



This document is Haji Bakr's sketch for the possible structure of the Islamic State administration.

After the Iraqi Army was disbanded in 2003, by a decree of the American occupational authority – tens of thousands of well trained army men lost their jobs and livelihoods.¹⁰⁵ With a stroke of a pen, America created an army of bitter enemies. 'Colonel Samir' – the Islamic State mastermind – *Haji Bakr* went underground and in Iraqi Anbar province found Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who by this time was notorious for his atrocities against the Shi'a, the attacks on US troops, and his training camps of

¹⁰⁵ (Kepel, 2008)

international jihadists in Afghanistan. The match was made in heaven: on one side was the calculating, strategic genius of the military intelligence officers, on the other the religious fanaticism of the jihadists. The grand plan for an Islamic state was to be legitimized by either God (Sharia) or the glorious Arab history.



Haji Bakr (Samir Abd Muhammad al Khlifawi aka Samir Abed Hamad al Obeidi)

Like many former Iraqi officers, Haji Bakr was detained at Camp Bucca and Abu Ghraib prison. During his detention time (2006-2008) he met with other former officers and established networks and cells that would later become what today is Islamic State. By 2010 a strong underground organization was formed and was waiting for an opportunity. In 2012 that opportunity presented itself when the uprising started in neighboring Syria. They started opening their Dawah offices in spring of 2013 in Raqqa and Manbij, then in al-Bab, Atarib and Azaz. The same was done in Idlib Province, in Sermada,

Atmeh, Kafr Takharim, al-Dana and Salqin. And it kept spreading as soon as enough 'students' were recruited. Where there was resistance – IS was temporarily withdrawing, preferring not to risk too much resistance in the beginning.

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They also decided not to recruit too many Syrians, but focused on foreigners who were coming from all around the world, from those with no military experience, to the battle tested Chechens and Uzbeks. By the end of 2012 the training camps were established in several locations. The units were supposed to be operating in Syria under Iraqi commanders. By fall of 2013 the troops consisted mostly of foreign fighters from various countries. In Aleppo alone there were more than 2500, a third of them were Tunisians, then Saudis, Turks, Egyptians and others. Another advantage was that they had nobody but their fellow fighters and didn't have to worry about protecting their families and homes, as did the Syrian rebels. The black masks they were wearing made them look more frightening, while at the same time making it impossible to know how many of them there really were, giving them a strategic advantage.

The first Syrian city to become the victim of Da'ish conquest was Raqqa. In March 2013 Raqqa first fell under the control of the Syrian rebels. The IS operation

began slowly and was at first undetected. It slowly became more brutal until all the adversaries were overcome. The rebels established a hastily elected city council and a host of other organizations, from journalists, to lawyers, doctors, women and youth groups. The well established infiltration system of Haji Bakr was put to work, followed by the kidnapping of the most important people in town – the head of the city council. And so on until the reign of fear made all the important clans' chiefs pledge allegiance to the Emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

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Until December 2013 IS was expanding according to the Haji Bakr's plan. But then things started going wrong after a well liked rebel leader was brutally tortured by the IS soldiers. The various rebel groups including the Al-Qa'ida affiliate al-Nusra, started attacking the ISIS everywhere. Raqqa nearly fell back into the hands of rebels, but IS was propped up with additional forces that came from Iraq. In Januray 2014 Haji Bakr was killed in Tal Rifaat when the fight between the rebels and Da'ish split the town in two. He tried to keep the low profile but was tipped off to rebel commander by a neighbor. In his house the rebels found computers, mobiles, SIM cards, passports, and papers, but not a single Qur'an.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ (Reuter, 2015).

After capturing Mosul, al-Baghdadi's appetite increased to ruling the entire region, from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, and so the rules of the 'State' have been adjusted as well. Until the Mosul take-over, the treatment of non-Muslims was not clearly defined and the *Jihadists* had freedom to do with them as they wanted. However, in Mosul the 'Caliph' issued a rule which gave the non-believers a choice of paying a special tax, leave, convert to Islam, or die.¹⁰⁷

However, despite all that has been thus far said the story about ISIS/IS is incomplete. Many of the sources used here to track the origins of ISIS/IS are from the mainstream media, or from the books written by either journalists or former Western intelligence officers, with some academic sources. While there is no reason to question the credibility or validity of any of these accounts, prudence is advised in taking their claims as absolute truths. Reasons for prudence are rather obvious.

Part of the media mission is to make money to survive, and groundbreaking reports and attention grabbing headlines are one of the ways to do so. The other is, that – although many states will categorically deny it – much of the most powerful media is owned or at least controlled by the states and serve the preset agendas,

¹⁰⁷ (Ghosh, 2014).

delivering messages that advance the 'politically correct narratives'. Not only that, the media usefulness in creating powerful political messages and spreading ideologies has been most evidently proven in the case of Hitler's Nazi Germany and Lenin's Soviet Union. The reason is very simple—media uses (and abuses) the very basic principles of human psychology. Impressionable human mind is most susceptible to captivating stories. If the stories are delivered by an 'authority' (and media are modern information authority) – the number of people who would question the veracity of the claims is minuscule. The principle of obedience to authority was proven to extreme in the famous experiment by Professor Stanley Milgram in 1965.

More famous example of the power of the media is perhaps the 'Big Lie' principle –attributed to Joseph Goebbels, the mastermind of Hitler's propaganda machinery— which maintains that when one lies the lie should be big and repeated frequently, until people start believing it. Lenin was also quoted as saying, that 'often repeated lie becomes true'. Perhaps neither of them has invented the principle (as Germans were accusing the British for using this method). They have all just found ways to manipulate it to such an extent as to change the course of history. The same seems to be the case with the use of propaganda by both the American 'war on

terror' machinery and the terrorists' 'jihad' narrative. Both repeat their fabricated stories to achieve their own agendas — justifying their actions by presenting the other side as evil and a threat to self, giving legitimacy to 'the fight' against it. The end results seemingly demonstrate that both sides are working in unison — lost in their own phobic and psychotic narratives.

