The notion of *takfir* plays a central role in the jihadi discourse. For example - Jabhat al-Nusra legitimizes the use of *takfir* because ISIS, the so called *Khalifa* killed the good scholars and their students.<sup>268</sup> The framing strategies vilification, exaltation (praising ingroup popular intellectuals) and credentialing are at work.<sup>269</sup> Jabhat al-Nusra vilifies ISIS by stating ISIS killed the good scholars, their own scholars are being portrayed as the good scholars, emphasizing the expertise of in-group intellectuals. Since ISIS killed the supposedly good scholars and established a caliphate without consulting the *umma*, Jabhat al-Nusra makes *takfir* on the organisation and its members. ISIS rhetoric is less justified by arguments, in their rhetoric you are either for or against the organisation, the world is divided in two. ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra have adopted and developed a radical discourse, which I have called the defectional discourse. Within this discourse the enemy is framed as a defector, an apostate, someone who is not a pious Muslim and therefore it is legitimized to excommunicate the 'other' and use violence against the 'other' They make use of the notion of *takfir* to legitimize violence, claiming the 'other' is not a pious Muslim.

Al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra make use of religion and references to the early Islamic period to claim credibility and to frame themselves as the truly Islamic organisation and to take on an Islamic identity. I call this discourse that all three build and use the *salafist*

---

<sup>267</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, 'Testimonial to preserve the Blood of *Mujahideen* in as-Sham' 03-05-2014. [https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16377/ZAW20140502\\_3.pdf?sequence=1](https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16377/ZAW20140502_3.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed on 13-05-2017).

<sup>268</sup> 'The Keys of Jannah, a message from shiekh al-Mujahid Abdullah al Muhaysini' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 14.

<sup>269</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Framing jihad: 159-177.

discourse. ISIS also uses a more political discourse to frame Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda as bad Muslims, most importantly their leadership is portrayed as corrupt and therefore cannot be righteous Muslims. This framing strategy in itself is a reference to the early Islamic period, after Mohammed died his followers were left with the question of who would be his successor. Religion and Islamic history therefore plays a big role in the political discourse as well as in the salafist discourse. These two discourses interact with and build on each other. Clearly ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra are openly 'othering' each other, al-Qaeda does criticize ISIS but not as harshly as Jabhat al-Nusra does. ISIS on the other hand speaks about faults within both organisation and does not really make a distinction between the two. ISIS also claims to be the right place to be a Muslim. Interviewees in the magazine often state that they were not able to truly follow their religion until they arrived at the caliphate. Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda cannot claim something similar since they, although having control over some areas have not established a caliphate yet. For both al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra establishing a caliphate is not means to an end, but the end itself. The jihadist movements use invectives to portray each other as 'bad' Muslims. Abu Bakr and his followers are called khawarij or kharijites by both Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda. On the other hand, ISIS frames Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda as sahwah or sahawat.

The answer to my main research question, 'what discourse have al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra adopted in their media expressions in order to legitimize jihadist differentiation and the use of violence, both symbolic and real, against their jihadist competitors? is - ISIS, al-Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra have adopted and developed a radical discourse, which I have called the defectional discourse. They make use of the notion of takfir to legitimize violence, claiming the 'other' is not a pious Muslim. This defectional discourse interacts with a political and religious salafist discourse, drawing on early Islamic history and early Islamic religious texts. Political decisions are often legitimized with religion.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Magazine articles:

- 'A Call from Usama Hamza Australi' *al-Risalah* no. 2 October 2015: 11-18.  
'A window into the Islamic State,' *Dabiq*, no. 4, 2014: 27.  
Abu Faruq al-Muhajir, 'Khilafa One Year On' *al-Risalah* no. 1 July 2015: 22-25.  
'Among the Believers are Men, Abu Mansur al-Muhajir' *Rumiyah* no. 1, September 2016: 14-17.  
'Hijra My Story', *al-Risalah* no. 1 July 2015: 17.  
'Interview with Shayks Abu Basir', *Inspire* no. 1, June 2010: 13-17.  
'Letter from the editor' *Inspire*, no. 1 June 2010: 2.  
'From the Battle of Al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions,' *Dabiq* no. 11, September 2015: 46-59.  
'The Allies of al-Qa'idah in Sham' *Dabiq* no. 7-12. (2015-2016).  
'The Keys of Jannah, a message from shiekh al-Mujahid Abdullah al Muhaysini' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 14.  
'In the words of the enemy', *Dabiq* no. 13, January 2016: 46-47.  
'Introduction' *Dabiq* no. 1, July 2014: 11.  
'It has become clear that there are elements in this group (ISIS)— and in its senior leadership—who have little or no respect for the sanctity of Muslim life' *Resurgence* no. 2, June 2015: 45-48.  
'The world has divided into two camps' *Dabiq* no. 1, July 2014: 11.  
'Healthcare in the Khilāfah' *Dabiq*, no. 9, May 2015: 24.  
'This is Al Qaeda or have they forgotten?' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 27-28.  
'Halab under Fire' *al-Risalah* no. 1 July, 2015: 31-32.  
Reaping the Fruits exclusive interview with Muslim Shishani' *al-Risalah* no. 1, July 2015: 37-38.  
Dozens of "Nusrah" and "Ahrār" fighters repent and join the Islamic State' *Dabiq* no. 7, 2015: 38-39.  
'Wilāyat khurāsān and the bay'āt from the qawqāz,' *Dabiq*, no. 7, February 2015: 36.  
'Interview with Abu Samir al-Urduni' *Dabiq* no. 10, July 2015: 71-77.  
'He found you lost and guided you' *al-Risalah* no. 2 October, 2015: 58-59.  
Albu Kamel Liberated' *Dabiq* no. 1, July 2014: 44.

