

# Framing the world in *Dabiq*

The propaganda of the Islamic State

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**Declaration of no plagiarism**

I hereby declare that in this thesis I did not plagiarise any individual during the process of writing. Any idea that is not my own has been noted in the reference list.

Yours truly,

Tom van Gorkom, 18 June 2016.

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## Introduction

The Islamic State (IS) is one of the most powerful and influential terror groups in history. Western intelligence services, militaries and experts have already largely mapped the organisational structure, ideological origins, tactics and symbols of the Islamic State, but its attraction to particularly Western youths and its motivations often remain nebulous.

The influence of the Islamic State is great, both in the West for the attacks it has staged in Europe and the United States and for the violence it practices in the Middle East in pursuit of territorial conquest for its 'caliphate'. The organisation's territory stretches from northern and western Iraq to Central Syria, with affiliate groups in Egypt's Sinai desert, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup> With these factors in mind, it becomes very important to understand what IS wants, how it thinks and and how it acts. The best way to do this is to look at what the Islamic State says about itself.

In this thesis I intend do a qualitative analysis of the way the Islamic State uses one of the means the organisation has at its disposal to broadcast its message to a wide audience. The online magazine *Dabiq* is an easily accessible resource that allows IS to explain its ideology and goals in a detailed way, and goes a long way to describe what the organisation is. I intend to analyse the Islamic State's propaganda narrative using the theoretical framework of 'framing', drawing mostly from the work of Benford and Snow.

### *On framing*

'Framing' or 'frame analysis' is a multidisciplinary research concept generally attributed to the work of Erving Goffman in his 1974 book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*.<sup>2</sup> The concept has since been continually expanded upon and was becoming increasingly broad until Benford and Snow's seminal article in 2000.<sup>3</sup> In this article they provide an overview of different aspects of the framing concept and find points of coherence and divergence, explaining that framing – in the context of social movements – is the act of producing "collective action frames" or "mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings".<sup>4</sup> According to the article, frames are "'schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals to 'locate, perceive, identify and label' occurrences within their life space and world at large."<sup>5</sup> Frames, in short, are ways people perceive and interpret the world and events around them.

Collective action frames are made up of a series of 'core framing tasks'. These framing tasks consist of identifying problems and attributing blame, identifying solutions and mobilising people to take action; 'diagnostic framing', 'prognostic framing' and 'motivational framing', respectively. When applied to the narrative of the Islamic State in *Dabiq*, I intend to

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Y Zelin, "The Islamic State's Model," Washington Post, January 28 2015. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/01/28/the-islamic-states-model/>. Accessed on 26-04-16.

<sup>2</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611-639.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 613.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 614.

locate IS' diagnostic, prognostic and mobilising frames drawing on literature on the subject and the analysis of the (currently) fourteen issues of the magazine.

The central question in this thesis will be: *How does the Islamic State frame its narrative in its online magazine Dabiq?*

The first section will give an overview of the history and organisation of the Islamic State; the second section will provide an overview of IS' diagnostic framing, roughly the answer to the question "what is wrong with the world and who is responsible for this?" The third section will explain IS' prognostic framing, answering the question of "what needs to be done?" The fourth section will go into IS' motivational framing, looking at the ways to motivate people in order to do what needs to be done.

## What is the Islamic State?

### Origins

The Islamic State as we know it today was announced on 29 June 2014, shortly after the fall of the city of Mosul in northern Iraq.<sup>6</sup> But IS' roots go much further back than the proclamation of its caliphate and are not to be found in Iraq and Syria, but rather in Jordan and Afghanistan. The seeds of the caliphate were sown by a Jordanian named Ahmad Fadhil Al-Nazzal Al-Khalayila, better known by his *nom de guerre*: Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi.

Upon his release from prison in 1999 and broadly influenced by one of the foremost jihadi ideologues, Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi, Al-Zarqawi travelled to Afghanistan in order to seek support from Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qa'ida. He received financial support, started his own training camp and founded a group called Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad. All this was possible because of the help he received from Al-Qa'ida, which was able to operate so freely in Afghanistan because of the Taliban government's patronage.<sup>7</sup> When the US invaded Afghanistan in 2001 in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks, searching for Bin Laden and toppling the Taliban, Al-Zarqawi and his men briefly fought alongside other jihadi groups in the country before making their way to northern Iraq via Iran.<sup>8</sup>

On 20 March 2003 the United States of America invaded Iraq in order to depose dictator Saddam Hussein over his alleged ties to Al-Qa'ida and biological and nuclear weapons programmes.<sup>9</sup> For many reasons but also in large part due to mistakes made by the US during and immediately after the invasion a Sunni insurgency quickly started against the occupying troops of the US-led "coalition of the willing".<sup>10</sup> The decision by the US to disband the Iraqi army and thus allow thousands armed of young men to flood the powder keg that was Iraq at this time contributed enormously to the context in which the insurgency rose up.<sup>11</sup> Apart from this, general dissatisfaction, unemployment and sectarian tensions between Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds were major problems in Iraq and Al-Qa'ida was poised to exploit the situation.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Zarqawi was a major figure in the Sunni insurgency, leading his group against the American military from his powerbase in northern Iraq around the town of Biyara, in Sulaymaniya province. He started attacks on coalition and UN targets in August 2003, with a series of car bombings,<sup>13</sup> but Al-Zarqawi's real rise to prominence and international notoriety came with his pledge of allegiance to Bin Laden's Al-Qa'ida in October 2004. The group's name

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<sup>6</sup> The Islamic State, "The Promise of Allah," 29 June 2014. Available at [https://ia902505.us.archive.org/28/items/poa\\_25984/EN.pdf](https://ia902505.us.archive.org/28/items/poa_25984/EN.pdf) accessed via [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/06/isis\\_announces\\_formation\\_of\\_ca.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/06/isis_announces_formation_of_ca.php) on 28-04-16.

<sup>7</sup> Erin Marie Saltman and Charlie Winter, "Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism," *Quilliam Foundation Report* (2014): 17.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," *Brookings Doha Analysis Paper*, Brookings Institution (2014): 6.

<sup>9</sup> "US launches cruise missiles at Saddam," CNN (online), 20 March 2003. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/03/19/sprj.irq.main/>. Accessed on 09-05-2016.

<sup>10</sup> "US names 'coalition of the willing', BBC News (online) 18 March 2003. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2862343.stm>. Accessed on 09-09-2016.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, "Introduction," *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict Volume 1*, (Westport, Connecticut/London: Praeger Security International, 2008), 1-12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Lister, "The Islamic State," 7.

was changed to to “Al-Qa’ida in the Land of the Two Rivers” (Al-Qa’ida fi Bilad al-Rafidayn), better known in the West as Al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI).<sup>14</sup>

Although Al-Zarqawi’s group became part of the Al-Qa’ida “franchise”, he was never fully under their control and relations with Al-Qa’ida’s leadership in Pakistan became increasingly strained over the position he took on the Shiites. Al-Zarqawi, in a letter released on 14 September 2005, declared war on the Shiites of Iraq, branding them apostates and calling on the Sunnis to join with him against them.<sup>15</sup> Yet despite these strains and waning popular support because of the extreme and indiscriminate violence he used, his influence and power inside the country remained substantial and he was even able to stage attacks in Jordan simultaneously to his war in Iraq.<sup>16</sup>

AQI’s prominence in Iraq was such that it was able to unite other Sunni jihadi groups around it in an organisation called the Mujahidin Shura Council in January 2006 and to start to control and administer its own territory. This group eventually declared the foundation of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) in October 2006, with Abu ‘Umar Al-Baghdadi as its leader<sup>17</sup>, after Al-Zarqawi was killed in June of that year.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Al-Zarqawi’s successor as leader of AQI (as an organisation within the Islamic State in Iraq), Abu Hamza Al-Muhajir, declared his loyalty to the leader of ISI, not to Bin Laden, signifying the rift that had been growing between the two groups.<sup>19</sup>

With the foundation of the Islamic State in Iraq came territorial control and governance by the *mujahidin* but this did not engender the support that they had hoped. ISI turned out to be incapable of adapting its ideology to what local populations were willing to stomach, especially from the many foreign fighters in the organisation, and their emphasis on enforcing Islamic law and carrying out its punishments together with upending Iraqi tribal customs resulted in a quick loss of popular support.<sup>20</sup> This loss eventually transformed into active resistance by Sunni tribes, especially in ISI’s stronghold of Anbar Province.

The *Sahwa* (Awakening) Councils were Sunni tribes who joined in the fight against ISI with support from Iraqi and coalition forces. These groups proved to be very effective at degrading ISI.<sup>21</sup> From 2007 to 2009 the Awakening groups managed to eradicate the Islamic State in Iraq from their territory, but the Sunni tribal effort was weakened with the beginning of the American withdrawal in June 2009.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq’s Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict Volume 1* (Westport, Connecticut/London: Praeger Security International, 2008), 113.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-155.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-160.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 570.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>19</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, “The War between ISIS and Al-Qa’ida for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement,” Research Note, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy No. 20, (2014). Available at [http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote\\_20\\_Zelin.pdf](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote_20_Zelin.pdf). Accessed on 28-04-2016.

<sup>20</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, (London: Hurts & Company, 2009), 155-159.

<sup>21</sup> Cordesman, *Iraqi Insurgency*, 512.

<sup>22</sup> Lister, “Profiling the Islamic State,” 10.

## *A new phase*

The US withdrawal, which ended on 18 December 2011, marked the end of its direct involvement in military affairs in Iraq for that period<sup>23</sup> but also signified an end to its role as a buttress for the Sunni Awakening effort and maintaining a sectarian balance in the country. With the US's ability to operate independently greatly diminished, the Shiite government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki drastically reduced its support for the tribes. By 2010 ISI (having moved its base of operations to Mosul) was capable of recruiting the tribes once again, exploiting religious tensions and able to offer higher salaries than the government.<sup>24</sup>

Abu 'Umar Al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza Al-Muhajir were both killed on 18 April 2010 in Anbar Province by US and Iraqi forces.<sup>25</sup> On 15 May 2010 the group announced that Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi would be Abu 'Umar's successor as head of the group, a statement that did not garner much attention in Western media as people widely believed that ISI was mostly defeated and could not do much more than stage suicide bombings.<sup>26</sup> This lack of international attention continued through much of 2010-14.