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Unfortunately, in this game of information manipulation important state officials have taken part, too. In the course of writing this book, the 9/11 attack CIA/FBI investigation report has been declassified, and released to public. The report indicates that the perpetrators have had contacts and backing of the Saudi government officials. On the other hand in Britain the long-awaited *Chilcot Report* ["The Iraq Inquiry"] has been released as well to show that both the then-President of the United States, George W. Bush and the then-Prime Minister of Britain, Tony Blair have misled, lied and manipulated the national and international public and governments to justify Iraq war. The role of mainstream Western media in dissemination of these lies and disinformation is but additional proof of its complicity in the unjust war — not on terrorists but rather against the entire Muslim (and non-Muslim world that opposes their views) — and the unholy war (contrary to 'jihad' or 'holy war') on the other side 'against the West' (and the 'apostate' Muslims).

Both, albeit by different means and methods, are waging war against the same victim—the innocent and the defenseless, while the masters of disaster on both sides rub their hands satisfactorily as their plans are realized.

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That the terrorists do not respect law is a reasonable expectation —they are outlaws and criminals. They create their own laws and are trying to impose their vision of the 'right' and 'wrong' on the others, who usually end up paying with their lives for the 'privilege' to participate in this 'noble struggle'. They are the victims of cognitive manipulation and their own socio-economic, ethno-cultural and educational circumstances. This point will be further elaborated in the part dealing with the methods that ideologies and revolutionary movements use to lure followers into their ranks. It is shocking, however, that the governments of the states that pride themselves in being democratic, along with the international security and intelligence agencies are not sharing information and taking steps to protect their citizens from harm — instead of collaborating and sometimes shielding terrorists, for own political and economic gains.

Most importantly, due to lack of international cooperation and agreement on how to define, and by extension, address and solve the problem of (*not only Islamist*)

terrorism – there is no solid material provided by the intelligence and security agencies that could provide more insight into the actual identities of these individuals, and finally, real masters of these organizations – in order to design policies and implement counter-terrorism strategies. What we end up with are hit-and-miss attempts and so it happens that results of the half-hearted struggle to uproot terrorism are similarly haphazard.

Interestingly, according to the American military counterterrorism center at West Point and affiliated institutions, the U.S. has willfully ignored the threat while it was still in its early stages. Whether this was due to lack of strategic thinking, or lack of interest in the eventual negative effects of the intervention, or possibly intentional, based on own geopolitical and economic interests, is another matter.

As the previous accounts demonstrate, the Islamic State has emerged from the power vacuum left by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Its spread over large swaths of land in Iraq and Syria was a result of capitalizing on the disenfranchisement of the Sunnis in both states, following

the ouster of Saddam's Ba'athist regime¹⁰⁸ and the U.S. support to, almost exclusively Shi'a government.

The history of ISIS and the rapid multiplication of terrorist factions in Iraq and Syria tell a story of failure of American foreign policy in the Middle East and Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹ In the wake of the invasion, 'the Iraqi state had completely collapsed... the external powerbrokers that held Iraq's future in their hands would place their own interests first... their knowledge and understanding of Iraq was faulty, stemming from a weak understanding of the country, its people, and its history'.¹¹⁰ This lack of insight has led the U.S. to create a Coalition Provisional Authority government along ethnic and religious lines further deepening existing sectarian divisions, instead of reconciling them. The previously privileged Sunni elite was purged while the Shi'a majority, long suppressed under Saddam's rule was propped to power by American support and the fact that they constituted majority of the country's population.

The power brokerage led to Sunni revolt [*Awakening*] which in the years to come would mix and merge with the Islamist factions to fight both the government and the invaders. In the beginning, as was mentioned, the

¹⁰⁸ (Laub & Masters, 2016).

¹⁰⁹ (Ignatius, 2015).

¹¹⁰ (Kfir, 2015).

majority of fighters of Islamic State in Syria were foreign Sunni fighters, as were many among the mujahedin in Afghanistan, who gave rise to Al-Qa'ida's global jihad (although they real fighting role in Afghan war is contested), the terrorist attacks against U.S. assets including the crucial 9/11 – and finally to the overreaction known as 'war on terror', the results of which are still plaguing the whole of Middle East and beyond.

The paradox of both strategies – the terrorists' and the American – is that both sides base their actions on faulty premises, hidden agendas, and lack of fundamental understanding of the ages old imperative of knowing oneself and one's enemy:

- **Americans** thought they could use the jihadists to advance their own ideological and geopolitical agenda of spreading the 'McWorld'¹¹¹ – a world dominated by the American 'exceptionalism' while controlling the resulting chaos.
- **Jihadists** pursuing the utopian Islamic State to emulate the first caliphs (the *Rashidun*) from the early days of Islam, and the 'Golden Age' of the Umayyad in Damascus and Abbasids of Baghdad, listening to the

¹¹¹ Benjamin Barber (2010). *Jihad Vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy*. New York: Random House.

delusional mantra of Osama bin Laden, thought that the actions of the mujahedin have ruined USSR and can bring down another 'evil Western Empire' – the United States.

Perhaps unbeknownst to both of them, more than 2,000 years ago a Chinese military strategist-philosopher, Sun Tzu wrote strategy classic, '*The Art of War*'—a compulsory reading at many military academies in the world. And this brilliant warrior then said,

"If you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know others but know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle"¹¹².

Looking at the American military intervention in Iraq, and its aftermath, one can clearly see the lasting wisdom of his words. One can also see that both the Americans and Jihadists were operating from distorted images of the self and the other. In both cases, the crucial mistake was made due to political and cultural myopia – neither side understood the context in which the enemy operated; neither the psychological, social, political and other factors that impose limitations on seeing the world

¹¹² Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated by Thomas Cleary (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2005), Chapter 3: Planning a Siege, p. 53.

'through the enemy eyes' to be able to predict their moves, counter them and find a solution to a 'war of the worlds' being waged in the Middle East.

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It can also be argued that both the Americans and the Islamists have committed these mistakes due to grandiose view of self based on the ideology of own 'exceptionality' – another impermissible strategic error.