Statements and guides:

- Orlando operation, *Inspire Guide*, 17-6-2016: [https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/alqacc84\\_idah-in-the-arabian-peninsula-22inspire-guide-orlando-operation22.pdf](https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/alqacc84_idah-in-the-arabian-peninsula-22inspire-guide-orlando-operation22.pdf) (accessed on 20-04-2017).  
'ISI Media Training Guide', 20-05-2011: <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/7290/AQI20110520.1.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20-04-2017).  
'Go Forth, Whether Light or heavy- Wilayat Halab' 03-06-2015: <http://jihadology.net/2015/06/03/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-go-forth-whether-light-or-heavy-wilayat-%E1%B8%A5alab/> (accessed on 29-02-2017).  
Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami 'Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful' 09-09-2014:

- <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16495/ADN20140922.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 29-03-2017).
- Abu Muhammad al-Adnani 'about the allegations made against ISIS' 07-03-2014:  
<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16378/ADN20140307.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 29-03-2017).
- Letter from al-Zawahiri to al- Zarqawi, 9-07-2005:  
[https://fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter\\_in\\_english.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_english.pdf) (accessed on 19-04-2017).
- Al-Jawlani, 'audio message' 10-04-2014:  
<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16380/AMJ20130410.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20-05-2017).
- Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, 'Announcement of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham' 09-04-2013:  
<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16497/ABB20130409.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20-05-2017).
- Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi 'audio message' 19-01-2014:  
<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16409/ABB20140119.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 15-06-2017).
- 'Statement From The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant on the sayings of the deceivers.'  
ISIS, 01-03-2014.
- Ayman al-Zawahiri, 'Testimonial to preserve the Blood of Mujahideen in as-Sham'  
03-05 2014:  
[https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16377/ZAW20140502\\_3.pdf?sequence=1](https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16377/ZAW20140502_3.pdf?sequence=1) (accessed on 13-05-2017).
- 'Speech Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Mosul' 05-07-2014:  
<https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/14272/ABB20140705.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 13-05-2017).

#### Other primary sources:

- Al-Jazeera, 29 June 2014.
- Al-Jazeera, 'Former Leader of al-Nusra Front confirming split from al-Qaeda' aired on 28-07-2016.
- Al-Maqalat, 'Jabhat an-Nusra, 'Their perfect timing for an unpredicted decision'  
<https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2016/07/25/jabhat-an-nusra-their-perfect-timing-for-an-unpredicted-decision/> (accessed on 09-06-2017).
- 'Interview Jawlani' *Arab al-Jazeera*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_R27jPPUW8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_R27jPPUW8) (accessed on 16-04-2017).
- 'Interview Jawlani' *Arab al-Jazeera*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnTQbIFX5qw> (accessed on 15-04-2017).
- Shaykh Abu Mariyah Al-Qahtani, 'al-Qaeda those who claim adherence to it.'  
<https://pietervanostaeyen.com/2015/06/25/shaykh-abu-mariyah-al-qahtani-al-qaeda-and-those-who-claim-adherence-to-it/> (accessed on 09-06-2017).