The move to Mosul and the increasingly Iraqi nature of ISI allowed the organisation to again evolve into a force to be reckoned with in the country. Learning from past mistakes, ISI maintained good relations with local communities and used its increased local cultural affiliations (due to a larger number of Iraqis among their ranks) to infiltrate the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). ISI was also again increasing military operations and carrying out intimidation campaigns against the local ISF commanders and soldiers through targeted assassinations and bombings, which contributed enormously to demoralising the ISF. This demoralisation, also tied to corruption and sectarian politics,<sup>27</sup> turned out to be an important factor in the (at first glance) astounding collapse of the Iraqi army in the city in June 2014.<sup>28</sup>

## *Expansion into Syria and Al-Qa'ida split*

The expanding violence and increasingly tenuous situation of the regime of Bashar al-Asad in Syria, which were the result of a burgeoning civil war after anti-government protests began in 2011<sup>29</sup>, were seen as an opportunity by Al-Baghdadi. The conflict in Syria (while certainly more complicated than I can elaborate on here) was mostly one between the Alawite

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<sup>23</sup> "US flag ceremony marks formal end of war role," BBC News (online). Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-16192105>. Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>24</sup> Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," 10.

<sup>25</sup> "US and Iraqi forces kill Al Masri and Baghdadi, al Qa'ida in Iraq's top two leaders," The Long War Journal (online) at [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/04/al\\_Qa'ida\\_in\\_iraqs\\_to.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/04/al_Qa'ida_in_iraqs_to.php). Accessed on 29-04-16.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Shadid, "Iraqi Insurgent Group Names New Leaders," At War Blogs The New York Times (online), 16-05-2010. Available at [http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/iraqi-insurgent-group-names-new-leaders/?\\_r=0](http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/iraqi-insurgent-group-names-new-leaders/?_r=0). Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>27</sup> Geoff Dyer, "Iraq's army faces tough challenge to build on victory," *Financial Times* (online), January 1 2016. Available at <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/92e8f1b4-b023-11e5-993b-c425a3d2b65a.html#axzz4BvpfAs2X>. Accessed on 18-06-2016.

<sup>28</sup> Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Slackman, "Syrian Troops Open Fire on Protesters in Several Cities," *New York Times* (online), March 25 2011. Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/26/world/middleeast/26syria.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/26/world/middleeast/26syria.html?_r=0). Accessed on 12-05-2016.



regime of the president and a Sunni rebellion.<sup>30</sup> Here was a chance for ISI to prop itself up as defender of Sunni Muslims in a wider context than just Iraq.

The ISI leader sent one of his commanders, Abu Muhammad Al-Jawlani, to Syria to set up a jihadi organisation. This group, Jabhat Al-Nusra (JN), quickly became one of the most effective fighting forces in the Syrian revolution, catapulting itself to the forefront of the rebel movement, which gave a large measure of independence to Al-Jawlani.<sup>31</sup> In an attempt to capitalise on JN's success, Al-Baghdadi announced a name-change in April 2013: the Islamic State in Iraq would be called the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham<sup>32</sup> (ISIS).<sup>33</sup>

Al-Jawlani was not willing to accept this challenge to his autonomy and allegedly was not informed beforehand; he refused the merger.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Al-Jawlani declared his allegiance to Al-Qa'ida and Al-Zawahiri, who had succeeded Bin Laden as leader of the organisation after the latter was assassinated in 2011<sup>35</sup>, not ISIS and Al-Baghdadi. This might seem like a power play by Al-Qa'ida to force ISIS out of the game but ISIS' roots go back to Afghanistan where it was founded with Al-Qa'ida support. Pledging loyalty to Al-Zawahiri, the leader, will thus probably have seemed like a natural move for Al-Jawlani. In any case the decision resulted in serious fighting between the two groups, with ISIS drifting away from Al-Qa'ida when it killed top leaders of other jihadi groups and even the Al-Qa'ida representative sent by Al-Zawahiri to mediate.<sup>36</sup> This caused Al-Zawahiri to disavow ISIS and officially disassociate his organisation from Al-Baghdadi's in February 2014.<sup>37</sup>

### *Territorial gains and control*

Al-Jawlani's refusal to submit to Al-Baghdadi's authority prompted the latter to send his own forces into Syria and conquer a large swath of territory there with his own fighters (mostly from JN) and to expand ISIS territory with large parts of eastern Syria. The Syrian city of Raqqa was also taken around this period, in January 2014, and was made the capital of the new caliphate.<sup>38</sup> This marked the beginning of a period of territorial extension for ISIS, which also saw the organisation extend overt territorial control into Anbar province in Iraq, specifically the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi, and large parts of northern Iraq. The Syrian-Iraqi

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Holliday, "The Struggle for Syria in 2011: an operational and regional analysis," online article for the Institute of War. Available at [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Struggle\\_For\\_Syria.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Struggle_For_Syria.pdf). Accessed on 12-05-2016.

<sup>31</sup> Erin Marie Saltman and Charlie Winter, "Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism," *Quilliam Foundation Report* (2014): 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Sham* is the term in classical Arabic for the region also known as Greater Syria, which includes modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine and parts of southern Turkey. Incidentally, ISIS is sometimes called 'ISIL', replacing the word *Sham* with 'Levant', from the Italian *Levante*. This last term denotes the entire area around the eastern Mediterranean.

<sup>33</sup> Saltman and Winter, "Modern Jihadism," 30.

<sup>34</sup> Zelin, "The War between ISIS and al-Qaeda," 4.

<sup>35</sup> Doug Mills, "Osama Bin Laden Is Dead, Obama Says," *New York Times* (online), May 1 2011. Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/02/world/asia/osama-bin-laden-is-killed.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/02/world/asia/osama-bin-laden-is-killed.html?_r=0). Accessed on 17-06-2016.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*, "Al-Qa'ida Disaffiliates with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham," Washington Institute at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/Al-Qa'ida-disaffiliates-with-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham>. Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>38</sup> Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," 14.

border became less and less relevant in this period, with fighters and supplies easily crossing between the countries.<sup>39</sup> The overthrowing of the borders drawn by 'Sykes-Picot' is a central part of ISIS ideology; there can be no national borders dividing the true Muslim *umma*, but I will go into this in more detail later on.

The increased control that ISIS exercised over its territory by mid-2014 allowed the group to make its biggest move yet and capture the attention of the whole world: taking Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, practically without firing a shot.<sup>40</sup> This period marks the start of ISIS' incredibly effective and sophisticated media campaign with the capture of Mosul followed by video reports of destructions of land barriers separating Iraq and Syria, the publication of its online magazine *Dabiq*, shortly followed by audiotapes and a televised appearance of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi claiming the foundation of an Islamic caliphate and declaring himself the caliph Ibrahim. ISIS changed its name once again, declaring itself to be simply 'the Islamic State' (*al-dawla al-islamiyya*).<sup>41</sup>

The media campaign gave IS' recruiting effort an enormous boost and gave its military operations a new impulse, allowing it to conquer even more territory and consolidate its hold on several areas and beating off large scale-assaults by the ISF and Shiite militias in Iraq. A notable example of this was the battle for Ramadi in 2015.<sup>42</sup> IS' expansion continued until it tried to take the northern Syrian town of Kobani, where the Kurds put up a fierce resistance and were eventually supported by intense US airstrikes on IS position on the city.<sup>43</sup> IS was ultimately forced to retreat but was again infiltrating the city a few months later.<sup>44</sup> This battle was heavily publicised by IS in *Dabiq*; despite the heavy losses it took it demonstrated that it was able to perform on the battlefield effectively, under intense pressure by the world's most advanced air force.

The years 2015 and especially 2016 saw some reverses on the battlefield for Islamic State, with the start of an intense Russian bombing campaign on 30 September 2015<sup>45</sup> in addition to the US-led coalition and Western press and governments repeatedly claiming that IS had lost 40% of its territory by mid-March 2016.<sup>46</sup> These claims are of course hard to verify and may still be prone to changes as the battlefield situation develops but they are an indication that IS is suffering from the intensity of coalition air strikes and from the fact that it

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Martin Chulov, "Isis insurgents seize control of Iraqi city of Mosul," The Guardian (online), 10-06-2014. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/10/iraq-sunni-insurgents-islamic-militants-seize-control-mosul>. Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>41</sup> Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," 14.

<sup>42</sup> "ISIL seizes control of Iraq's Ramadi," Al Jazeera (online). Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/isil-overruns-iraqi-holdout-ramadi-150517142811552.html>. Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>43</sup> Laurent Laughlin, "The Fight Against ISIS on the Border Between Turkey and Syria," Time (online). Available at <http://time.com/3631586/islamic-state-kobani-turkey-syria-kurds/>. Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>44</sup> Adam Withnall, "Isis re-enters Kobani: Fighting between militants and Kurds restarts in key Syrian border city," Independent (online), 25 June 2015. Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-re-enters-to-kobani-fighting-between-militants-and-kurds-restarts-in-key-border-city-10343884.html>. Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>45</sup> CNN, "Russia launches first airstrikes in Syria," CNN (online), 30 September 2015. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/30/politics/russia-syria-airstrikes-isis/>. Accessed on 01-05-2016.

<sup>46</sup> Henry Johnson, "Mapped: Islamic State is Losing its Territory – and Fast," Foreign Policy, 16 March 2016. Available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/16/mapped-the-islamic-state-is-losing-its-territory-and-fast/>. Accessed on 01-05-2016.

is fighting on several fronts at once. Its ability to conduct terror attacks seems undiminished, however.