Moreover, both sides had their own hidden agendas, and were not shying away from creating temporary tactical alliances with the enemy – adhering to the *Machiavellian* principle that 'goals justify the means' – when useful for achieving either short or longer-term goals. These alliances with militant Islamists have been an integral part of the American foreign policy since the Afghan-Soviet war (and many other wars in between), and last until today as seen in the support given to various 'rebel' factions in Syria.

Neither side seems to have thought of the aftermath and how such alliances are short lived and create an environment of distrust and divisions among local people, the latter being the crucial factor of stability in post-conflict phase.

It seems as if the U.S. was transfixed on its self-attributed '*moral superiority*', the idea that their decisions

are infallible, even in the face of the contrary evidence. Or perhaps, the only thing that mattered was the pursuit of own hegemonic agenda, while the destruction of states and societies are written off as 'unintended collateral damage'.

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Unfortunately, when the official policy is guided by 'goals justify the means' mindset such tragic outcomes are part and parcel of the strategy. Ideologically they are '*justified*' by higher goals. The morality of such policy will not be discussed at this point.

An attempt at a comprehensive solution to the problem of terrorism in the Muslim world, and related issues that go back centuries, is made in the last section of this report.

Al-Qa'ida and Da'ish: Ideological and Strategic Differences

The clashes and differences existed throughout the Muslim world from the advent of Islam, and they went along sectarian, linguistic, political, ethnic and racial lines. Back then they were understandable as the empire was rapidly expanding into lands populated with people with long and very diverse historical, cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds from those of conquering Arabs. This division is today extant not only

among *mujahedin*, but spans all segments of Muslim societies the world over. And, these differences are nothing to be surprised about. Despite the desires of many for a common identity based on shared religion to serve as unifying factor, the diversity in Muslim countries' today again spans history, culture, levels of economic development, language, customs, and political systems.

In a way, the struggle of the Muslim Islamists to have a unified, *global* Islamic world is similar to the ambition of the Western neo-liberals to unify the world under the ideology of '*globalism*'. Neither idea is accepted by the majority of people, despite the pushes from their instigators, nor will it succeed because most world cultures would like to retain their uniqueness, rather than become a melting pot cooked according to an Anglo-American script and sustained by the power of their militaries and the multinational companies controlling consumption and production of everything that people would eat, drink, read, believe and think.

Certainly, the divisions in Islam are even more prominent among the militant and terrorist groups, because – but not only – they are an amalgamation of people whose only common factor is the religion, while a host of other significant factors drives them apart, sometimes simple things like individual psychological characteristics and

(power) ambitions of leaders to the questions of racial supremacy (contrary to the notion of 'Nation of Islam'). But as the story of Afghanistan will show, and subsequently that of Iraq and Syria, as well—they themselves question whether that religion is truly the same, by arbitrarily labeling one another as '*apostate*', while each pursuing its own practical agendas leaving the religion behind once it's no longer useful and military or economic power change the situation on the ground.

Afghanistan's seeming success in the fight against the Soviet invasion (with the US/CIA support) for a while fuelled hopes among both mainstream Muslims (to various degrees) and the radical fundamentalists alike that the Muslim Ummah was once again united in defense of the faith — as they were during the most glorious days of Islamic history, the narrative kept alive in collective memories through Qur'an, the Hadith, and national and tribal histories. What few know (except for those who have witnessed it), however, is that already in Afghanistan the ideological, operational, strategic and other differences started to plague the seemingly united *mujahedeen* front. Some of the first records of discord are those of Arab Afghans looking down on their hosts and bin Laden himself stating the supremacy of Arabs and their right to lead global jihad.

Again, the proof that the Al-Qa'ida and ISIS are not pioneers of the idea of global jihad can be found in the Iranian Islamic revolution, written by Imam Khomeini, in his 1981 book *"Islam and Revolution"* using similar language:

"...Since Iran is the only state to have begun to implement 'true' Islam, however, it is thought to be the world's only legitimate state with a unique obligation of facilitating the worldwide implementation of Islamic law. Force and violence are not only acceptable but necessary means of doing so...

...the Shiites see themselves as a persecuted minority. They believe that through their special knowledge of the Koran... passed on them by the Prophet Mohammed and the 12 imams, they are the righteous few dominated by an innately wrongful majority.

*...the Shiites view themselves as victims of injustice and oppression. Ayatollah Khomeini has interpreted this theme to make the Shiites the representatives, even vanguard, of the "oppressed and innocent masses crushed under foot all over the world."*¹¹³

¹¹³ Hoffman, 1993.

Moreover, it is worth noting that both sides are representing two major sects within Islam, Iran the Shi'a, and Al-Qa'ida and ISIS the Sunni. Also, both the Iranian official state ideology and practice, and that of the two militant groups understand the application of Sharia law according to their own sectarian affiliations. Here, a useful reminder for a reader is due, and it is a warning against the common misconception about the concept of "Islamic law". Although, as seen here through the Islamist narratives, many lay claims that theirs is the correct interpretation of the *Sharia*, in reality, there is no such thing as 'Islamic Law'. There are, however, different schools of Islamic Law within the Sunni tradition, and then another school of Shi'a tradition.

Within Sunni Islam, these four schools are: *Hanbaliyya*, *Hanafiyya*, *Malikiyya*, and *Shafiyya* — and even among them many distinct rules regarding different matters vary to a great degree from one another. The fact that such diversity exists brings one to conclude (using simple method of deductive reasoning) that anyone who claims that his interpretation is the 'only right one' (in the light of the fact that for many centuries all these schools in principle agree that others are valid too) — is inventing his own ideology or a new sect altogether. This practice is particularly disconcerting taking into account the fact that the leaders of the militant groups discussed here are

neither Islamic scholars nor do they base their ideology on the teachings of the accepted schools listed here. As previously stated, their ideology stems from deviations from the tradition — which started when one man's frustrations with the world around him led him into creating his own 'philosophy', which then turned into a political alliance and finally the establishment of the first Saudi state.

