Frame Wars: The Effects of Frame Alignment Processes on al-Qaeda's and Islamic State's Contest for Resonance.

A Comparative Frame Analysis.

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Abstract

In 2013, the world shook by the sudden announcement of what was momentarily thought to be a 'new' jihadi group: Islamic State. Islamic State destroyed boundaries of cruelty and went beyond the imaginable. It also drew away attention from al-Qaeda, who had been the flag carrier of global jihadism for over a decade. As Islamic State continues to impose onto the world its view of a global war between Muslims and non-believers, al-Qaeda's relative salience and credibility slowly declined. This study focuses on how both organizations fight for resonance in a reciprocal framing contest, and how they manipulate processes of frame alignment to link its diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational narratives to their intended audiences. The study's results are based on extensive primary data, much of which had as of yet not been subjected to systematic academically scrutiny. It finds that Islamic State succeeds in amplifying its own frames, inter alia by actively discredting al-Qaeda's. Islamic State constructs its frames based on direct readings of local culture and experiences. Where its frames do not find resonance, Islamic State enforces them with brutality. Al-Qaeda meanwhile attempts to return the concept of *jihad* to a scholarly interpretation and gradually loses centrality in the global jihadist movement.

Acknowledgments

It's a somewhat intimidating but incredibly rewarding ride - first being granted entry in the selective Master's programme of Conflict Studies and Human Rights, and before I properly realized it, there's just a few days left before handing in my final thesis.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor dr. Laurens Bakker. I wish to thank the staff of the Master's programme for their knowledge and guidance: dr. Jolle Demmers, dr. Chris van den Borgh, dr. Antoine Buyse, and dr. Mario Fumerton in particular for inspiration. I would like to thank my classmates and the people at the Centre for Conflict Studies for creating a positive and stimulating working and learning atmosphere.

I am incredibly grateful to my girlfriend S. and her infinite encouragement and assurance. A big shout-out to my sister L. who, perhaps unknowingly, has become an embodiment of dedication for me and who proves that perseverance and determination go an incredibly long way. Thanks to my parents for always having been patient and caring, and who have made it possible for me to safely, and slowly but surely discover and follow my passions in life.

Thanks to my friends of old and new.

Table of Contents

Introduction and background

Unlike many academics who may be struggling to explain their topic of writing to their families, or to people not involved in their discipline in general, the most frequent reaction I got when I answered the inevitable question of what I was writing my thesis on was one of surprise and thrill, usually followed by statements concerning the current state of world affairs: "if you'd ask me, we should…". And indeed, the societal relevance of this topic is demonstrated when regardless of education, class, or background, interest in the topic of terrorism seems to grow larger with every new event. Stories on terrorism dominate news media in the Netherlands and its significance increases as every few weeks a new, unexpected impulse or event revives the everlasting debates, which get ever more encompassing: in 2001 terrorism meant al-Qaeda (AQC) and the Taliban; in 2003 Saddam Hussein and Iraq joined the team of terrorists; over the years the *perceived threat* of terrorism and resulting security policies became something ordinary. In 2013, things changed when news media told us that a 'new' group, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (later shortened to Islamic State, or IS) had claimed territory in Iraq. Its proclamation of the new Caliphate in 2014 drew widespread attention and raised countless questions: who are these people, where do they come from, and what do they want from us? In the course of the next two years, attacks linked to the movement had been witnessed, among others in Paris (twice), Copenhagen, Brussels and Nice; most recently a beheading of a priest in northern France. These events coincide with a historic influx of immigrants, many from the war-torn regions of Iraq and Syria, which fuels suspicion and raises societal tensions. At the time of writing, front lines read that Western Europe should brace for a "terrorist diaspora", and that "the attacks in Brussels and Paris are just the beginning of IS-terror in Europe"[1].

Message from IS-affiliated al-Yaqeen media agency, in Dutch: "Who will be next?" (al-Yaqeen 2016)