### *Organisation*

As was mentioned in the introduction, IS displays many of the aspects of a modern, functioning state with a meticulous bureaucracy and sophisticated command structure. It has a council of ministers, an organised justice system and an effective military and intelligence structure.<sup>47</sup> A large part of the attraction of its system is the fact that it has the same or, indeed, more to offer than rival states in the region, like the governments of Iraq and Syria. Fighting a war on several fronts does seem to have an impact on their ability to provide services however, with local populations suffering from lack of resources and IS seemingly having more trouble getting its members to fight.<sup>48</sup>

Much of the military and intelligence capacity comes from former Iraqi army and intelligence personnel who joined IS' ranks and provide it with institutionalised knowledge and practice, like Abu Muslim Al-Turkmani a former lieutenant colonel in the Iraqi army.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, former Ba'th Party officers seem to be at the centre of the surprising level of sophistication and professionalization that IS has displayed on and off the battlefield. Research in this area is still ongoing.<sup>50</sup>

### *Ideology*

The Islamic State is part of the Salafi trend within Islam, which is centred around the core premise that the best Muslims were those in the time of the Prophet Muhammad and that any religious aspect of Islam that is not in the Koran or instructed by the Prophet is *bid'a* (innovation) and is wrong.<sup>51</sup> The following principles are central to Salafism: *tawhid* (monotheistic unity of God); the supremacy of God and His laws (the *shari'a*) over man-made laws and the fact that only God may be worshipped, anything else is *shirk* (polytheism).<sup>52</sup> *Salafism* is a current within Islam that exists within a wide spectrum consisting, according to Wiktorowicz of the "purists"<sup>53</sup> (those adherents who isolate themselves from the world and devote themselves to religious study and practice); "politicos" (those Salafists who are more politically engaged in trying to establish their version of an Islamic society)<sup>54</sup>; and jihadis (those

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<sup>47</sup> Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," 21.

<sup>48</sup> Liz Sly, "The Islamic State is failing at being a state," Washington Post (online), 25 December 2014. Available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/the-islamic-state-is-failing-at-being-a-state/2014/12/24/bfbf8962-8092-11e4-b936-f3afab0155a7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-islamic-state-is-failing-at-being-a-state/2014/12/24/bfbf8962-8092-11e4-b936-f3afab0155a7_story.html). Accessed on 28-04-2016.

<sup>49</sup> "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani: From Iraqi officer to dead ISIS deputy," Alarabiya News (online), 19 December 2014. Available at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/profiles/2014/12/19/Abu-Muslim-al-Turkmani-From-Iraqi-officer-to-slain-ISIS-deputy.html>. Accessed on 27-04-2016.

<sup>50</sup> Liz Sly, "The hidden hand behind the Islamic State's militants? Saddam Hussein's," Washington Post (online), 4 April 2015. Available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/the-hidden-hand-behind-the-islamic-state-militants-saddam-husseins/2015/04/04/aa97676c-cc32-11e4-8730-4f473416e759\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-hidden-hand-behind-the-islamic-state-militants-saddam-husseins/2015/04/04/aa97676c-cc32-11e4-8730-4f473416e759_story.html). Accessed on 01-05-2016.

<sup>51</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006): 209.

<sup>52</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Salafi Movement," 208-209.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

who support the use of violence to establish Islamic states).<sup>55</sup> The Islamic State belongs to this last category of Salafists.

### *Propaganda*

The Islamic State has a capacity for propaganda and media output that is unrivalled by any other (jihadi) terror group in history, made possible by an extensive support structure. Many different branches in many of IS' different self-proclaimed provinces (*wilayāt*) produce an enormous amount of propaganda. A report by the Quilliam Foundation found that Islamic State publishes "38.2 unique propaganda events a day from all corners of the [...] 'caliphate'..."<sup>56</sup>

Propaganda efforts like *Dabiq* magazine, but also messages on social media like Twitter, Facebook, VKontakte and other platforms allow Islamic State to frame the conflict in and around their 'caliphate' in such a way that they control the narrative, regardless of what happens in reality. Despite indications that many of the photographs and footage of IS soldiers firing heavy and sophisticated weapons at unseen enemies are in fact completely staged,<sup>57</sup> and that life in the 'caliphate' may be significantly more difficult for the local population than is portrayed by IS, the image of an ever-expanding, ever-victorious military force remains powerful and present.

The propaganda effort is both aimed at international audiences with English publications like *Dabiq* and internet videos featuring combat (staged or real) against Iraqi or Syrian government forces; as well as aimed at local audiences. Aaron Zelin has remarked that the vast majority of IS' publications are in Arabic, and quite a few articles mention dealing with "spies" and "traitors".<sup>58</sup> These are probably more geared towards keeping their own population in line. As we can see, a comprehensive analysis of the entirety of IS propaganda would be an incredibly large and difficult task, and would probably result in a book-length study. I will therefore focus the rest of this thesis on the IS narrative of itself in the *Dabiq* publication.

### **Explaining what is wrong with the world: a diagnostic narrative**

"The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dābiq." This quote, attributed to Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi, features above every foreword in every issue of *Dabiq* magazine. It is a short version of the blueprint the late *sheikh* gave to his organisation. The first issue of *Dabiq* clearly shows the step-by-step plan of IS towards its apocalyptic goal of provoking the end of time and vanquishing its enemies.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>56</sup> Charlie Winter, "Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'," *Quilliam Foundation Report* (2015): 5.

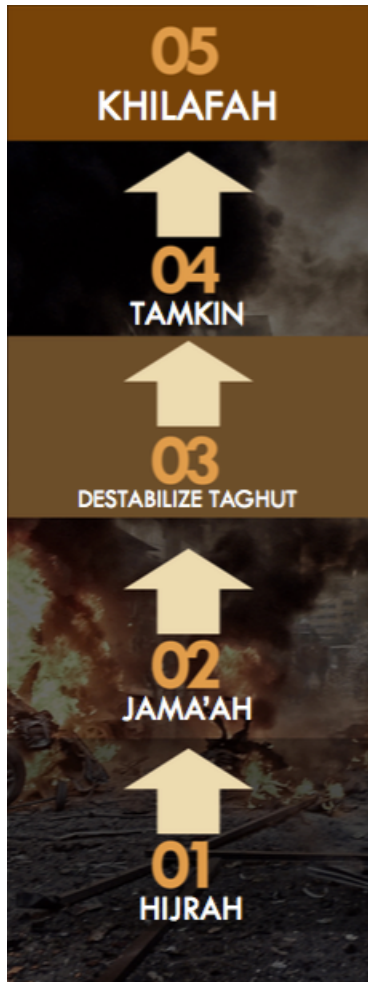
<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, "Picture Or It Didn't Happen: A Snapshot of the Islamic State's Official Media Output," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, (2015). Available at <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/445/html>. Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>59</sup> "From Hijrah to Khilafah," *Dabiq*, no. 1 (2014): 39. All issues of *Dabiq* available at The Clarion Project at <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-il-propaganda-magazine-dabiq>.

Steps one to five were completed in Iraq, with foreign fighters ‘emigrating’ (*hijra*) to the country, coming together (*jama’ah*), destabilising the ‘Iraqi idolatrous (*taghut*) regime’, consolidating its territory in the country (*tamkin*) and pronouncing the caliphate (*khilafah*). These steps are now being exported to other countries, first to Syria and then followed by other territories that have pledged loyalty to the Islamic State in countries like Libya, Egypt and Yemen. This is the basis of IS’ narrative, which we can divide into the three analytical framing questions: “what is wrong with the world and who is responsible for this?”; “what needs to be done?”; and “how to motivate people to do what we want?”

In this section I will give provide some background information on the magazine, followed by the division of IS’ narrative into six overarching themes as identified by Charlie Winter.<sup>60</sup> I will then go into IS’ diagnostic framing, combining the organisation’s view of what’s wrong in the world with the way they apply these themes to get their message across.



#### On Dabiq

*Dabiq* was first released as part of the media offensive by the Islamic State following the announcement of its ‘caliphate’ in Iraq and Syria in 2014.<sup>61</sup> The professional design of the magazine, coupled with IS’ broader social media campaign surprised many in the West.<sup>62</sup> *Dabiq* is published by the Islamic State’s Al-Hayat Media Centre, part of IS’ central media command (see appendix).

In the month leading up to the Mosul campaign and the subsequent announcement of the caliphate, English-language publications by what was then ISIS were done through *Islamic State News* (political issues) and *Islamic State Report* (military issues).<sup>63</sup> *Dabiq* is the amalgamation of these two in one glossy publication which tries very hard to portray events surrounding the Islamic State in a way that appears objective and informative. The title comes from a town in northern Syria where, according to Islamic traditions about the end of the world, a final battle will take between the armies of ‘Rome’

<sup>60</sup> Charlie Winter, “Documenting the Virtual ‘Caliphate’,” Quilliam Foundation Report (2015): 6.

<sup>61</sup> “MSA Intel Alert: The Islamic State Releases Dabiq Magazine,” (online), July 8 2014. Available at <http://www.msasecurity.net/security-and-counterterrorism-blog/bid/102254/MSA-Intel-Alert-The-Islamic-State-Releases-Dabiq-Magazine>. Accessed on 05-05-2016.

<sup>62</sup> Olivia Becker, “ISIS Has A Really Slick and Sophisticated Media Department,” Vice News (online), 12 July 2014. Available at <https://news.vice.com/article/isis-has-a-really-slick-and-sophisticated-media-department>. Accessed on 05-05-2016.

<sup>63</sup> Harleen K. Gambhir, “Dabiq: The strategic messaging of the Islamic State,” *Institute for the Study of War Backgrounder*, (online), August 15 2014: 1. Available at <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/dabiq-strategic-messaging-islamic-state>. Accessed on 05-05-2016.