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Similarly, as seen from the Al-Qa'ida's history it started as an idea of assisting Muslim brothers in Afghanistan free themselves from the atheist communist Soviet invasion, but turned into a transnational military organization and global ideology of militant Islam or 'global jihad'. Ultimately, and paradoxically, it even turned against the Afghans it purportedly came to help. Da'ish on the other hand, started from a similar rhetorical position of freeing Muslims from foreign occupation, but from the beginning (at least according to al-Zarqawi's ideas) had a different goal—that of putting words into action and creating an Islamic state—an imitation of the early Islamic caliphate. The idea of creating a state, seems to have been the key matter of contestation and finally breakup and conflict between the Al-Qa'ida, its affiliates in the Levant and the Islamic State (ISIS).

Similarly to Al-Qa'ida's rift with the Taliban in Afghanistan Da'ish started fighting against other Muslims in Iraq, Syria and of lately, Libya. While Al-Qa'ida was focused primarily on fighting the 'far enemy' (the Soviets first, then the West/the U.S.) and spreading its ideology to create a global network of jihadists who will fight not only Western enemy but also 'apostate' Arab and Muslim governments, from the outset, Da'ish had the opposite focus. Their primary target was the 'near enemy', chiefly the Shi'a Muslims in Iraq, then the Iraqi government (which following American invasion was incidentally mostly Shi'a), then the opposing Sunni Muslim militant groups (springing up as a response to the unfair governance brought on by the U.S.), the 'apostate' Muslim governments, and lastly the West.

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Ideological Pillars and Success Metrics

One of the key success factors lies in groups ideological narrative about revival of the Muslim Empire, because of the cognitive resonance it has within the Muslim world, due to its intricate linkage with the life of the Prophet Mohammed, the spread of Islam itself, and the feeling of pride it evokes in mostly oppressed masses of Muslims around the world today.

The other important factors are the last few centuries of Western colonization of the Arab world, the humiliation born out of the loss of sovereignty, the overall decline of Muslim societies, and the delayed or stagnating economic development and modernization of its societies. This inability of most of the Muslim world in the post-Ottoman and post-independence era to chart its own future and compete on par with other countries in the global arena plays a major role in the current turmoil, especially in the Middle East. This is not intended to negate the negative consequences of arbitrarily drawn nation-state borders by the Western powers in the aftermath of the WWI, on the contrary. The 'revolutionary quest' that we are witnessing in the Muslim world is a combination of these factors. It is a quest for a system and a renewed identity, in which Islam and the Muslim states find the way to coexist with one another and with non-Muslim states alike, without either infringing on the right of the others to exist; or without going to the extremes of reverting to either Islamist ideologies, or a to entirely secular post-modern Arab (or Muslim) state. It is a quest of the Muslim world to reinvent itself and design its own identity befitting the modern era.

Ignoring a myriad of factors, including ethnic, sectarian, cultural, linguistic and other varieties (and there are many) extant in the Muslim world, and the context of the

interconnectedness of the 21st century world—including the remnants of the colonialism and its influence through educational and cultural systems—the solution to the problems was erroneously sought in a simplistic and dangerously rigid ideology of 'Islamism'. Like any ideology, it helps to 'solve' complex problems through a simple polarization into 'us' versus 'them'.

Choosing cloak of Islam as the ideological foundation to mask the problems and inability to deal with the contemporary issues facing Muslim world (such as elitism, authoritarianism of most regimes, especially the Arab monarchies, lack of socio-economic development, etc.), various 'revolutionary terrorist organizations' have ensured a permanent flow of funds and recruits. The narrative of Islamic glory, the sacredness of the Sharia [as God given law] and the obligation of '*jihad*' – is known to even the most illiterate among the Muslims worldwide. Getting the followers for this ideology is a matter of masterful manipulation of the most personal and emotional element of socio-cultural and psychological makeup of an average follower of Islam. The ruthless exploitation of the only individual and common identity that every Muslim is certain about, that of being a Muslim – regardless of his national, cultural, educational and social background, is the secret ingredient of success of

the Islamist ideology, be it Wahhabism, Salafism, Al-Qa'idism or Da'ishism.

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The striking similarity with other extremist ideologies and movements from the past including the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition, the Soviet atheist-Communism, the pseudo-Christian anti-Jewish Nazism, the American elitism and *exceptionalist* globalism – is unsurprising. They all share number of common themes: black and white world vision (us vs. them i.e. 'good' vs. 'evil'), urgency for taking action, desire for change (of the old 'rotten' system), persuasion and mobilization via use of propaganda, and the desire for hegemony—the global conquest, and use of violence to eliminate the 'evil other'. The *Islamism*, on which this book focuses endangers the very survival of many Middle Eastern states, ethnic and religious groups, and increasingly threatens the world at large.

a. Spreading the ideology

Certainly, one of the key elements of the Da'ish's strategy is spreading its ideology. As was previously stated, the ideology of Da'ish is similar to that of Al-Qa'ida in sense that both seek to establish Shari'a rule in Muslim states through 'armed struggle' or '*jihad*'. The key element of the ideology is that it is based on Islamic

teachings and mostly Wahhabi and Salafist interpretations of 'pure Islam' and the application of these ideologies to every aspect of life, from state governance to personal affairs of the citizens. The ideology serves to provide 'exclusive knowledge' about 'right' and 'wrong' and how to bring about the desired change, all of that under the premise of 'doing God's will' – hence the primary audience in religious terrorist ideologies is a deity.

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According to a reputed terrorism expert, Bruce Hoffman "whereas secular terrorists attempt to appeal to actual and potential sympathizers, religious terrorists act directly or indirectly to please the perceived commands of a deity",¹¹⁴ which makes the religious terrorism uniquely destructive and dangerous, because the whims of the deity dictate terrorist behavior. Religious terrorism considers violence as a sacred acts mandated by theological demands, liberating the terrorist from political, moral, or practical constraints that limit other terrorists in their struggle.¹¹⁵ *Ideology also serves as a call for action and gives timeliness and methods – the sense of urgency to act immediately.* This element of urgency to act is especially prominent in religious

¹¹⁴ (Hoffman, 1993)

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

ideologies¹¹⁶, such as ISIS's, by its emphasis on end times and the apocalyptic battle that are found in Islamic prophecies. This theme was widely exploited in the ISIS's media, urging the followers to travel to Syria and Iraq to join, because the 'time draws nigh'.

b. Promoting identity of the Ummah; defining enemies

The Muslim community or *Ummah* has a special place in the Islamic narrative and culture, from the very beginnings of the religion and the first community formed by the Prophet and his followers. In Qur'an 3:105 Muslims are told: '*You are the best ummah brought forth for mankind, bidding unto good, rejecting what is disapproved, believing in God*'.