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[1] Goldstein 2016

Academic relevance

Mirroring Western society's hunger for answers, there has been a notable peak in academic publications on topics of Islamic terrorism, most recently on the rise of Islamic State. Despite this heightened attention, I have found that there is still an incredible academic disunity on how to approach and understand such violence. Especially the enigma of terrorism seems to have avoided being caught in a consistent definition, despite its frequent use in academia, politics, media and society. There is a profound lack of academic consensus, and it appears that definitions are largely shaped by neoliberal political discourses. Symptomatic of this academic vacuum is Mark Juergensmeyer's rejection of the idea that an objective definition of terrorism is even *required*: in his book - on religious terrorism nota bene - he argues that the definition of terrorism is to be provided by terrorism's witnesses and victims and their *news media*. His own definition his work's main theme is therefore void of any analytical power as terrorism is ultimately defined as "public acts of destruction, committed without a clear military objective, that arouse a widespread sense of fear"[2]. Such diagnostic vacancies run the risk of aligning academic works with political ideological agendas. Juergensmeyer's definition perfectly fit a narrative of manichaean rationality versus barbarism; the same narrative used as George Bush Jr.'s explanation of terrorism: "fueled by a totalitarian ideology that hates freedom"[3]. Juergensmeyer's myopia is a case in point in David Keen's work, who emphasizes[4] the importance of considering violence to be an analytically 'positive' (as opposed to 'nullified') or 'analyzable' force. This must replace non-explanations of terrorism or violence in pathological terms, as these fundamentally disable the possibility of any *analysis* of such acts of violence. This approach is support by Johan Galtung, who, as paraphrased by Keen, considers approaches such as Juergensmeyer's to be overly focused on security and semantically 'religious', including a "construction of the Other as evil, with no legitimate goal (...) and no basis for any solution"[5]. Despite such fundamental critiques, most academic works on terrorism and related subjects are still aiming to first and foremost *solve* the problem of violence, implicitly taking the same stance as Juergensmeyer's.

Of course I am not condoning terrorism or violence here. I am merely signaling that if we as academics wish to truly *understand* the motivations and incentives driving such forces as IS to perform its atrocities, then it is ultimately counter-productive to engage ourselves with political activism or ethical judgments. We have the opportunity to study these phenomena *as they are*, within the limits of what we are capable of. Exemplary to this approach is Robert A. Pape's 2003 analysis on the '*logic*' of suicide terrorism. He argued that 'terrorism is best understood in terms of

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[2] Juergensmeyer 2003:5
[3] Snow and Byrd 2007:19
[4] Keen 2008
[5] Keen 2008:4-6

its strategic function', designed to 'achieve specific political purposes'[6]. In addition, Alex Schmid approached terrorism as a combination of communication and violence, and observed that both violence and propaganda aim to achieve behavioral modification: violence through coercion, and propaganda through persuasion. He states that "*terrorism is a combination of the two, using demonstrative public violence as an instrument of psychological warfare, 'advertising', as it were, an armed non-state group's capabilities to do harm and to destroy*"[7]. This statement is asserted, somewhat unintentionally, by Ayman al-Zawahiri, AQC's main ideologue: "*It is not a hidden secret that our work in this stage has two aspects: The first is military and the second is propagational*"[8]. These principles are fundamental to this study and are operationalized in Chapter 1.

Research puzzle

The message of Islamic State has gained influence, among Islamists extremists and Western audiences alike[9]. Coinciding with the organization's apparent growth seems to be an increasingly rapid decline in influence and authority of the former flag carrier of jihadism in the Middle-East and beyond: AQC[10]. Over a decade of warfare decreased the organization's infrastructure, and it is slowly losing its place in Western news[11], and therefore also in the discourse on terrorism. In 2014, AQC publicly disassociated with Islamic State, in a statement in which it emphasizes their differences in ideals and goals. AQC considered Islamic State to be too extremist and too violent, and denies any involvement or responsibility for actions taken by Islamic State. Reversely, Islamic State has repeatedly increasingly voiced its criticism on AQC, which it portrays as an archaic, slow and outdated organization, which hasn't set its priorities right. As AQC's message slowly fades out, I could not help but wondering how it is possible that these - apparently very similar - organizations have produced quite *dis*similar outcomes when it comes to achieving and safeguarding their respective interpretations of reality, their popular support, their military and territorial control, and the protection of their interests. What makes it that AQC's story gradually erodes, and that other organizations, with seemingly similar stories, got so much more popular? Why do 'lone wolfs' align themselves to IS, and not to AQC?

In this thesis, I set out to analyze how the organizations of Islamic State and AQC vie for attention, popular support, and *resonance* among certain audiences by attempting to expand their interpretive frames while maintaining credibility. In other words: how to reach as many people as possible, but still appear authentic? The research question central to this thesis is as follows: *"How*

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[6] Pape 2003:344
[7] Schmid 2014:1
[8] al-Zawahiri 2013:1
[9] Bunzel 2015:4; Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016; Saltman & Winter 2014
[10] Bunzel 2015:31;35; Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016; Mendelsohn 2016; Saltman & Winter 2014
[11] BBC 2016

do frame alignment processes, underlying al-Qaeda's and Islamic State's diagnostic and prognostic narratives, affect each organization's respective frame resonance and organizational sustenance?"

Both AQC and Islamic State have disseminated many documents, magazines, and audiovisual material through which they express their narratives, or *discursive constructions.* I study how adjustments of frames in these narratives have affected each organization's successes or failures in maintaining frame resonance, and therefore their organizational sustenance.