(being taken to mean 'Western' armies, presumably) and Muslims which will lead to the end of time.<sup>64</sup>

The magazine makes use of photographs, interviews, background stories and religious articles, articles for women and advertisements for IS' own video and media outlets and generally frames a narrative of the Islamic State as a viable, successful, militarily victorious state founded on the precepts of the Islamic religion, conquering those that oppose it.

*Dabiq* gives shape to the narrative that surrounds IS' five-step scheme with what Charlie Winter identifies as six overarching themes in a study of one month's worth of IS media output: mercy, belonging, brutality, victimhood, war and utopia.<sup>65</sup> I will use this thematic division of IS propaganda and the analytical concept of collective action frames by Benford and Snow and their three 'core framing tasks', the first of which is 'diagnostic framing'.<sup>66</sup> IS' diagnosis of 'what's wrong' revolves around victimhood; oppression and injustice against the worldwide Sunni Muslim community by its numerous enemies.

### *Victimhood: Sunnis as 'victims' of Islam's historical enemies*

The prime enemies of the Islamic State are the 'Christian Crusader nations', the Shiites, who are called 'Rāfidah' in IS' narrative, allied together with the Jews (Israel), the 'Nusayris', a derogative term for the Alawite regime of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria and the '*Sahwah* Coalitions'. The last group consists of those Sunni Muslims (and especially other jihadi groups) who resist the Islamic State.<sup>67</sup>

This list of enemies routinely figures in *Dabiq*, with many of the terms used for evoking early Islamic history. 'Rāfidah' for instance, is a derogatory term which means the 'rejecters', which refers to the group of Shiites who rejected Zayd Ibn 'Ali, an important figure in early Islam who refused to slander Abu Bakr and 'Umar, the first two 'rightly guided' caliphs in Sunni Islam.<sup>68</sup> Another word for Shiites that is often used by the Islamic State is 'Safawi', from the Shiite Safavid dynasty that ruled Iran between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>69</sup> The term '*Sahwah*' ('awakening') is more recent; the name comes from Sunni tribes who allied with US and coalition forces in Iraq between 2006 and 2011.<sup>70</sup>

A final Islamic term that is often used by IS to denote its enemies is *murtaddun*, which in Arabic means 'apostates'. *Riddah*, in Islam, signifies the phenomenon of a person who is a Muslim by birth or conversion but has turned away from his religion. The legal punishment for this in Islam is death.<sup>71</sup> The Islamic State accords itself the authority to declare someone an apostate (an unbeliever or *kafir*, the act of which is denoted by the noun *takfir*, hence the term *takfiri* Islamists), which means they can lawfully kill anyone they declare an unbeliever.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Alex P. Schmidt, "Challenging the Narrative of the 'Islamic State'," ICCT Research Paper, June 2015: 14. Available at <http://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf>. Accessed on 29-04-2016.

<sup>65</sup> Charlie Winter, "Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'," Quilliam Foundation Report (2015): 6.

<sup>66</sup> Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes," 615.

<sup>67</sup> "From the Battle of Al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions," *Dabiq*, no. 11, (2015) 46-59.

<sup>68</sup> Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 45.

<sup>69</sup> William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009), 37-56.

<sup>70</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, (London: Hurts & Company, 2009), 155.

<sup>71</sup> Rudolph Peters and Gert J. J. De Vries, "Apostasy in Islam," in *Die Welt Des Islams* 17 (1976-1977): 2-5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

This is one of the most controversial themes in Islam, as many Muslims believe the death penalty is not warranted in this case.<sup>73</sup>

Examples of *murtaddun* according to the Islamic State are the Iraqi Security Forces<sup>74</sup>, Nigerian military forces<sup>75</sup> fighting groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and Muslim Kurdish forces fighting the Islamic State in northern Syria.<sup>76</sup> This last group is the target of an attempt at division in issue number four by the Islamic State's official spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani al-Shami, who specifies that IS' war against the Kurds is not nationalist but religious. They do not care about the Kurds' nationalist aspirations but only fight the "unbelievers among them".<sup>77</sup> There are several articles in *Dabiq* where IS calls upon Kurdish Muslims to join the Islamic State instead of fighting it: "As for the Muslim Kurds, then they are our people and our brothers wherever they may be."<sup>78</sup>

The naming game clarifies who IS' (and by extension, the 'true' Sunni Muslims') enemies are. There is real symbolic value in these names, as they have negative connotations for Sunni Muslims. Michael Bhatia stated on the process of naming that "a series of normative associations, motives and characteristics are attached to the named subject."<sup>79</sup> For Muslims, their cultural/religious associations with these negative terms from their shared cultural history are applied to specific actors, labelling them as the enemy, the problem. IS explicitly draws this historical parallel: "Just as the Companions had to face coalitions of various Jewish, pagan, and hypocrite parties in the battle of al- Ahzāb, the Muslims of the Islamic State face various coalitions of kuffār having a common interest in seeing the Khilāfah destroyed."<sup>80</sup>

In IS' diagnostic frame therefore, what is going on is that Sunni Muslims are oppressed by unbelievers and 'rejecters'.

Moreover: all of the enemies listed above are *united* in their war on the Sunnis.<sup>81</sup> In this narrative the United States is allied with Russia and Iran, fighting the Islamic State directly with airstrikes and indirectly through "ineffective"<sup>82</sup> proxy groups such as the Free Syrian Army, the Kurdish PKK and the Peshmerga. This war is doomed to failure, according to *Dabiq*, since it is 'repeating history': a comparison is made between former US President George W. Bush warning the American people that the 'war on terror' is going to last a long time and president Obama pronouncing the same warning in 2014.<sup>83</sup>

### *A diagnosis of the injustice faced by Sunny Muslims through Western eyes*

Part of the diagnostic framing and propaganda of IS is not done by Muslim ideologues but (apparently) presented by a Westerner. John Cantlie is a British photojournalist who was

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>74</sup> "The fight for wilāyat al-anbār," *Dabiq*, no. 5 (2014): 11.

<sup>75</sup> "The bay'ah from West Africa," *Dabiq*, no. 8 (2015): 14-15.

<sup>76</sup> "The fight against the PKK," *Dabiq*, no. 2 (2014): 12-13.

<sup>77</sup> "Excerpt," *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 9.

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

<sup>79</sup> Michael Bhatia, "Fighting Words: naming terrorists, bandits, rebels and other violent actors," *Third World Quarterly* 26, No. 1 (2008): 8.

<sup>80</sup> "From the Battle of al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions," *Dabiq*, no. 11 (2015): 46.

<sup>81</sup> "From the Battle of al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions," *Dabiq*, no. 11 (2015): 49-55.

<sup>82</sup> "Reflections on the final crusade," *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 41.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-44.

captured in Syria by IS militants in 2012 and released by members of the Free Syrian Army<sup>84</sup>. Cantlie was re-captured along with American journalist James Foley when he went back in November 2012 to visit the fighters who had freed him.<sup>85</sup>

Foley was killed by beheading in a videotaped execution by IS, published on 19 August 2014; the first of a number of international hostages to be executed this way by the Islamic State.<sup>86</sup> Cantlie was not killed; rather, he has been used by IS as a propaganda tool, performing in videos and (at least in name) as an author of articles in *Dabiq*.

Cantlie's name appears as the purported writer of a series of articles, starting in the fourth issue of *Dabiq*<sup>87</sup>. It is of course impossible to ascertain that Cantlie is indeed the writer of these articles but the writing style is different from that of many other articles. His video appearances, at least, seem to have been performances done under duress<sup>88</sup> so it is possible that his writing is, too. Even if Cantlie is not the writer, the Islamic State is using his identity to convey a message specifically to Western audience in Western language.

Cantlie's articles are an attempt by the Islamic State to convey a different narrative on their caliphate and the problems of the world and diagnose the West as being corrupt and misled. His stories vary between blaming the US and U.K. policy on hostages (no ransom is paid) while European countries' hostages are set free and discussing the state of the world and the West's fight against IS in a critical and slightly cynical manner.<sup>89</sup>

Again, even if it is Cantlie doing the writing and even if he is presenting his own worldview, he is certainly presenting it in a way that fits IS' narrative. The diagnostic narrative often focuses on the United States and its corrupt and ineffective efforts to destroy the Islamic State. Cantlie levels criticism at Western nations and their policy towards Muslim nations which 'generates the growing anger that will reduce Western nations to ashes...'<sup>90</sup> Another topic that Cantlie touches upon is the Western approach to the Islamic State as a terrorist organisation instead of a real state:

generally one doesn't expect a mere "organization" to lay siege to cities or have their own police force. You certainly don't expect a mere "organization" to have tanks and artillery pieces, an army of soldiers tens of thousands strong, and their own spy drones. And one certainly doesn't expect a mere "organization" to have a mint with plans to produce their own currency, primary schools for the young, and a functioning court system. These, surely, are all

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<sup>84</sup> "Syria: British Journalist John Cantlie Kidnapped With Jeroen Oerlemans Is Released By Free Syrian Army," Huffington Post UK (online), 29 July 2012. Available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/07/29/syria-john-cantlie-jeroen-oerlemans-free-syrian-army\\_n\\_1715827.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/07/29/syria-john-cantlie-jeroen-oerlemans-free-syrian-army_n_1715827.html). Accessed on 08-05-2016.

<sup>85</sup> "British journalist John Cantlie appears in new Isis video," The Guardian (online), 19 March 2016. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/19/british-photographer-john-cantlie-appears-in-new-isis-video>. Accessed on 08-08-2016.

<sup>86</sup> "Militant Group Says It Killed American Journalist in Syria," New York Times (online), 19 August 2014. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/world/middleeast/isis-james-foley-syria-execution.html>. Accessed on 08-05-2016.

<sup>87</sup> "Hard talk: the real stories behind my videos," *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 52-55.

<sup>88</sup> "John Cantlie: Isis video shows British hostage anxious and reading a script under duress, says voice expert," The Independent (online), 18 September 2014. Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/john-cantlie-british-journalist-was-probably-anxious-and-reading-a-script-under-duress-claims-voice-9742156.html>. Accessed on 08-08-2016.