## Secondary literature

- Adoni, Hanna, and Sherrill Mane. "Media and the social construction of reality: Toward an integration of theory and research." *Communication research* 11, no. 3 (1984).
- Armanios, Febe. "The Islamic traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya." Congressional Information Service, Library of Congress, 2003.
- Armstrong, Karen. *Islam: geschiedenis van een wereldgodsdienst*. De Bezige Bij, 2009.
- Bhardwaj, Maya. "Development of Conflict in Arab Spring Libya and Syria: From Revolution to Civil War." *Washington University International Review* 1, no. 1 (2012).
- Byman, Daniel. *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the global jihadist movement: what everyone needs to know*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2015.
- Catherine, Lucas and Kareem el Hidjaazi. *Jihad en Kolonialisme*. Epo uitgeverij 2015.
- Cleveland, William L., and Martin Bunton. *A history of the modern Middle East*. Hachette UK, 2016
- Crooke, Alastair. "You Can't Understand ISIS If You Don't Know the History of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 32, no. 1 2015.
- Croteau, David, and William Hoynes. *Media/society: Industries, images, and audiences*. Sage Publications, 2013.
- Douwes, Dick. *De Islam, een kleine geschiedenis*. Prometheus, 2016.
- Douwes, Dick. Religion and citizenship in Lebanon and Syria (working paper).
- Euben, Roxanne L. 'Modern and Contemporary Islamic Political Theory'. *The Oxford handbook of political theory*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Fischer-Rosenthal, Wolfram. "The problem with identity: Biography as solution to some (post)-modernist dilemmas." *Comenius* 15, no. 3 (1995).
- Gambhir, Harleen K. "Dabiq: The strategic messaging of the Islamic State." *Institute for the Study of War* 15 (2014).
- Gunaratna, Rohan. "Al Qaeda's ideology." *Current trends in islamist ideology* (2005).
- Lister, Charles R. *The Syrian jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the evolution of an insurgency*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Hakim, Yahya. "The Hashemite-Umayyad Divide and its Impact on the Future of Islam." *The Muslim World* 106, no. 1 (2016): 83-96.
- Hatina, M. (2012). Redeeming Sunni Islam: Al-Qa 'ida's Polemic against the Muslim Brethren. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39(1): 101-113.
- Heyes, Cressida, "Identity Politics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
- Hinnebusch, Raymond, 'Sectarianism and Regime Type in Syria' University of St. Andrews: <http://www.brismes.ac.uk/conference/sessions/panel-6c/> accessed on 11-07-2107.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond. "The tangent of the Syrian uprising." *Ortadoğu Etütleri* (2014): 4.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond. "The Sectarian Revolution in the Middle East." *Revolutions: global trends and regional issues* (2016).
- Hokayem, Emile. "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian Civil War." *Adelphi Papers* 54, no. 447 448 (2014): 39-70.
- Jackson, Brian A. "Groups, networks, or movements: A command-and-control-driven approach to classifying terrorist organizations and its application to Al Qaeda." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 241-262.
- Jensen, Sune Qvotrup. "Othering, identity formation and agency." *Qualitative studies* 2, no. 2 (2011).
- Liu, James H., and Denis J. Hilton. "How the past weighs on the present: Social representations of history and their role in identity politics." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 44, no. 4 (2005).



- Kilcullen, David. *The accidental guerrilla: Fighting small wars in the midst of a big one*. Oxford University Press, 2011: 155.
- Makdisi, Ussama. *The culture of sectarianism: community, history, and violence in nineteenth-century Ottoman Lebanon*. Univ of California Press, 2000.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the roots of terror*. Harmony, 2005.
- Musallam, Adnan. *From secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the foundations of radical Islamism*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005.
- Matthiesen, Toby. *Sectarian gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring that wasn't*. Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Moghadam, Assaf, and Brian Fishman, eds. *Fault lines in global jihad: organizational, strategic, and ideological fissures*. Taylor & Francis, 2011.
- Moubayed, Sami. *Under the black flag: At the frontier of the new jihad*. IB Tauris, 2015.
- Oudheusden, van Jan, *Het Midden-Oosten, een kleine geschiedenis*. Bert Bakker, Amsterdam, 2016: 193.
- Rajan, VG Julie. *Al Qaeda's global crisis: The Islamic state, takfir and the genocide of Muslims*. Routledge, 2015.
- Roland Gömöri. "ISIL—the New Face of Terrorism." *Defence* (2015): 58.
- Scheufele, Dietram A. "Framing as a theory of media effects." *Journal of communication* 49, no. 1 (1999).
- Smith, Alastair G. "Testing the surf: Criteria for evaluating internet information resources." *Public-Access Computer Systems Review* 8, no. 3 (1997).
- Stazak, Jean-François. 'Otherness/Othering' in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Elsevier 2009.
- Styszyński, M. (2016). *ISIS Communication Strategy*. *Przegląd Strategiczny*, (9).
- Tosh, John, and Sean Lang. *The pursuit of history: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history*. Pearson Education, 2010.
- Torres Soriano, Manuel R. "The road to media Jihad: The propaganda actions of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 1 (2010).
- Turner, John. "From cottage industry to international organisation: the evolution of Salafi Jihadism and the emergence of the Al Qaeda ideology." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010).
- Turner, John. *Religious ideology and the roots of the global Jihad: Salafi Jihadism and international order*. Springer, 2014.
- Warde, Ibrahim. "Wagering on Sectarianism: The Political Economy of Extremism." *The Muslim World* 106, no. 1 (2016).
- Wiktorowicz, Quintan. "Framing jihad: Intramovement framing contests and al-Qaeda's struggle for sacred authority." *International Review of Social History* 49, no. S12 (2004).
- Willemse, K., *One Foot in Heaven, Narratives on Gender and Islam in Darfur, West-Sudan* (Leiden: Brill 2001).
- Wright, Robin et al, *The jihadi Threat ISIS al Qaeda and Beyond*. Wilson Center and United States institute of Peace, 2016: 10-11.
- Zald, Mayer, and Robert Ash Garner. "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay, and Change. In Mayer Zald and John D. McCarthy (Eds.), *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*, (pp. 121-41). New Brunswick." (1987).
- Zelin, Y. Aaron, 'Inchoate Conceptualization of Jihadi Media' 31-5-2001: <https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2011/05/31/inchoate-conceptualization-of-jihadi-media/>