Throughout the Muslim history, in particular the period of great Muslim Empire, the most important element that held all these territories and peoples together, with their vast cultural, linguistic, ethnic, political and economic diversity, was the common identity of being a Muslim and part of the *Ummah* (the Community). This element is particularly emphasized by the ISIS's call to jihad and creation of Islamic State, as it invokes the duty for all Muslims to help their brothers as they are told by the Qur'an. Indeed, in Islam the notion of one's *identity* is

¹¹⁶ Until 19th century all terrorism had religious justification; it changed with the advent of anarchism, Marxism and later secular ideologies.

tied to the communal being, where a Muslim exists as part of the *Ummah*, and where the individual existence is second to that of the group.

This element of common identity is explained by the social identity theory, which postulates that 'people ascertain who they are and to which social group they belong by engaging in a process of *categorization* (putting people, including oneself, into groups), *identification* (a subjective association), and *comparison* (a bias toward one's own group and its importance)'.¹¹⁷ The verse from Qur'an about the *Ummah* is the proof of this process which ISIS skillfully uses to draw people into its ranks.

The emphasis on belonging to *Ummah* is given utmost importance in the non-military sphere of ISIS's warfare as it helps provide a steady stream of both financiers and fighters. The concept of the *Ummah* is a crucial part of the ideology for the psychological preparation of fighters, because it helps to polarize the world into 'worthy' and 'unworthy', the 'true' Muslims against 'apostates' and non-Muslims ("*infidels*"). As explained by social identity theory, the *comparison* part of the process helps distinguish between the members of the *Ummah* (the brothers) and the enemies. Where ultimately enemy is

¹¹⁷ Kfir, 2015.

anyone and everyone who rejects the ideas espoused by the ideology or more precisely the group's radical interpretation of 'pure Islam'.

c. *Ensuring perpetual fighting till the 'end of time'*

Social identity theory also helps to explain the factors that have led to the emergence and expansion of the Islamic State. Part of the secret of its recruitment success and appeal it has for many Muslims around the world is the fact that both ISIS and Al-Qa'ida use the resentment over the great Muslim nation subjugation to the West, and their collaborators, as some Arab governments are labeled. These two, in jihadist terminology are described as 'far enemy' (*al-Adou al-Baeed*) and 'near enemy' (*al-Adou al-Qareeb*), respectively. Although it appears as if the religion is the foundation for the movement's ideology, it is not religion, but grievance and insecurity felt by many Muslims which are being exploited. Syrian philosopher, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, describes this resentment, impotence and grievance as follows¹¹⁸:

"We have never acknowledged, let alone reconciled ourselves to, the marginality and passivity of our position in modern times. In fact, deep in our collective soul, we find it intolerable

¹¹⁸ Cited in Gerges, 2005.

that our supposedly great nation must stand helplessly on the margins not only of modern history in general but even of our local and particular histories".

Yet, ideology alone is insufficient to turn an individual into a terrorist. In order to go from an ideology to action through violence an individual usually goes through a process of radicalization. Radicalization process of most terrorist groups¹¹⁹ consists of four core components: *grievance, cognitive opening, ideology, and mobilization*.

Grievance means there *exists* a *wrong* towards the group to which one belongs or identifies with that needs to be righted, some injustice that requires justice.

Cognitive opening is a process that requires either a charismatic individual and/or compelling idea (ideologue and ideology) to work.

Ideology is the ingredient that provides blueprint for actions, as previously explained.

Mobilization is the moment of acting on the provided blueprint, to address the perceived grievance.

The way this ideology secures constant inflow of supporters and recruits – willing to die for the cause of

¹¹⁹ Dr Peter Neumann, *Countering Violent Extremism* (ICSR, London).

jihad — is found in the environment in which they find themselves. As explained earlier, in the radical Islamic worldview there are two realms, the House of Islam and the House of War. This mindset is the ideological element that ensures perpetual fighting. Islamic State's eschatological (apocalyptic/End of Days) terminology and worldview are such that they strongly believe in their ultimate victory, either by completely defeating the enemy or by sacrificing their lives as *martyrs*, fighting for the cause of God. Martyrdom for the cause of Allah is the only assurance of earning a place in heaven. According to Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, the IS spokesman, "current jihad will continue until the Day of Judgement."¹²⁰

d. *Obeying obligation to fight, not necessarily winning*

The nature of the revolutionary spirit of the Islamist ideology is evident in their systemic efforts to instill the idea of jihad as an individual's obligation to fight (for every Muslim able to do so) to the extent of making it equal with the five fundamental pillars of Islamic faith: the profession of faith, praying, fasting, alms-giving, and pilgrimage. Although the jihad in classical interpretation of the ulema is considered as a collective duty (*fard kifaya*) and primarily of 'defensive' nature, the modern interpretation of the Islamists like bin Laden and ISIS's

¹²⁰ Kaplan & Costa, 2015.

hypothetical creator al-Zarqawi consider it as a *permanent* and *personal* obligation (*fard 'ayn*).¹²¹

Drawing from the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, that jihad was an 'eternal' armed struggle "against every obstacle that comes into the way of worshiping God and the implementation of the divine authority on earth, *hakimiya*, and returning this authority to God and taking it away from the rebellious usurpers [rulers]."¹²²

Osama bin Laden preached jihad as 'individual duty' of every capable Muslim to go to war, saying that 'jihad is part of our religion and no Muslim may say that he does not want to do jihad in the cause of God... These are the tenets of our religion. [...] No other priority, except faith, could be considered before [jihad].'" To bin Laden, *jihad* was second only to belief (*iman*).¹²³

These claims clearly demonstrate how revolutionary his claims are and how different from that of Ulama the classical school. This interpretation of the individual duty of jihad — as per their own admonition— is due to the occupation of the Muslim lands; either by the local 'apostates' (the near enemy) or their American masters (the far enemy). Here again we see the presumed

¹²¹ (Gerges, 2005)

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Gerges, 2005.