<sup>89</sup> "Remaining and Expanding," *Dabiq*, no. 5 (2014).

<sup>90</sup> "The Anger Factory," *Dabiq*, no. 7 (2015): 76.



hallmarks of (whisper it if you dare) a country.<sup>91</sup>

This of course reflects IS' eagerness to be recognised as a state but it also connects the failures of Western efforts against IS (taking these as given) with this lack of recognition from the West. These articles even goes so far as to mention the possibility of a truce between the Islamic State and Western countries, possibly indicating that the international coalition's airstrikes were having an effect, but in any case showing that they are searching for the legitimacy of a recognised international actor at the state level.<sup>92</sup>

These articles show IS going to some length to counter Western claims that it is nothing but a bloodthirsty gang of terrorists who merit only total destruction. They use a Western interlocutor to facilitate the attribution of blame of the injustices that Muslims across the world suffer at the hands of Western nations. This is what is going on according to the Islamic State. The next question is: "what needs to be done?"

### What needs to happen? The Islamic State's prognostic framing.

"Glad tidings for the Muslim ummah", "a new era has arrived" and "a call to hijrah". These are some of the exclamations readers find when they open the first issue of *Dabiq* magazine, entitled "The Return of the Khilafah".<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the foundation of the Islamic State's caliphate was, at the very least for jihadists and like-minded Muslims worldwide, a momentous occasion. Never before had an Islamic militant group in the modern age managed to overtly control the amount of territory that the Islamic State now claimed.<sup>94</sup> The leader of this newly declared religious entity was Ibrahim Awwād Ibrahim 'Ali al-Badrī al-Samarrā'iyy, who gave himself the *nom de guerre* of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and would henceforth rule as the caliph Ibrahim.<sup>95</sup>

This section will mainly talk about how the Islamic State addresses the question of 'what needs to happen?' in *Dabiq* magazine. I will be focusing on this question as part of IS' prognostic framing effort, which will draw from themes identified by Winter as those of 'utopia' (the caliphate as a true Islamic state) and 'brutality' (that which the unbelievers and the enemies of the Islamic State merit). The prognostic framing question of 'what needs to happen?' can thus be split into two questions: 'what must be done *by* the Muslims/Islamic State?' and 'what must be done *against* the enemy?'

Furthermore, he listed the benefits and services provided by the Islamic State, including:

- Returning rights and property to their rightful owners
- Pumping millions of dollars into services that are important to the Muslims
- The state of security and stability enjoyed by the areas under the Islamic State's authority
- Ensuring the availability of food products and commodities in the market, particularly bread
- The reduced crime rate
- The flourishing relationship between the Islamic State and its citizens

<sup>91</sup> "Paradigm shift", *Dabiq*, no. 8 (2015): 65.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> "The Return of the Khilafah," *Dabiq*, No 1 (2014).

<sup>94</sup> John Hall, "The ISIS map of the world," DailyMail (online), 30 June 2014. Available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2674736/ISIS-militants-declare-formation-caliphate-Syria-Iraq-demand-Muslims-world-swear-allegiance.html>. Accessed on 24-05-2016.

<sup>95</sup> Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," 4.

## *The 'utopia' theme, living in the caliphate*

Prognostic framing is about proposing a solution to a documented problem<sup>96</sup>, and *Dabiq* proposes the Islamic State as the solution: the caliphate represents a utopia, a fully developed state where one can find anything a modern Muslim needs and will remedy the problems of Sunni Muslims in the world, (“you [Muslims] have a state and Khilafah, which will return your dignity, might, rights and leadership”)<sup>97</sup> and offer a way to end oppression (“... the Muslim will walk everywhere as a master...”).<sup>98</sup>

The establishment of the caliphate gives the Islamic State myriad propaganda options and allows it to construct a narrative of the traditional dichotomy of *dar al-kufr* (the abode of unbelief) and *dar al-islam* (the abode of Islam)<sup>99</sup>. For IS, “the world has divided into two camps”.<sup>100</sup> This religiously based worldview has a real-world component in that it plays into the widespread Sunni discontent in the Muslim world) with their governments. IS is offering them what Lister calls a “stable form of Sunni governance”.<sup>101</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>102</sup>, reads the introduction of an article on infrastructure. It describes how the Islamic State cares for its followers, followed by drawing a parallel to the time of the Prophet Muhammad who, according to *Dabiq*, “would appoint a deputy to remain in the city [of Medina] and look after the affairs of the Muslim families.”<sup>103</sup> IS also emphasises healthcare, technological advancement and higher education in the caliphate,<sup>104</sup> and the fact that it is “the only state ruled by Allah’s Shari’ah today.”<sup>105</sup>

*Dabiq* emphasises the ‘utopia’ theme in social justice as well, and compares itself favourably to its enemies with racism and nationalism as recurrent subjects. “A number of high-profile race-related incidents”<sup>106</sup> in the United States (no mention is made of specific incidents but we can assume they are referring to the killings of young African-American males like Michael Brown, who was shot by the police in 2014)<sup>107</sup> are contrasted with Islam’s emphasis on equality. The Islamic State is “a state where the Arab and the non-Arab, the white man and the black man, the easterner and the westerner are all brothers.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes,” 616.

<sup>97</sup> “Khilafah declared,” *Dabiq*, no. 1 (2014): 7.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>99</sup> Ali Shehata Abdou Selim, *The Concept of Coexistence in Islamic Primary Sources: An Analytical Examination*, (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 152.

<sup>100</sup> “The world has divided into two camps,” *Dabiq* no. 1 (2014): 11.

<sup>101</sup> Lister, “Profiling the Islamic State,” 26.

<sup>102</sup> “A window into the Islamic State,” *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 27.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>104</sup> “Healthcare in the Khilāfah,” *Dabiq*, no. 9 (2015): 24.

<sup>105</sup> “Foreword,” *Dabiq* no. 10 (2015): 4.

<sup>106</sup> “Walā’ and barā’ versus American racism,” *Dabiq*, no. 11 (2015): 18.

<sup>107</sup> Kashmira Gander, “Michael Brown shooting: what happened in Ferguson?” *Independent* (online), 11 August 2015. Available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/michael-brown-shooting-what-happened-in-ferguson-10450257.html>. Accessed on 15-05-2016.

<sup>108</sup> “Foreword,” *Dabiq*, no. 8 (2015): 4.

An article that explains the basics of this idea of the Islamic State as a utopia is titled “Walā’ and Barā’ versus American racism”<sup>109</sup>. It refers to the Islamic concepts of *wala’* (the undivided loyalty Muslims should accord to God) and *bara’* (the disavowal towards anything deemed un-Islamic).<sup>110</sup> God is the unifying force for Muslims in the Islamic State’s caliphate, described as “the strongest bond of faith”.<sup>111</sup> IS’ goal in this frame seems twofold; on the one hand it facilitates their call for *hijra*, making it easier for Muslims to emigrate. On the other hand, this message allows them to frame a call to potential followers among tribes in countries in the Middle East and North Africa: “for the one who leaves his tribe is a muhājir [emigrant] that parts from his family, his wealth, and his homeland, and who believes in Allah and attests to the truth of His Messenger.”<sup>112</sup>

The fact that Islam transcends boundaries of nationality, race and ethnicity is a recurrent theme and a central part to the prognostic frame. It becomes a defining factor in deciding who is the enemy and who is not: “The American Muslim is our beloved brother. And the kāfir Arab is our despised enemy even if we and he were to have shared the same womb.”<sup>113</sup> This distinction becomes the motivation through which IS carries out the ‘brutality’ theme against its opponents. This leads to the second prognostic question.

#### *What to do with the enemy? The ‘brutality’ theme*

The Islamic State is best known in the West for its terror attacks against civilian populations, especially those in Western Europe (Paris and Brussels) and the United States (San Bernardino).<sup>114</sup> Various European leaders have stated that they are ‘at war’ with the Islamic State<sup>115</sup> (thus entering IS’ apocalyptic war narrative leading to the showdown at Dābiq) but its attacks are designated as ‘terrorist’.<sup>116</sup> This designation is not one the Islamic



<sup>109</sup> “Walā’ and barā’ versus American racism,” *Dabiq*, no. 11 (2015): 18-21.

<sup>110</sup> Joas Wagemakers, “Framing the ‘threat to Islam’: *Al-wala’ wa al-bara’* in Salafi discourse,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2008): 3.

<sup>111</sup> “Walā’ and barā’ versus American racism,” *Dabiq*, no. 11 (2015): 19.

<sup>112</sup> “Those who break off from their tribes,” *Dabiq*, no. 3 (2014): 6.

<sup>113</sup> “Foreword,” *Dabiq*, no. 8 (2015): 3.

<sup>114</sup> Karen Yourish, “Brussels is Latest Target in Islamic State’s Assault on the West,” *New York Times* (online), March 25 2016. Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/03/25/world/map-isis-attacks-around-the-world.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/03/25/world/map-isis-attacks-around-the-world.html?_r=0). Accessed on 16-05-2016.

<sup>115</sup> “Valls sur les attentats à Paris: “Nous sommes en guerre,” *Europe 1* (online), 14 november 2015. Available at <http://www.europe1.fr/politique/valls-sur-les-attentats-a-paris-nous-sommes-en-guerre-2620549>. Accessed on 16-05-2016.