Zelin, Aaron Y. "Picture or it didn't happen: A snapshot of the Islamic State's official media output." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015).

Other (online) sources:

Jihadology: <http://jihadology.net/>

Harverford project: <https://ds-drupal.haverford.edu/aqsi/>

The Oxford Dictionary of Islam: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com>

Mapping Militants: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/>

Bukhari, 'Limits and Punishments set by Allah' <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/86/57>

## Appendices

### Appendix I: Glossary

Ahl al-Kitaab - People of the book - Jews, Christians, Muslims (the Abrahamic faiths). This term is used in the Quran to describe people who adhere the older religions.

Ahl al-Sunna - Sunni Islam and its adherents.

al-Ansar - "helpers" - Often seen in conjunction with "Muhajireen" (travellers, those who make hajj). Comes from the people of Medina who welcomed Mohammed and his followers (see, e.g., Jaish al Muhajireen wal Ansar). They welcomed them after they were forced to leave Mecca in 622. They helped Mohammed with the establishment of the first Islamic community.

Ansar/nusra - companions/helpers of Mohammed.

Amir al-Muhmineen - Commander of the Faithful. Religious title given to the highest religious leader in the land, currently claimed by leader of the Islamic State.

At-Taaifah Al- Mumtaniah – a group that refuses the law of Allah.

Bay'aa - means oath or oath of allegiance.

Bhugat – transgressors.

Dar al-Harb - Literally “house of war” - territory outside of Islamic rule. Excluded from this are territories which have a treat of peace with Muslims, which become Dar al-Ahd.

Dar al-Islam - home of Islam. Countries ruled according to the Islam/sharia.

Dawa - proselytizing, missionary work. Both to non-Muslims and to Muslims who are regarded as having fallen from the path of ‘true’ Islam.

Fard - a religious duty or obligatory action.

Fatwa - an authoritative statement issued from an Islamic authority on a point of Islamic law. Formal legal opinion or decision of a scholar on Islamic law.

Fitna - Sedition - used quite frequently to accuse another of causing dissension/division in the ranks (especially of the broader Islamic community or community of jihad).

Temptation or ordeal. The term is used to describe the civil wars that tore the Muslim community during the rasjidoen and the time of the Umayya. Fitna means chaos, civil strife/war, reference to early Islamic conflicts, as well as the danger of chaos when Islamic law is not applied.

Hadith - is one of various reports describing the words, actions, or habits of the Islamic prophet Mohammed. Hadith literally means report, account or narrative. Ahadith are second only to the Quran in developing Islamic jurisprudence and regarded as important tools for understanding the Quran and commentaries (tafsir) written on it.

Jihad- literally struggle or battle. Jihad has many definitions, varying from a personal inner battle on how to live your life as a good Muslim to a holy (defensive) war when the umma is being attacked. As stated in the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* the exact meaning of jihad depends on the context. Jihad is the only legal warfare in Islam, carefully

controlled in Islamic law. To justify jihad against other Muslims, extremist brand them unbelievers for their neglect in adhering and or enforcing a particular interpretation of Islam.

Jahiliyya - Pre-Islamic period, or “ignorance” of monotheism and divine law. In current use, refers to secular modernity, for example in the work of Abu al-Ala Mawdudi, who viewed modernity as the “new jahiliyya.” Sayyid Qutb interpreted jahiliyya as the domination of humans over humans, rather than submission of humans to God. The term denotes any government system, ideology, or institution based on values other than those referring to God. To correct this situation, such thinkers propose the implementation of Islamic law, values, and principles. Radical groups justify militant actions against secular regimes in terms of jihad against jahiliyya.

Kufr/kafir/kuffar - unbelief, unbeliever, traditional designation for Christians and Jews; today used more generally.

Ghulat - ‘extremists’, traditional Sunni designation of smaller Shiite communities.

Munafiq(un) - hypocrites (only outwardly acting as Muslims).

murtadd - apostate. Muslims who are working for the tawaghit and other infidels, such as foreign powers.

Mushriken - Muslims who violate the principle of monotheism.

Nusayris/Alawites - *extreme* in that their tenets differ strongly from Sunni Islam

Rafida/rafidun/rawafid - Sunni designation of Shiites, who rejected authority of the first two Caliphs.