'injustice' — the problem, and the 'solution' via 'jihad' replayed as part of the ideological narrative.

This ideology draws heavily on the first ideologue of modern jihad, Sayyid Qutb, whose revolutionary idea of jihad has to various degrees inspired many generations of modern jihadis and among them, most importantly, the leaders and chief ideologues of both al-Qa'ida and ISIS. According to Qutb, "*the Islamic Jihaad has no relationship to modern warfare, either in its causes or in the way in which it is conducted. The cause of Islamic Jihaad should be sought in the very nature of Islam, and its [universal] role in the world.*"¹²⁴

e. *Institutionalizing a culture of martyrdom*

Violence and sacrifice are the themes that permeate all major religious traditions from pagan animalism, to Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, and lastly — certainly Islam, too.¹²⁵ From this point of view, there is hardly anything new about the religion-violence nexus that Islamist terrorist groups have themselves invented. What is new is how central the concept of 'martyrdom' has become to the 'modern jihad' movement and its use as a tactical weapon in the terrorist arsenal.

¹²⁴ Cited in Gerges, 2005; *emphasis added*.

¹²⁵ Juergensmeyer, et al., 2013.

From the early days of Islam, Muslims have been instilled with the belief that suffering for the faith was an essential part of their religious life. This belief is derived from the Qur'an (9:111) itself, where the message has been revealed to the Prophet¹²⁶:

"Allah has bought from the believers their lives and their wealth in return for paradise; they fight in the way of Allah, kill and get killed. This is a true promise from Him... and who fulfills His promise better than Allah? Rejoice then at the bargain you have made with Him; for that is the great triumph."

Indeed, first followers of Islam in its original environment of pagan Meccan pantheon were considered an offense to the existing polytheistic religion that was inclusive of diverse beliefs and deities, whereby Islam with its monotheistic belief was exclusive. Hence, first Muslims were in conflict with the rest of their contemporary community. As Muslim beliefs were exclusionary, they have led the foundations for the first experiences of martyrdom. For the Muslims, the first story of martyrdom relates to an Ethiopian slave, Bilal—who was persecuted for his beliefs. Although Abu Bakr, the Prophet's companion and successor, later bought Bilal he remained

¹²⁶ Cook, 2007.

the symbol of Islamic martyrdom—the suffering for the sake of Islam.¹²⁷

Following the early days of Islam, the concept of martyrdom followed strictly sectarian lines, and included those who were killed by the opposite sects of Islam — denying the ‘martyrs’ the right to call themselves Muslims, mainly the Sunni against the Shi’a (as the two main sects of Islam). Paradoxically, a number of mainstream Islamic traditions concur that if a Muslim kills another Muslim both inevitably go to hell. However, this concept of going to hell for killing a ‘apostate’ Muslim, has been reversed by the Sunni Muslims via contentious narrative that those killed in such battle are ‘martyrs’ who died defending faith. Unfortunately, there are too many examples of internecine conflicts, exclusively involving Muslims, which until this day are not properly resolved in the Sunni interpretation of Islam, but left to God to resolve.

The understanding of martyrdom as violent struggle against political injustice probably comes from the *Kharijites*, who have assassinated Prophet’s grandson Ali, the third Muslim caliph for his ‘un-Islamic rule’. The same principle is today reapplied to all those Muslim rulers who do not fit the Da’ish ideology, for various reasons. It is

¹²⁷ Cook, 2007.

important to note that following the Kharijite movement, the Ulama tried to change the language from “seeking martyrdom” to “praying for martyrdom” to accentuate the other way, or the *inner jihad*. This tension between diverging conceptualizations of the martyrdom in Islam shows its tendency to adjust its meaning to the sociopolitical circumstances at any given time.¹²⁸

Indeed, throughout the later Islamic history the concept of martyrdom has changed and adapted to the outside circumstances, to take a particularly prominent place in the narratives of the modern day radical Islamists and terrorist groups like Al-Qa’ida and Da’ish. The animosity towards the Shi’a and other Islamic sects that deviate from Sunni Islam has remained to this day, and is more alive than ever in the sectarian conflict raging in Syria and Iraq today.

Again, the idea of modern martyrdom in political, radical Islamist thought is ascribed to the writings of Sayyid Qutb, who saw martyrdom as ultimate virtue which guaranteed a Muslim victory over the world. His own trial at the hand of Egyptian government and ultimately the death sentence made Qutb become a living embodiment of modern Islamic martyrdom.¹²⁹ The links to Qutb and

¹²⁸ Calhoun, 2004.

¹²⁹ (Cook, 2007).

his teachings to the leaders and ideologues of Al-Qa'ida and Da'ish have been previously described.

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By design or coincidence, at this moment nearly all key figures that have been mentioned as the leaders or the ideologues of various militant Islamist groups — in their own terminology — have been *martyred*, i.e. 'died while fighting jihad for the cause of Allah'. In this sense, they continue to serve as an ideological inspiration for the new generations of jihadists who 'live to die as martyrs' on the path of jihad. *Martyrdom requires jihad to render martyrs, and martyr blood serves as an infusion for the new martyrs where their death serves the higher purpose of liberation of their societies.* On the other hand, it can be argued that the ideology of Da'ish is essentially a death cult, where perpetual bloodshed ensures the life of the movement.

f. Establishing pride, brotherhood, unity

The source of both inspiration and desperation and shame of the jihadi warriors is drawn from the history of Islamic Empire (the Golden Age) and its subsequent decline, which eventually led to Western colonization and the Western imposed and arbitrarily drawn 'borders'. In the more recent history, particularly Arab, the 1967 war with Israel and the defeat of several Arab armies at the

hand of a 'tiny' little Israel — and the accompanying occupation of Palestine and the associated problems, for many radicalized Muslims are both an inspiration and the justification of the modern jihad. The Palestinian injustice and the righting of the wrong, including the liberation of Jerusalem and other Muslim lands is the cause worth fighting for. It is also the ultimate battle aimed at reestablishing the lost glory and pride in the minds and collective memory of many Muslims around the world. The liberation of Jerusalem was prominent in al-Zarqawi's proselytizing and according to some sources, his ultimate goal.