<sup>116</sup> I use the extensive, but inclusive definition of terrorism by sociologist Jack P. Gibbs: Terrorism is illegal violence or threatened violence directed against human or inhuman objects, provided that it:

- (1) was undertaken or ordered with a view to altering or maintaining at least one putative norm in at least one particular territorial unit or population;
- (2) had secretive, furtive, and/or clandestine features that were expected by the participants to conceal their personal identity and/or their future location;
- (3) was not undertaken or ordered to further the permanent defense of some area;

State denies; in fact, it enthusiastically claims the term: the twelfth issue of *Dabiq* is titled “Just Terror”, showing emergency services at work in Paris.<sup>117</sup>

The ‘brutality’ theme is expressed through examples of events that show and celebrate the use of violence on civilians through large-scale terrorist attacks such as the bombing of a plane full of Russian citizens, killing 224 people, in Egypt and the attacks in Paris, which killed 130, both in November 2015.<sup>118</sup> In addition a number of attacks by ‘lone knights’ have been committed: “Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar... struck the crusaders of Australia and killed one of their personnel”<sup>119</sup>; “sixteen year-old Ishāq Qāsim Badrān grabbed his blade and pierced citizens of the accursed Jewish state”<sup>120</sup> and so on. An article titled “Soldiers of terror” reads: “... the soldiers of the Khilāfah sent a forceful message to the camp of kufr and riddah, striking and terrorizing them in multiple lands...”<sup>121</sup> The mentions of violence on civilians are numerous and written in a celebratory manner.

So why does the Islamic State vindicate these attacks as ‘terrorism’? Why *not* take the trouble to conceive a narrative like Al-Qa’ida did several years ago, wherein Western citizens are considered lawful combatants because they are part of their government due to the fact that they vote in a democracy?<sup>122</sup> Part of the answer can be found in the fact that the Islamic State seems to care less about criticism on the part of more moderate Islamic scholars who condemn such attacks than Al-Qa’ida did (and does). IS encourages its followers to “Kill the imams of kufr (disbelief) in the West”<sup>123</sup> and asks “how can these imams of kufr remain under the protection of Allah’s enemies?”<sup>124</sup> The imams who are not *with* the Islamic State must automatically be *against* them as unbelievers, *kuffar*.

Terrorising the enemy is not the only purpose that the brutality theme serves. Revenge is also an important goal. Widely publicised “barbaric”<sup>125</sup> killings like the beheadings of James Foley, Steven Sotloff, Kenji Goto and Haruma Yukawa and the burning of a Jordanian F-16 pilot Mu’adh al-Kasasiba<sup>126</sup> are specifically linked to either their own deeds or those of their governments. The beheadings of James Foley and Steven Sotloff, both Americans, are attributed to their government’s continued airstrikes: “The US was informed of James Foley’s

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(4) was not conventional warfare and because of their concealed personal identity, concealment of their future location, their threats, and/or their spatial mobility, the participants perceived themselves as less vulnerable to conventional military action; and

(5) was perceived by the participants as contributing to the normative goal previously described (supra) by inculcating fear of violence in persons (perhaps an indefinite category of them) other than the immediate target of the actual or threatened violence and/or by publicizing some cause. Source: Jack P. Gibbs, “Conceptualization of Terrorism”, *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989): 330.

<sup>117</sup> *Dabiq: Just Terror*, no. 12 (2015).

<sup>118</sup> “Foreword,” *Dabiq*, no. 12 (2015): 2-3.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> “Soldiers of Terror,” *Dabiq*, no. 8 (2015): 17.

<sup>122</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, “Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda’s Justification for September 11,” *Middle East Policy* 10 (2003): 88-89.

<sup>123</sup> “Kill the imams of kufr in the West,” *Dabiq*, no. 14 (2016): 8-17.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>125</sup> Myles Burke, “David Cameron condemns ‘barbaric’ killing of James Foley,” *The Telegraph* (online), 20 August 2014. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/11047255/David-Cameron-condemns-barbaric-killing-of-James-Foley.html>. Accessed on 16-05-2016.

<sup>126</sup> “Jordan pilot hostage Moaz al-Kasasbeh ‘burned alive’,” *BBC News* (online), 3 February 2015. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31121160>. Accessed on 16-05-2016.

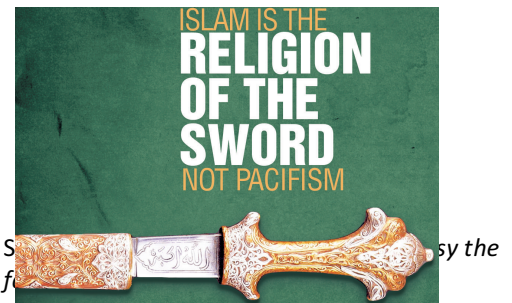
status as a prisoner held by the Islamic State. There were demands made prior to the US strikes, for the release of Muslim prisoners held by the US in exchange for Foley's release, but they were arrogantly ignored."<sup>127</sup>

The same goes for the Jordanian pilot. The article "The burning of the murtadd pilot"<sup>128</sup> explains how burning Kasasiba alive in a cage (and subsequently burying him under a pile of rubble) is "a just form of retaliation"<sup>129</sup>, drawing parallels with the pilot's bombs achieving the same effect. Despite the criticism, including from jihadi corners by Al-Zarqawi's former mentor, Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi<sup>130</sup> the Islamic State presents a clear narrative of revenge. Other instances of IS applying this theme include the beheading of twenty-one Egyptian Coptic Christians<sup>131</sup> in "revenge for the muslimāt (Muslim women) persecuted by the Coptic crusaders of Egypt"<sup>132</sup>; the killing of a number of Syrian tribesmen because they "betrayed their covenant by rebelling against the Islamic State"<sup>133</sup> and enslaving Yazidi women, the Islamic State explaining that they "dealt with this group as the majority of fuqaha' [Islamic scholars] have indicated how mushrikīn should be dealt with."<sup>134</sup>

Deeds such as those mentioned above, even though they seem repulsive, all fit into IS' narrative of a just and Islamic approach to violence and a way to counter the perceived oppression of Sunni Muslims around the world. In the framing of the Islamic State, terrorising people in order to found a caliphate for the 'right' Muslims is not only logical and justified; it is a divinely ordained imperative. The next question that must then be asked is how IS motivates people to join its 'holy war' against its enemies.

### From the balcony to the barricades: motivation

"There is no life without jihād, and there is no jihād without hijrah."<sup>135</sup> This phrase probably best captures the essence of the Islamic State's motivational framing in *Dabiq*. Waging victorious and conquering war against the unbelievers is the organisation's *raison d'être* and in order to do this it needs soldiers; these *muhajidin* must be recruited from amongst the people, they must be motivated to "move from the balcony to the barricades."<sup>136</sup>



<sup>127</sup> "Foreword," *Dabiq*, no. 3 (2014): 3.

<sup>128</sup> "The burning of the murtadd pilot," *Dabiq*, no. 7 (2015), 5-8.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>130</sup> "Interview and Translation: Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi dd February 6, 2015," <https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2015/02/09/interview-and-translation-shaykh-abu-muhammad-al-maqdisi-dd-february-6-2015/>.

<sup>131</sup> "ISIS video appears to show beheadings of Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya," CNN (online), February 15, 2015. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/15/middleeast/isis-video-beheadings-christians/>. Accessed on 06-06-2016.

<sup>132</sup> "Revenge for the muslimāt persecuted by the Coptic crusaders of Egypt," *Dabiq*, no. 7 (2015): 30.

<sup>133</sup> "The punishing of shu'aytāt for treachery," *Dabiq*, no. 3 (2014): 13.

<sup>134</sup> "The revival of slavery before the hour," *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 15.

<sup>135</sup> "There is no life without jihād," *Dabiq*, no. 3 (2014): 31.

<sup>136</sup> Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes," 615.



In this section I will outline the Islamic State's relatively straightforward motivational framing in *Dabiq*: in order to fight in the *jihad*, potential soldiers need to make *hijra* to the caliphate's territories. *Hijra* is encouraged through emphasising a sense of duty and obligation to God. *Jihad* is made attractive through glorifying martyrdom and the promise of incentives like war booty and women. The two main themes from Charlie Winter's set<sup>137</sup> that make prominent appearances in IS' motivational framing are 'belonging' and 'war'. The 'belonging' theme emphasises Muslims' fundamental differences from unbelievers and urges them to join their fellow believers. The 'war' theme is one of victorious war and of unstoppable expansion. Before I go into this I will shortly outline the theoretical framework of motivation and motivational framing.

Motives can be defined as "forces which impel action to realize desires, wants and goals...Motives initiate, direct and sustain behavior."<sup>138</sup> The role *Dabiq* plays is to shape these motives so that their frame coincides with IS' goals and allows its followers to engage in "ameliorative collective action".<sup>139</sup> Several themes and motivational narratives play a role in *Dabiq* in this sense. Finding the right measure of frame resonance, "the effectiveness or mobilizing potency of proffered framings"<sup>140</sup>, seems to have been an evolving process for the Islamic State.

In a quantitative analysis of the language used in the first year of *Dabiq*, Vergani and Bliuc found that the language used by IS tended increasingly towards the use of emotional content which emphasised "affiliation"<sup>141</sup>, (what Winters termed 'belonging'). This might imply that the organisation found this type of language more effective in motivating readers and potential followers to join their cause. Seeing as how IS increasingly puts an emphasis on belonging, that is the first theme I will be looking at.

### *Belonging to the Islamic State*

'Belonging' in *Dabiq* figures as part of the transformational process of *hijra*: a Muslim who lives in *jahiliyya* (the period of 'ignorance' in the time before the Islamic religion)<sup>142</sup> in the lands of the West as a stranger and joins his coreligionists in a land ruled by *wala'* and *bara'*<sup>143</sup> (see section three). Muslims are enjoined to "abandon the lands of shirk and come to the land of Islam".<sup>144</sup> Two main motivations are applied in the frame to get Muslims to emigrate to the caliphate. The first is an obligation to God to make *hijra* if there is a state ruled by *shari'a* law, when *Dabiq* states that "hijrah is an obligation from *dārul-kufr*<sup>145</sup> to *Dārul-Islām*"<sup>146</sup>, and warns of the risk run if this obligation is not met: "As for those who continue to suffer from the

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<sup>137</sup> Charlie Winter, "Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'," *Quilliam Foundation Report* (2015): 6.