Sahada/ Shahada- literally the testimony, is an Islamic creed declaring belief in the oneness of God and the acceptance Muhammad as God’s prophet. The Shadada is recited as last words by Muslims who are dying. Sahaba is a designation of companions of Muhammad (often negative within Shiite discourse because they did not support Ali). The Shahada is found on Islamic Flags. Wahhabism used the shahada on their flags since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ibn Saud added a sword to the flag. The modern Flag of Saudi Arabia, introduced in 1973, also has the shahada on it. More radical organisations also used the Shahada on their flags, the Taliban used a white flag with the shahada inscribed in black. The various jihadist organisations have followed this example. The shahada written on a green background has been used by supporters of Hamas since 2000. In 2006, ISIS designed a flag using the shahada phrase written in white on black background. Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda also use the Shadada on their flags.

Shirk/mushrik - idolatry or polytheism/idolater.

Tajdid and Isla - Renewal and Revival, the Arabic terms ihya (revival) and tajdid (renewal) are typically used in the context of modern Islamic movements, although they have premodern roots. Premodern renewal was usually associated with a designated

renewer (mujaddid) who, according to hadith, would come at the beginning of each century to renew Muslim faith and practice. The modern call for revival and renewal derives from perceptions of backwardness and stagnation in Muslim societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Islamic thinkers encourage a renewed commitment to Islamic values and practice as the means to achieve development and progress.

Takfir - the practice of excommunication. Declaring someone an unbeliever or infidel is named takfir in Islam. Some modern radical movements like al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat Fath al-Sham use a broader definition of takfir to legitimize their extreme violence. The Oxford Dictionary of Islam describes takfir as the pronouncements that someone is an unbeliever, a *kafir*, and therefore no longer a Muslim. In the modern era takfir is used for sanctioning violence against leaders of Islamic states who are perceived as inadequate religious, in other words they are not religious enough. Nowadays takfir has become a central ideology of militant groups.

Takfiri(s) - anti-jihadi designation of radical Sunni militants.

Tawaghit - Muslim regimes that do not rule in accordance with sharia law.

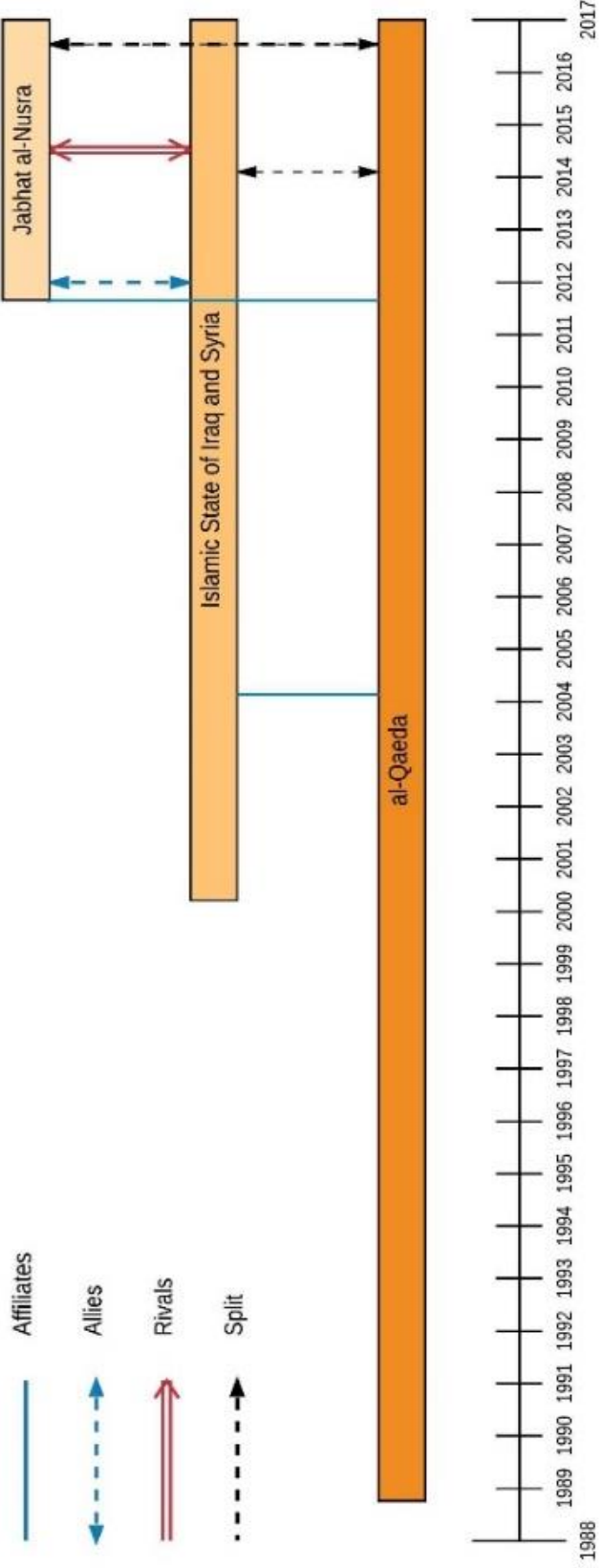
Tawhid - doctrine of the absolute unity of God and his creation/Islam, interpretations varies from radical notions in combatting diversity and secularism, to adjusting diversity.