The concept of brotherhood is very strong in Islam, as emphasized in Qur'an itself. "*The believers are nothing else than brothers. So make reconciliation between your brothers, and fear Allah, that you may receive mercy.*" [Al-Hujjurat, 49:10]

The idea of brotherhood was strongly established in the Muslim community following the Hijrah of the Prophet; the notion included clearly defined responsibilities of Muslims towards other members of the then established Islamic State. It included, among other things support of the strong for the weak, the rich for the poor, the knowledgeable to those in pursuit of knowledge, and so on. Moreover, and importantly for the purposes of the

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jihadist ISIS ideology, as in the early days of Islam, the brotherhood is an obligation — not a choice.

This notion of unity is deeply exploited among the Da'ish members, where the emphasis is placed on avoiding mingling with the 'non-believers' (as previously defined) — as they 'fragment the Ummah'. Because they feel threatened and oppressed, their 'resistance' to modernization, Western influence, and host of other issues, seeks in unity and renewed Muslim identity better future by returning to the fundamental Islam. The Muslim unity is important element of the global jihad as only united, all as one in their jihad the Muslims can hope to liberate themselves and achieve the final victory by turning the whole of the Earth into Dar al-Islam. The group thus finds its strength in the 'power of many' thought the ideas of brotherhood and unity of all Muslims. In practical terms, this has been witnessed by the willingness of many Muslims from around the world to rally behind this idea and join the Da'ish ranks over the years.

This is eloquently expressed by one Yemeni Afghan volunteer, as follows: "Afghanistan reminded Muslims of all colors and races that what unites us [the Islamic faith] is much more important than the superficial differences wrought by colonialism and secular nationalism. We felt

we were on the verge of reenacting and reliving the Golden Age of our blessed ancestors."¹³⁰

'Real Islam' and 'Realpolitik' Dichotomy

In the previous sections about the genesis of Da'ish (ISIS) as an extension of AQI, the ideological and organizational differences have been mentioned as the reason for the fall-out of the two groups. Here, these issues are addressed in more depth to demonstrate — among other things — how the 'jihad' narrative that both the Al-Qa'ida and Da'ish seek to present as their key ideological premise is false. The splinter groups and infighting that started in Afghanistan and continued in Iraq and Syria to this day, the racist supremacy of Arabs over leading 'jihad' as witnessed by bin Laden's own words, are the case in point.

It is to be hoped that this analysis will demonstrate the utilitarian and criminal nature of these organizations and the victimization of their misled followers, who are lured into the 'unholy war' believing they are fighting for freedom and justice for their own people, to defend (sometimes find/regain) their own religious identity, and — most tragically of all — that their fight is for God's cause. A God [*Allah*], who according to the Muslim

¹³⁰ (Gerges, 2005).

scriptures is most often addressed as '*the most merciful, most compassionate*'. Herein lies the most obvious proof of falsity of the Islamist ideology of terrorist *jihad*—that the most merciless and inhuman behavior against their own kin [primarily] is perpetrated in the name of the most merciful God.

Indeed, this demonstrates the psycho-pathological underpinnings in most cases linked to the individual characteristics and personality issues of the leadership. Due to lack of verifiable information about the links with various foreign secret services it is impossible to prove the financial and other incentives that may too have played a role in their engagement. However, from a number of sources it can be safely deduced that most of the ideologues of 'jihad', from Abd al-Wahhab himself, to Sayyid Qutb, to bin Laden, and al-Zarqawi have ultimately sought power and had personal socio-psychological backgrounds that made them especially susceptible to extremist thinking and behavior, such as feeling of social alienation from their immediate surroundings (in case of Abd al Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb), or family circumstances (in case of bin Laden, who grew up without a father whom he sought to emulate, and perhaps please with his pursuit of 'ultra-traditionalist' ideology; and al-Zarqawi who was a fatherless orphan from a poor background left to mend for himself through

a path of petty crime). These and similar personal and social motivational factors cannot be discounted or worse ignored in the backgrounds of their followers.

Furthermore, although all these groups and their leaders claim Qur'anic teachings as their guidelines and the rule of 'righteous caliphs' in an Islamic State regulated by the Shari'a law as their aim – there are many flaws found in this narrative, the system they advertise to public and the reality on the ground.

One important factor to consider in case of Da'ish is the fact that its leadership is a mix of former secular Ba'athist officers of Saddam Hussein's army who have joined Jihad based on strategic calculations, and pragmatism – driven by the need to survive and revenge for the loss of status and power, and part religious zealots who serve as ideologues, and the fighters, who are a mix of criminals, high-school dropouts, young unemployed men seeking their own identity, thrill and adventure in a romantic quest for the revival of the glorious Arab past. And even here, there is a paradox. They aim to establish a glorious Caliphate, but forget (or have never learned it in the first place) that the most glorious of the caliphates – the Damascus and Baghdad – have been the centers of culture, education, science and most importantly, intense socio-cultural and economic

exchanges between the East and West. None of this exists in the so-called 'Islamic State' that they have created. Their state is closing schools, arbitrarily and indiscriminately killing people, children, women and old, even their own members for slightest 'deviation' from the 'rules of the State'. Their 'State' is another totalitarian state where elite leadership uses religious zealots as foot soldiers. In the highest echelons of power there are no checks and balances but endemic corruption and power struggles.