<sup>138</sup> Rune Henriksen and Anthony Vinci, "Combat Motivation in Non-State Armed Groups," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20 (2007): 89.

<sup>139</sup> Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes," 617.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 619.

<sup>141</sup> Matteo Vergani and Ana-Maria Bliuc, "The evolution of the ISIS' language: a quantitative analysis of the language of the first year of *Dabiq* magazine," *Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società* 2 (2015): 16-17.

<sup>142</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, "A Genealogy of Radical Islam," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 no. 2 (2005): 78.

<sup>143</sup> Wagemakers, "*Al-wala' wa al-bara'* in Salafi discourse," 3.

<sup>144</sup> *Dabiq: Shari'a alone will rule Africa*, no. 8 (2015): 28-29.

<sup>145</sup> The traditional Islamic division between a territory of believers and one of unbelievers, part of the framing narrative by IS. See section three on prognostic framing.

<sup>146</sup> "The danger of abandoning *Dārul-Islām*," *Dabiq*, no. 11 (2015): 22.

disease of being indifferent towards the obligations of hijrah... then let them prepare their flimsy excuses for the angels<sup>147</sup> of death.”<sup>148</sup>

A series of articles written for women mostly centre around this obligation to perform *hijra* as well, usually comparing their situation to that of men, “This ruling [*hijra*] is an obligation upon women just as it is upon men”.<sup>149</sup> Women are encouraged to divorce their husbands if they do not agree with their wives’ intention to make *hijra*, because in this case “any relationship you have with him is a relationship that is impermissible according to the Sharī’ah.”<sup>150</sup> In a parent-child context, children are reminded that they should obey Allah even before their parents: “the muwahhid<sup>151</sup> should always remember that he is obliged not to obey his parents in what entails disobedience of Allah”.<sup>152</sup>

Behind all this lies the threat that *not* emigrating to the caliphate is a major sin. Each Muslim “should now make his number one priority to repent and answer the call to hijrah, especially after the establishment of the Khilāfah.”<sup>153</sup> Continuing to live in the *dar al-kufr* is a sin in and of itself and if a Muslim is incapable of doing this for “whatever extraordinary reason” then he or she should at least publicise a pledge of allegiance.<sup>154</sup>

The second motivation in the ‘belonging’ theme emphasises not so much the act of *hijra* itself as it does the reasons for it; readers are warned that “living amongst the sinful kills the heart, never mind living among the kuffār!”<sup>155</sup> This ties into the oppression in the ‘victimhood’ theme of the diagnostic frame when explaining that “the modern day slavery of employment, work hours, wages, etc., is one that leaves the Muslim in a constant feeling of subjugation to a kāfir master”<sup>156</sup> but it also emphasises the feeling of cultural isolation (‘strangeness’) a Muslim might feel in a Western country:

Strangeness is a condition that the Muslim living in the West cannot escape as long as he remains amongst the crusaders. He is a stranger amongst Christians and liberals. He is a stranger amongst fornicators and sodomites. He is a stranger amongst drunkards and druggies. He is a stranger in his faith and deeds, as his sincerity and submission is towards Allah.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> A reference to the angel ‘Izra’il in Islam, who takes the souls of human beings upon the time of death ordained by God. See Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34-35.

<sup>148</sup> “Foreword,” *Dabiq*, no. 9 (2015): 4.

<sup>149</sup> “The twin halves of the muhājirīn,” *Dabiq*, no. 8 (2015): 33.

<sup>150</sup> “They are not lawful spouses for one another,” *Dabiq*, no. 10 (2015): 44.

<sup>151</sup> Believer in the concept of *tawhid*, that God is One and that there are no other Gods beside Him. See: Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>152</sup> “Tawhīd and our duty to our parents,” *Dabiq*, no. 10 (2015): 15.

<sup>153</sup> “Introduction: Hijra from hypocrisy to sincerity,” *Dabiq*, no. 3 (2014): 33.

<sup>154</sup> “Foreword,” *Dabiq*, no. 2 (2014): 3.

<sup>155</sup> “Bad company destroys the heart,” *Dabiq*, no. 3 (2014): 32.

<sup>156</sup> “Modern day slavery,” *Dabiq*, no. 3 (2014): 29.

<sup>157</sup> “And as for the blessing of your lord, then mention it,” *Dabiq*, no. 12 (2015): 29-30.

Apart from cultural isolation this also refers to the concept of *ghuraba* in Salafi Islam; the feeling that they are different, and apart, from non-Muslims<sup>158</sup>. It is also a very old and central concept of Islam: the *umma*, or global Islamic community. Historically, wherever Muslims were in political control of a territory there was no such thing as a stranger for Muslims: all believers were coreligionists who were not distinguished from each other in any way (e.g. nationality, ethnicity, race et cetera) within this territory.<sup>159</sup> To live in a territory not controlled by Muslims and not ruled by the *shari'a* means that a Muslim is a stranger amongst unbelievers. This is the central problem for a Muslim living outside the caliphate<sup>160</sup>.

*Hijra* is the cure to this problem; a Muslim finds that after joining his fellows "he was no longer a stranger inside his own community. He was surrounded by muwahhid mujāhidīn. He would easily find several mujāhidīn walking besides himself on any major street inside the cities of the Islamic State."<sup>161</sup> The implication of the prognostic and motivational framing in *Dabiq* is that the successful *muhajir* (emigrant) after his journey to the caliphate finds a utopian society where he or she will be able to join in IS' victorious war against the unbelievers.

### *Joining the victorious war*

The 'war' theme in IS' motivational framing makes use of constant reminders of the organisation's military victories and continuing territorial expansion. Several articles are dedicated to the creation of new *wilayat* (provinces)<sup>162</sup>, others to military victories in individual battles<sup>163</sup> and still others to the general expansion of the caliphate through conquest and pledges of allegiance from various groups: "the Islamic State officially announced its expansion into the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, Sinai Peninsula, Libya, and Algeria, and the establishment of wilāyāt therein. The Khalīfah Ibrāhīm (hadhahullāh) also accepted the bay'āt<sup>164</sup> from all groups and individuals who pledged allegiance from other lands."<sup>165</sup>

Pledges of allegiance include several groups in the Middle East who joined, such as Ansar Al-Islam<sup>166</sup> and defectors from Jabhat Al-Nusra and Ahrar As-Sham<sup>167</sup> in Syria and groups further afield such as Boko Haram in West Africa.<sup>168</sup> The impression these articles intend to give is that of an unstoppable force, showing that "the mujāhidīn gain further momentum in

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<sup>158</sup> Carmen Becker, "Muslims on the path of the Salaf al-Salih," in *Information, Communication & Society* 14, (2011): 1189.

<sup>159</sup> Franz Rosenthal, "The Stranger in Medieval Islam," *Arabica* 44 (1997): 35-36.

<sup>160</sup> A territory ruled by a caliph, ruler of Muslims as representative of the prophet Muhammad. See: Wadad Kadi and Aram A. Shanin, "caliph, caliphate," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Bowering, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 81-82.

<sup>161</sup> "And as for the blessing of your lord, then mention it," *Dabiq*, no. 12 (2015): 32.

<sup>162</sup> "The announcement of two new wilāyāt in Iraq," *Dabiq*, no. 8 (2015): 27.

<sup>163</sup> *Dabiq*, no. 2 (2014): 37-42.

<sup>164</sup> A pledge of allegiance in Islam from one person to another. See Lisa Anderson, "Obligation and Accountability: Islamic Politics in North Africa," in *Daedalus, Religion and Politics* 120 (1991): 96.

<sup>165</sup> "Foreword," *Dabiq*, no. 5 (2014): 3.

<sup>166</sup> "Ansar al-islam pledges allegiance to the Islamic State," *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 21.

<sup>167</sup> "Dozens of "Nusra" and "Ahrār" fighters repent and join the Islamic State," *Dabiq*, no. 7 (2015): 38-39.

<sup>168</sup> "The bay'ah from West Africa," *Dabiq*, no. 8 (2015): 14-16.



their war against the armies of kufr”<sup>169</sup>. At the same time IS acknowledges that its rise cannot continue without challenge: “but this momentum is also met with tribulations that test their [the *mujahidun*’s] firmness, resolve, and sincerity.”<sup>170</sup> Indeed, persevering in the face of opposition and allowing the fight to escalate is part of the narrative. “the crusaders could only be expected to intensify their efforts to stop the Islamic State’s expansion, and this would only mean an increase in their transgression against Islam and the Muslims.”<sup>171</sup>

In the end resistance to IS amounts to nothing, as in this article on the battle for the northern Syrian town of Kobani: “cheer and ecstasy at the sight of airstrikes against the *mujāhidīn* turned into sorrow and frustration as they [the ‘crusaders’] realized the lack of effect that they had in stopping the advance.”<sup>172</sup> This application of the ‘war’ theme not so much paints IS as invincible, as it shows its actions to have a certain inevitability: yes the enemy will oppose us and sometimes win, but we have God on our side and we will be victorious in the end. It invites readers to be part of this inevitable force, and reap the benefits.

Despite IS’ repeated, pious injunctions not to “gather the *dunyā* [temporal possessions] and its treasures”<sup>173</sup>, the organisation still motivates prospective followers by offering them worldly incentives. A number of articles are devoted to *ghanimah*, or war booty, explaining that “the most lawful income... is the income of the *ghānimīn* (earners of the *ghānimah*).”<sup>174</sup> A fighter with the Islamic State need not worry about income because “his provision becomes what Allah has given him of spoils from the property of His enemy.”<sup>175</sup> This is a proper way to make a living because “the people of *tawhīd* and obedience to Allah are more deserving of wealth than the people of kufr in Allah and shirk.”<sup>176</sup>

Not only are material possessions suggested; women, too, are presented as part of the reward for a fighter: “The right hand’s possession (*mulk al-yamīn*) are the female captives who were separated from their husbands by enslavement. They became lawful for the one who ends up possessing them even without pronouncement of divorce by their *harbī* husbands.” Besides slave girls, the possibility is mentioned of a man marrying up to four women: “O slaves of Allah, you may marry two, three or four women...”<sup>177</sup>, which – to a man who is having difficulty finding a wife in any society – might be a tempting prospect.