Ta'ifa/ta'ifiyya - 'sect', sectarianism.

Umma - the Islamic umma originally described Muhammad's community. It is commonly used as a term to describe the collective community of Islam.

Wajib/waajib - In Islamic jurisprudence, an obligatory act, with failure to perform it being sinful.

**Appendix II: The Ties that bind al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra**



© Jasmin Seijbel (information derived from <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/>)

### **Appendix III: Time line**

This time line covers al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra's history and a part of the Syrian civil war. The time line is incomplete but covers the most important developments and events.

**September 2001:** Operatives of al-Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and piloted two into the World Trade Centre towers and one into the Pentagon building. The fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania. Following the attacks, the United States invaded Afghanistan to find and prosecute Osama bin Laden and others who were responsible for the attack.

**October 2002:** ISI assassinated Laurence Foley in Jordan.

**August 2003:** ISI bombed the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf (85 killed, unknown wounded).

**March 2004:** Al-Qaeda facilitated and supervised a bombing on Madrid's public transportation system.

**May 2004:** Seventeen members of the self-proclaimed 'Jerusalem Squadron', attacked two oil industry buildings in Khobar, Saudi Arabia. The militants took 41 hostages. Abdulaziz al-Muqrin, the leader of AQAP from 2003-2004, claimed responsibility for the attacks in an audio tape.

Zarqawi beheaded American civilian worker Nicholas Berg in Iraq.

**July 2005:** Four British men detonated 3 bombs on the London Underground and one on a double-decker bus during morning rush hour in London. Al Qaeda claimed the bombings, but there is no direct evidence that shows that AQ directed the attack.

**November 2005** The organization bombed the Shi'ite Golden Mosque in Samarra, 65 miles north of Baghdad, sparking retaliation against 100 or more Sunni mosques.

**November 2006:** Al Qaeda in Iraq detonated a series of car bombs and carried out mortar attacks in Sadr City, Iraq. It was the deadliest sectarian attack since the beginning of the War in Iraq in 2003.

**September 2008:** A truck bomb exploded at the Marriot Hotel in Islamabad. Intelligence officials suspected AQ, although the attack was never claimed. (40+ killed, 250+ wounded).

**August 2009:** AQI claimed responsibility for the bombings of several government buildings in Baghdad.

**May 2010:** AQI carried out attacks across Iraq in response to the killings of AQI leaders Masri and Baghdadi.

**March 2011:** Protests are held in different parts of the country, inspired by other popular uprisings across the Arab world. The military cracks down on protesters in Damascus, Baniyas and Deraa, cradle of the uprising where 100 people are reportedly killed on the 23rd.

**April 2011:** President Bashar al-Assad vows to crush what he called "terrorists". Protests calling for the downfall of the regime spread and strengthen. The crackdown intensifies. Hundreds are killed.

**May 2011:** The US imposes sanctions on Assad and senior Syrian officials for human rights

abuses.

**June 2011:** Details emerge of a mutiny by Syrian soldiers in the northern town of Jisr al-Shughour, where 120 troops were killed, according to the government.

**August 2011:** After days of ferocious assault on the city of Hama, the epicentre of anti-regime protests, hundreds are left dead by Syrian security forces backed by tanks and snipers. The US, Britain, France and Germany and the European Union demand that Assad resign, saying he is unfit to lead. The Syrian National Council is formed, the first opposition coalition of diverse groups seeking an end to Assad's rule. The body a year later becomes part of a supposedly more encompassing Syrian National Coalition.

**October 2011:** Russia and China veto a European-backed UN Security Council resolution that threatens sanctions against Syria if it doesn't immediately halt its military crackdown against civilians. US pulls its ambassador out of Syria. The Arab League votes to suspend Syria's membership.

**November 2011:** The Arab League overwhelmingly approves sanctions against Syria to pressure Damascus to end the crackdown, an unprecedented move against an Arab state.

**December 2011:** Back-to-back car bombs near Syria's intelligence agencies in Damascus kill at least 44 in the first major attack in the heart of the capital. Syria's state-run TV blames al-Qaeda fighters.

Syrian security forces open fire on thousands of anti-government protesters in the central city of Hama, one day ahead of a visit by Arab League observers on a mission to end the crackdown.