The whole notion of its legitimacy is based on the presumed 'righteousness' of the self-proclaimed (elite chosen or even imaginary) *Caliph* — because he is believed to be a descendant from the tribe of the Prophet Mohammed.¹³¹

Yet one must ask, why seek the dubious descendant from the Prophet's tribe, if the same people desecrate the shrines and tombs of the real descendants and deny them the right to live and to worship? *Why seek Prophet's tribesmen if his closest descendants, the Hashemites already exist and rule the neighboring Jordan?*

¹³¹ (Fishman, 2007)

Oddly enough, just like the Shi'a the Jordanian royal family is an enemy to the Islamic State. In fact, the man who, according to former U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell's speech to UN Security Council was the key link between Al-Qa'ida and Saddam Hussein¹³², the infamous Al-Zarqawi is responsible for numerous terrorist attacks in Jordan and his goal to overturn the Jordanian Kingdom is well known. Upon his first return from Afghanistan in early 1990s Zarqawi has spent years in Jordanian prisons. Moreover, the followers of Prophet Mohammed's slain grandson Imam Ali the Shi'a Muslims — are a number one sworn enemy of the "Islamic State".

The way the 'State' is run and operated, shows deep flaws too. More than a state run by a God given law, it resembles an authoritarian kleptocracy, "transferring net wealth from commoners to upper classes. [...]The difference between a kleptocrat and a wise statesman, between a robber baron and a public benefactor, is merely one of degree: a matter of just how large a percentage of the tribute extracted from producers is retained by the elite, and how much the commoners like the public uses to which the redistributed tribute is put."¹³³ They however seem not to notice that such system of governance as is kleptocracy, in absence of

¹³² (Chossudovsky, 2004/2014)

¹³³ Diamond, 2005

public support “run the risk of being overthrown, either by downtrodden commoners or by upstart would-be replacement kleptocrats seeking public support by promising a higher ration of services rendered to fruits stolen.”¹³⁴

Moreover, infighting that is endemic in all such entities will ultimately destroy the ‘Islamic State’ and the organization that runs it, despite its mantra that their fight is God-ordered. This may be seen in the recent months since the more intensified fight against Islamic State has been carried out since Russian air-force has joined the Syrian government forces in its anti-terrorist fight.

Al Qaeda and similar groups are used for manipulation. Since 9/11 America is actively looking for allies for their ‘war on terror’... some countries may consciously label dissidents to get military and other assistance from the U.S. and NATO allies to ‘fight militant Islamists’.

Some reasons for this and similar attitudes can be grounded on various biases – including fear that now pervades both the Muslim and non-Muslim world in relation to Islamist terrorists. Exaggerating the facts to achieve aims is a well known political tactic, but one that

¹³⁴ Ibid.

should not be part of anti-terrorism efforts, if we are serious about addressing them – head on and fairly.



Today it has been proven that conscious attempts of US and UK governments and the media to link Saddam Hussein to Al-Qa'ida in order to justify attacking Iraq, represent a war crime, because it was carried out based on false information and with sinister geopolitical, neo-imperialistic ends in mind. Just like non-state actor terrorism such acts by states, especially those that pride

themselves in being 'beacons of democracy', are inexcusable and unforgivable.

The matters are even more sensitive when they involve military interventions in former colonies, where the collective memories keep alive the feelings of self-shame and resentment towards former colonizers. Instead of helping resolve the underlying issues Western military interventions in these countries exacerbate the problems, and threaten to turn existing conflicts into endless wars of attrition. Due to already poor socio-economic and in many cases political circumstances in these countries, endless wars can only make things worse, never better.

A holistic and honest approach to a problem of terrorism and extremism in the Muslim world, that would account for all the various factors that have contributed to its current state is a dire necessity. Both the Muslim countries and the West have to give their contributions to finding a solution. Both parties also need to understand that their own selfish power-struggles have no place in this process. Only those actors who are ready to approach the problem with the desire to help find a lasting solution should be welcome to the club. It is a high time for the international community to understand that the US-led approach in the form of 'war on terror' has only made matters worse; indeed, this approach has

made Al-Qa'ida a global jihad brand that has splintered into a myriad of groups with similar ideologies and goals spread all over the world. It has made the *jihadism* a truly global problem and one that can only be solved through a concerted effort of all those actors who have contributed to its growth.

Da'ish Media Use – Central Role of Propaganda

"The printing press is the greatest weapon in the armory of the modern commander." — British military strategist T. E. Lawrence (commonly known as: *Lawrence of Arabia*)

The use of propaganda in terrorist movements of the modern age goes back to the anarchists of the late 19th Century. The famous axiom of terrorist acts being 'propaganda by the deed' dates back to Russian anarchists, who skillfully used modern technologies of their time, such as telegraph and the newspaper, to communicate their message to the wider audience. After the anarchists carried out a number of heads of state assassinations, including the Russian tsar, the Empress of Austria, the king of Italy, and the U.S. president—the 1890s have been labeled the 'Golden Age of Assassination'.

Having considered this historic precedent, in this sense, the Da'ish use of modern media technologies and

propaganda as part of their marketing and communication efforts is nothing new or surprising. It is rather an integral part of the overall strategy and key success factor that has enabled it to achieve the unthinkable—become the focal point of global security discussion across traditional and virtual media spaces.

Osama bin Laden himself pointed out the strategic importance of media for the jihadist movement, in a 2002 letter to Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, stating that: *"It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90 percent of the total preparation for the battles."*¹³⁵ The emphasis on use of media was later reiterated by Ayman al-Zawahiri in a letter to al-Zarqawi, during the first *jihadist* insurgency in Iraq: *"We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Ummah."*¹³⁶

More importantly, even prior to al-Qa'ida leadership, the US – both officially via government public communication channels and via mainstream media in the likes of *The New York Times* – just two months post-9/11 have

¹³⁵ Klausen, 2015. [emphasis added]

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* [emphasis added]

labeled "Osama bin Laden a formidable propaganda foe" and declared propaganda's comeback as a tool for shaping public opinion.¹³⁷ Also, it would be wrong to assume that the propaganda material created by Da'ish is produced in the battlefield centers. It is more likely, or rather even probable, that at least some of the marketing departments are not located in the fighting areas, and could be as well housed in some (un)witting Western or Arab country, as some research indicates.

¹³⁷ Fullerton & Kendrick, 2006.