Methodological limitations and impediments

Initially, the focus of this research was aimed at gaining interpretive insights into personal justifications for violence, derived from jihadist narratives. Despite initial serious efforts to reach people who felt attracted to jihadist, ideology, I have found that the time available has been insufficient to build up the required network and subsequent rapport to gain access to the desired research population. The contact I had with a very prominent actor in the Dutch salafist landscape was unilaterally broken off for unknown reasons, and I do not have permission to use data provided by it. I have ultimately decided to focus on the explanatory, positivist side of the story instead. While motivations for violence still were an area of interest, methodological limitations include the near-impossibility for this researcher to collect empirical evidence in the context of this research. Testing hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework of functionalism would require extensive field research in the conflicted areas themselves and require interviews with those directly involved in war economies. Given the volatile novelty and continuing development of this study's theme, such research would effectively boil down to requiring active cooperation of AQC and IS leaders and commanders, or gaining access to deserted high-ranked 'officials'. Even regardless of their willingness to cooperate (which I have not explored), the feasibility of a study based on my travelling to the affected areas as a Western, non-Muslim researcher who does not speak Arabic, seems quite low (the importance of being Western and non-Muslim will be expanded upon in Chapter 2).

This research is based on open-source data analysis. I have been the only interpreter of primary sources, so the visions in this work are mine. I have also used meta-analyses from research reports for the analysis of more general trends. There are two main limitations that I have encountered during the course of this research. The first is that I do not speak Arabic. Both AQC and IS distribute much of their literature in English, although when it comes to internal correspondence, or 'interior narratives' (see *paragraph 1.3.3*), I have been dependent on translators. Secondly, I found that original jihadi literature is hard to come by due to active censorship and deleting policies of internet companies and the government. Video messages are scattered over the web, but it seems that only main news agencies have the possibility to gain speedy access to those. Regardless

of these obstacles, and due to unimpeded access to both organizations' digital magazines, I have been able to conduct a well-balanced research.

Terminology

Finally, I would like to add some clarifications on the terminology used in the study. Throughout the work, I refer to the central, ´original´ organization of al-Qaeda as 'AQC', this is to avoid confusions with any of its other affiliations with regionalized names. Furthermore, I have used the word 'constituents' and 'adherents' interchangeably, just as I have done with the words 'actor/party/organization': these respective choices are fully dependent on its directs textual contexts and have no analytical implications. Wherever I have used words which are regarded not to be part of the English standard vocabulary, i.e. when using Islamic concepts or titles, I have provided a definition in footnotes.

The chapters in this thesis follow the analytical order of its framework. *Chapter 1* outlines this analytical framework revolving around Framing Analysis, as well as the methodological choices derived from this model. The three consecutive chapters examine the main findings in context to their relevant phase of analysis: *Chapter 2* covers Framing Analysis, *Chapter 3* covers Frame Alignment Processes, and *Chapter 4* covers Contending Credibility, or an analysis of the covered framing processes with regard to the concept of framing contests. The thesis finalizes with the concluding *Chapter 5*.

CHAPTER 1: Theoretical framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical groundwork and analytical components used throughout this thesis. Together they form the analytical building blocks which help us to make sense of empirical events and realities, providing the lenses through which we spectate. These analytical lenses enable us to develop ourselves from being passive observers to active interpreters. The selection of these theoretical interpretive frames has naturally evolved from the specific focus and empiricism of this thesis' theme, which seeks to understand and interpret AQC's and IS's narratives in terms of their conception, reception, further development, and strategic functions. Please refer to *Table 1* for a comprehensive visualization of Framing Analysis.

1.1 Violence and conflict

As of yet, academics have not found a united approach to an understanding of violence. Therefore it is important to outline some principal theoretical foundations on the analysis of violence, on which this specific study is based.

Violence itself does not constitute a conflict: rather, it is an expressive component of it. Conflict, as defined by Chris Mitchell, consists of three component parts: goal incompatibility, attitudes, and behavior. It is "any situation in which two or more 'parties' (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals"[12]. Violence should be understood as a form of such conflict behavior: "actions undertaken by one party in any situation of conflict aimed at the opposing party with the intention of making that opponent abandon or modify its goals"[13]. Political violence may appear irrational and foolish, but such definitions are counterproductive when attempting to untie the knots of violent conflict. In order to understand what violent conflicts are about, the observer needs to see through the apparent vulgarity of the violent acts themselves, and acknowledge the multidimensional functions and strategies 'underlying' them. This is the premise of David Keen's functionalism: in order to *explain* violence and war, one first needs to *understand* it. It posits that war and political violence are usually described in terms of good and evil[14] by influential actors such as media, politicians, and global organizations. Violence and war are often understood as an aberration of the status quo while instead, they should be understood through their own dynamics. Violent conflict begets its own dynamics and qualities, vying for its own goals and interests[15]. It is a functional phenomenon and a form of "social action relative to the interests and convictions of conscious actors"[16]. David Keen therefore advocates an

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[12] Mitchell 1981:5
[13] Mitchell 1981:6
[14] Keen 2008:4
[15] Brubaker and Laitin 1998:426
[16] Schmidt and Schröder 2001:1

approach to war as "*positive* phenomena, that is, as phenomena that have *functions* as well as causes and effects". Violence is *produced* by "a diverse and complicated set of actors who may well be achieving their objectives in the midst of what looks like failure and breakdown"[17].