**January 2012:** The Arab League halts its observer mission in Syria because of escalating violence.

Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, announces its creation. Since then it has been described as "one of the most effective rebel forces" in Syria. The group has been designated as a terrorist organisation by the UN, US, UK, Australia and Turkey.

Russia and China veto a resolution in the UN Security Council that backs an Arab League plan calling for Assad to step down. The diplomatic development came a day after hundreds of casualties were reported in a major assault by government forces on Homs' Khalidiyah district. Syria holds referendum on a new constitution, a gesture by Assad to placate the opposition. The West dismisses the vote as a sham.

**March 2012:** Syrian troops take control of shattered Bab Amr in Homs after a government assault that raged for weeks. The main opposition group, the Syrian National Council, forms a military council to organise and unify all armed resistance.

AQI claimed responsibility for attacks across eight cities in just under six hours. Shiites, police, security forces and government officials were targeted in Karbala, Kirkuk, and Baghdad.

Al-Nusra conducted two suicide bombings in the Damascus governorate against the Assad



Regime.

**April 2012:** Syria promises to comply with a UN-brokered ceasefire but carves out an important condition - that the regime still has a right to defend itself against terrorists that it says are behind the uprising. The agreement ultimately fails to hold.

**May 2012:** A massacre in Houla village in Homs leave more than 100 killed, almost half of them children. The UN Human Rights Council later releases a report accusing Assad's forces and pro-government militiamen of war crimes during the bloodbath.

**June 2012:** UN observers suspend patrols in Syria due to escalating violence.

**July 2012:** A blast at the National Security building in Damascus kills the defence minister and his deputy, who is also Assad's brother-in-law, and wounds the interior minister. Rebels claim responsibility.

Syria threatens to unleash chemical and biological weapons if the country faces a foreign attack, the country's first acknowledgement that it possesses weapons of mass destruction.

**August 2012:** Kofi Annan announces his resignation as UN-Arab League envoy to Syria after failing to broker a ceasefire.

Obama says US will reconsider its opposition to military involvement in Syria if Assad's regime deploys or uses chemical or biological weapons, calling such action a "red line" for the US.

**November 2012:** Syrian anti-government groups strike a deal to form the Syrian National Coalition, a new opposition leadership that will include representatives from the country's disparate factions fighting to topple Assad's regime, responding to repeated calls from their Western and Arab supporters to create a cohesive and representative leadership.

Al-Nusra carried out a suicide bombing in the Hama governorate against the Assad Regime. At the time, this bombing represented the highest amount of casualties inflicted on the Assad Regime through an attack by opposition forces (50+ killed, unknown wounded).

**January 2013:** A defiant Assad blames "murderous criminals" for violence in Syria, ignores international demands to step down and pledges to continue the battle "as long as there is one terrorist left" in Syria.

**April 2013:** The leader of the self-declared Jihadist group the Islamic State of Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, released a recorded audio message, in which he announces that Jabhat al-Nusra was an extension of al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria. The leader of al-Nusra, Abu Mohammad al-Joulani, refuses the merger. Divisions and infighting among the ranks of the self-labelled jihadists emerge.

**May 2013:** The European Union ends its embargo on sending weapons to help Syrian rebels.

**June 2013:** Obama authorises sending weapons to Syrian rebels after White House discloses that US has conclusive evidence Assad's government used chemical weapons on a small scale against opposition forces.

**July 2013:** AQI attacked Abu Ghraib and Taji prisons in Iraq, freeing approximately 800 prisoners with Al Qaeda affiliations.

**August 2013:** Al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, the Islamic State (IS), Jaysh Muhajireen wal-Ansar, and Suqqor al-Izz attacked Alawite villages as part of an offensive in the Latakia governorate. They killed 190 civilians, while Al-Nusra only lost 3 fighters. IS and Jaysh Mujahedeen wal-Ansar took 200 hostages.

The Assad regime is accused of using chemical weapons in the Damascus suburbs to kill hundreds of civilians, including many children as they slept. The government denies using chemical weapons.

Obama says he has decided the United States should take military action against Syria. But the president says he will seek congressional authorisation for the use of force.

**September 2013:** ISIS took control of an air defence base in Hama, Syria.

A possible diplomatic solution to avoid a US military strike arose when Syria welcomed a suggestion to move all of the country's chemical weapons under international control. UN Security Council unanimously adopts a resolution requiring the Syrian regime to dismantle its chemical weapons arsenal.

**October 2013:** Officials from OPCW arrive in Damascus to monitor the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.

**January 2014:** UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon meets the first round of peace talks in Geneva involving the Syrian government and Syrian National Coalition.

ISIS takes control of Raqqa.

**February 2014:** After ISIS attacked the headquarters of the *Liwa al-Tawhid Brigade* in Aleppo on the first of February 2014, al-Qaeda distanced itself from ISIS and its actions in Syria.

A second round of the Geneva talks is held; representatives of government and opposition fail to agree on agenda; Joint Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi apologises to the Syrian people for lack of progress in the talks. He resigns in May.