Interviews with, and personal profiles of, fighters are also common ways of framing a motivational narrative for IS in *Dabiq*. Profiles of dead fighters especially are often seen in *Dabiq*, in a series called ‘Amongst the Believers are Men’. These articles invariably present men who emigrated to the caliphate in order to fight with the Islamic State and were killed in action, presumably. It would be difficult to verify their stories since, of course, the person interested was killed.

Most of the fighters in these articles are Europeans who emigrated to the caliphate at some point. These include Abu Muhārib al-Muhājir<sup>178</sup>, for instance, born as Mohammed

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<sup>169</sup> “Wilāyat khurāsān and the bay’āt from the qawqāz,” *Dabiq*, no. 7 (2015): 36.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>172</sup> “The fight for ‘ayn al-islām,” *Dabiq*, no. 5 (2014): 15.

<sup>173</sup> “My provision was placed for me in the shade of my spear,” *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 10.

<sup>174</sup> “Modern day slavery,” *Dabiq*, no. 3 (2014): 29.

<sup>175</sup> “My provision,” *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 10.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, *Dabiq*, no. 4 (2014): 10.

<sup>177</sup> “Two, three or four,” *Dabiq*, no. 12 (2015): 20.

<sup>178</sup> “Among the believers are men: Abu Muhārib al-Muhājir,” *Dabiq*, no. 13 (2016): 22-23.

Mwazi and better known in the West as 'Jihadi John', who was killed in a US airstrike in January 2016.<sup>179</sup> Another example is 'Abū Qudāmah al-Misrī', (born as Aine Davis<sup>180</sup>) a young man from West London who, according to *Dabiq*, was killed by a sniper in Syria.<sup>181</sup> The deaths are always celebrated as martyrdoms: they are often not said to be killed but to have "received *shahadah*" (martyrdom).<sup>182</sup>

The men in these articles are the most tangible examples in *Dabiq* of people who have done what IS would motivate its readers to do. Together with a prospect of victorious battle and the promise of rewards in this life and paradise in the next<sup>183</sup>, IS' motivational framing is a potent aspect of their propaganda and recruitment.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I analysed the framing of the Islamic State's narrative in its online glossy magazine publication *Dabiq*. I used the theoretical approach to framing as outlined by Benford and Snow which posits that collective action frames forming a narrative consist of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. In order to bring further order to the massive amount of information contained in the current fourteen issues of *Dabiq* magazine I also organised the themes applied by IS according to five of the six used by Charlie Winter in his analysis of one month's output of the organisation's *total* propaganda effort (victimhood, war, belonging, utopia, brutality and mercy). The mercy theme was sufficiently uncommon in *Dabiq* that I felt it could be left out.

The Islamic State's diagnostic framing revolves around victimhood: Sunni Muslims are victims of oppression and violence in a world increasingly set on dominating and subjugating the true Muslims and this has led to a state of war in many parts of the world. Sunnis are increasingly in danger in this war and need protection from a very precise and clear group of enemies. This framing was further clarified by using Western journalist John Cantlie.

The prognostic applied to this diagnostic framing is that the caliphate established by the Islamic State is the protector of the Sunni community in the world; the caliphate is a utopia that can meet all of the demands of the modern pious Muslim who wishes to live in the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. As for the enemies who wish to destroy the true Muslims; they will be met with brutality. Executions meted out as just punishment serve to clarify how IS treats its enemies according to divine justice.

Finally, in order to motivate people to join this cause IS calls to readers of *Dabiq* to emigrate to the caliphate in order to bolster its ranks. Here it emphasises the theme of belonging; a Muslim can be part of a community of believers. His reward will be partaking in a victorious war against the unbelievers with both earthly benefits and divine favour bestowed upon him.

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<sup>179</sup> "ISIS confirms death of 'Jihadi John'," CNN (online), 20 January 2016. Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/19/middleeast/jihadi-john-dead/>. Accessed on 08-05-2016.

<sup>180</sup> Tom Wyke and Jay Akbar, "TWO new members of Jihadi John's Beatles terror cell are revealed: Including a 32-year-old QPR fan from west London who went on an aid convoy with George Galloway," Daily Mail (online), 7 February 2016. Available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3435947/Second-member-ISIS-Beatles-QPR-fan-west-London-Alexanda-Kotey-32-identified-spies-group-four.html>. Accessed on 29-05-2016.

<sup>181</sup> "Among the believers are men: Abū Qudāmah al-Misrī," *Dabiq*, no. 7 (2015): 46.

<sup>182</sup> "Among the believers are men: Abū Ja'far al-Almanī," *Dabiq*, no. 11 (2015): 38.

<sup>183</sup> Wiktorowicz, "A Genealogy," 93.

The Islamic State represents a dangerous situation to international stability, especially in a region of the world already beset by conflicts and crucial to the world's energy supply. The organisation's recruiting power through its propaganda is clear but possible responses to it are less so. Recent battlefield setbacks make it easier for the West to outline a counternarrative to the utopian and victorious war aspects of IS' propaganda but the idea of Sunni Muslim victimhood will be more difficult to dispel as long as socioeconomic certainty and security remain elusive in war-torn countries like Iraq and Syria. Brutality is something the Islamic State will easily remain capable of due to the sophistication of its media apparatus and ability to conduct terror attacks. Anyone wishing to counter the Islamic State will have to bear this in mind, as well as the fact that IS seemed defeated before as ISI, in 2010, before coming back more powerful than ever. It would be dangerous to prematurely declare victory against the idea of a jihadi caliphate and the end of the world at a small Syrian town called Dabiq. Framing a false narrative of victorious war cuts both ways.

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# Appendix

## Institutional chart for the Islamic State’s propaganda operation.

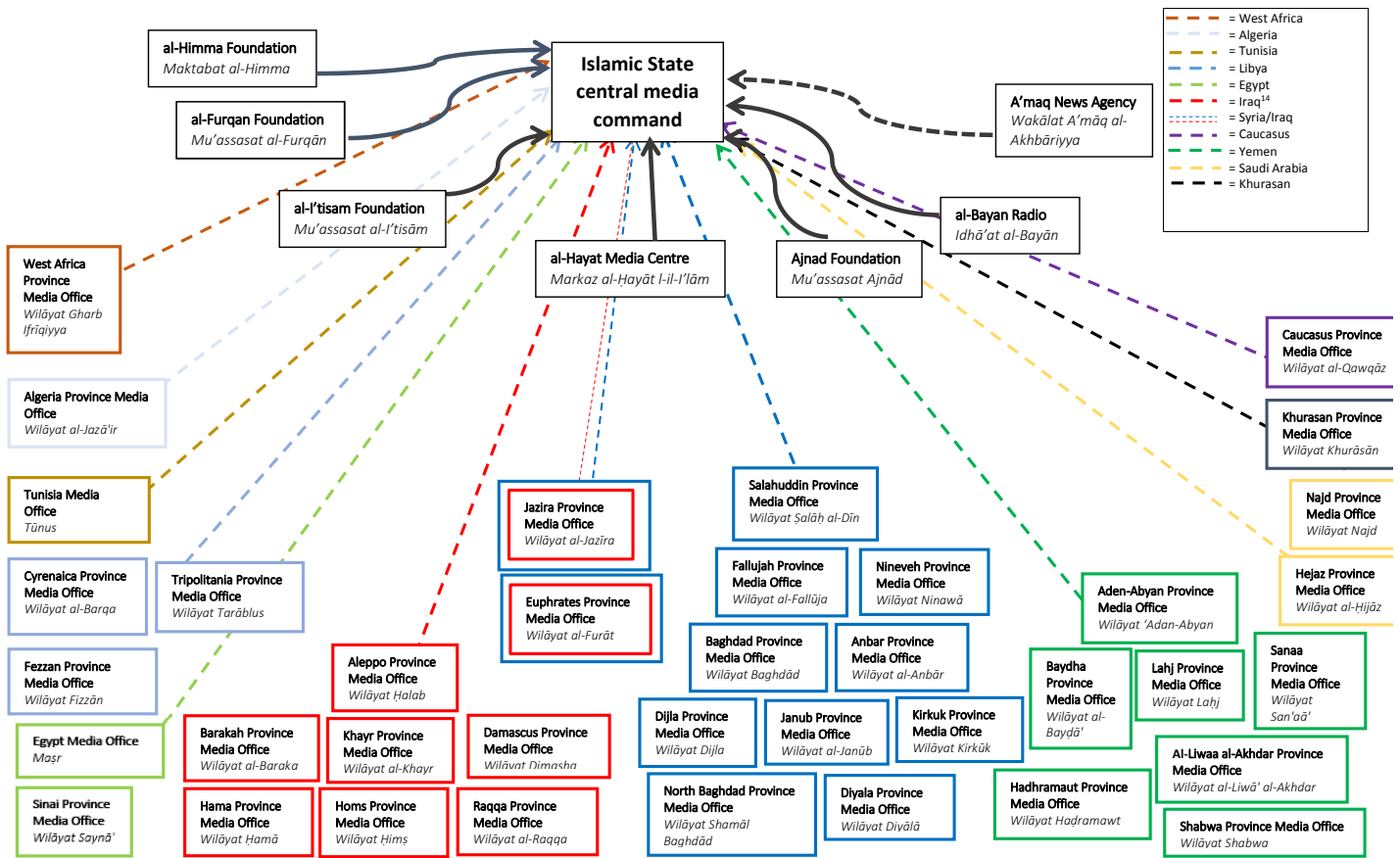


Figure 1

Schematic of Islamic State propaganda structure with local ‘media offices’, source: Winter, Charlie, “Documenting the Virtual ‘Caliphate’,” *Quilliam Foundation Report* (2015): 16.