**March 2014:** Al-Nusra began targeting Hezbollah with a suicide bombing in Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, near the border with Syria.

**May 2014:** An American citizen known as Abu Huraira al-Amriki carried out a suicide truck bombing in the Idlib governorate. This is allegedly the first instance of an American conducting a suicide attack in Syria.

**June 2014:** ISIS seized border crossings at Qaim, Waleed, and Trebil, gaining control over the border between Iraq and Syria and the border between Iraq and Jordan.

Syria holds a presidential election in government-held areas. More than one person could stand as a presidential candidate for the first time since the Assad family came to power more four decades ago.

The establishment of a new 'caliphate' was announced by ISIS, with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

named as caliph.

**July 2014:** The UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution on Syria allowing aid convoys to go into rebel-held areas without government approval.

ISIS takes control of Deir Az-Zor. ISIS is fighting rival groups in the province, which borders Iraq. It already controls large parts of Syria's eastern oil-producing region.

**August 2014:** Over a period of two weeks, ISIS executed 700 members of the al-Sheitaat tribe in the Deir al-Zor province, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The tribe and ISIS began fighting in July.

ISIS fighters attack Sinjar, the Yezidi town, forcing Kurdish units to flee.

ISIS successfully captures the Mosul Dam in Iraq, later in August the Dam is recaptured by Kurdish forces.

**September 2014:** ISIS captures the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra.

**October 2014:** ISIS publicly executed a number of members of a Sunni tribe, the Albu Nimr, that had been resisting ISIS's advance in the Anbar province. Reports on the number of dead range from forty-six to over three hundred, and differ on whether or not women and children were killed along with men.

ISIS publicly executed a number of members of a Sunni tribe, the Albu Nimr, that had been resisting ISIS's advance in the Anbar province. Reports on the number of dead range from forty-six to over three hundred, and differ on whether or not women and children were killed along with men.

**November 2014:** Al-Nusra attacked and defeated the Syrian Revolutionary Front (SRF) and Harakat Hazzm in the Jabal al-Zawiya region in Idlib. The two moderate opposition groups were linked to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and both surrendered local towns to Al-Nusra. Some of their members were arrested while others defected to Al-Nusra.

**January 2015:** Two gunmen attacked the offices of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris. The paper had previously been targeted by Islamic extremists for its satire of Islam, and was listed in an AQ "most wanted" list. AQAP claimed the attack, and there is evidence that at least one of the gunmen travelled to Yemen, participated in AQ training, and receiving funding for an attack.

ISIS began to carry out its first assaults on U.S. bases in Iraq, conducting mortar attacks against a training base. According to senior U.S. defence officials, the attacks have been completely ineffective against the base.

**March 2015:** Al-Nusra coordinated with the Jaysh al-Fatah umbrella organization to seize the city of Idlib from the Assad Regime. It was the first time that opposition groups controlled the city of Idlib since the outbreak of the civil war. The battle was part of a successful Jaysh al-Fatah campaign to push the Assad Regime out of the Idlib governorate by June 2015.

**May 2015:** ISIS seized Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, from Iraqi security forces,

which were supported by Shiite militias and American airstrikes. ISIS had controlled areas around Ramadi for almost a year and a half before taking the city.

**November 2015:** Eleven members of the Islamic State killed 130 civilians and injured 100 more in a series of attacks in Paris, France. Gunman and suicide bombers attacked a concert hall, a soccer stadium, restaurants, and bars in the French capital. Within the days following the attack, nine of the IS operatives were killed. One operative remained on the run until he was captured in Brussels on March 18, 2016. According to French President Hollande, the attacks were planned in Syria organized in Belgium.

**March 2016:** Members of the Islamic State set off three nail bombs in Brussels, Belgium: two bombs were detonated in the Brussels Airport and one in the Maalbek Metro Station. In the two days following the attack, European authorities arrested eleven Islamic State militants that have been linked to this attack and the November 2015 attack in Paris, France.

**August 2016:** Jabhat Fatah al-Sham coordinated with the Jaysh al-Fatah umbrella organization and the Fatah Halab control room to break through the Assad Regime's siege on the city of Aleppo. On August 10, the Assad Regime reportedly retaliated with a chlorine attack on opposition-held areas in the city of Aleppo.

**October 2016:** Iraqi Army battles ISIS in Mosul.

**November 2016:** Syrian rebels announce an offensive to retake Raqqa.

**December 2016:** Jabhat Fath al-Sham renamed in December 2016, while merging with other jihadist factions in the region. Nowadays the organisation's name is Tahrir al-Sham.<sup>270</sup>

---

<sup>270</sup> Timeline is conducted from information on the following websites:

<http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/>

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2015/02/rise-fall-isil-150212075706347.html>

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2012/02/201225111654512841.html> and

<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>