Functions of violent conflict are many, though many of these are, at least partly, kept hidden for strategic reasons. Some of the most apparent immediate functions of violence may be economic: Keen mentions how raids in Sudan and Sierra Leone, and arms trade in the DRC, Philippines and Chechnya, have all perpetuated violent conflict through economic incentives[18]. Additionally, Carolyn Nordstrom[19] has documented how processes initiated by events of violence and war have created political, economic and social incentives which disadvantage prospects of peace in Angola and Mozambique. These examples set the trend in which to understand presently ongoing conflicts as well: as forces capable of producing political, economic, and cultural systems. Only when acknowledging this capability, and when understanding that violence and war have functions, effects, and mechanisms of their own, can we start to explain violent atrocities and acts of war, regardless whether they are judicially 'legal' and committed by high-tech state armies, or 'illegal', and committed by splinter cell insurgencies or terrorist organizations.

Using the method of framing analysis in combination with the 'underlying' frame alignment processes, I systematically analyze AQC's and IS's frames *and* their incentives for the use of violence. The next section expands upon this.

1.2 Framing and discourse analysis

The degree of acceptance of acts of violence is not determined by its real or measurable objectives, by the actor's intentions, or by its victims: it is determined by the constructions through which selective violence is strategically interpreted and presented towards a certain target audience[20]. This interpretation and presentation happens through the *framing* of actors, problems and solutions, and the importance of being involved. Paul Collier notes on framed narratives that as regardless of the framing organization's true objective, "both greed-motivated and grievance-motivated rebel organizations will embed their behavior in a narrative of grievance, [so] the observation of the narrative provides no informational content to the researcher as to the true motivation for rebellion"[21]. Through this statement, Collier attempts to dismiss the analysis of narratives as no more than a smokescreen, an obstruction to understanding the actors' true intentions. Rather than rendering these narratives void however, Collier unintentionally demonstrates that these narratives

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[17] Keen 2008:14-5
[18] Keen 2008:20
[19] Nordstrom 2004
[20] Benford and Snow 2000
[21] Collier 2003:101

are, as the violence itself, a battleground on their own[22], as they compete for acceptance in their discursive versions of the truth. The outcome of such framing contests ultimately determine the legitimacy of violent acts, the credibility its actors, and the degrees of participation as they epistemologically *construct* reality by contending the truth and its consequences.

1.2.1 Core Framing Tasks

Charles King explains framing as "the way in which the goals and objects of mobilization, whether violent or otherwise, are presented to potential adherents, to the designated opponents, and to third parties"[23]. The main tools used to research these frames are provided by models presented by Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow[24]. Their model of frame analysis in social movement organizations focuses on three 'core framing tasks': diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing. The first task, diagnostic framing, is concerned with the identification of the problem and its source, the attribution of blame, and the delineation of boundaries between 'good' and 'evil' actors. Diagnostic framing therefore addresses the most basic questions in the analysis of a social movement's narrative: what is the problem and who is to blame? The second core task, prognostic framing, covers the proposed solution to the problem: how can the outlined problem be solved (or opponent be defeated), and what strategies need to be developed and observed in order to make that solution work? Lastly, the task of motivational framing serves as a 'call to arms' or the rationale for action. This task focuses on convincing potential adherents to participate in the movement and coincides with other framing tasks. Through the provision of an internal logic, provided in a discourse which exists of narratives, performances and images[25], violence is not only justified, it is *required*[26]: an obvious necessity in a coherent framework of truths. I have not reserved a separate paragraph for the analysis of motivational framing as its presence is interwoven with the adjustment and presentation of all other framing tasks, and an isolated approach would be redundant.

1.2.2 Frame alignment processes

Core framing tasks form the essence of framing theory. They tell audiences what the organization and its goals are about and therefore co-determine organizational legitimacy and popular support, such as movement participation. However, these framing tasks cannot be studied *per se* as they are performed in defining contexts. Byrd and Snow stress the importance of not falling for the trap of

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[22] Benford and Snow 2000:625
[23] King 2007:117
[24] Benford and Snow: 2000
[25] Demmers 2012:127
[26] Schröder and Schmidt 2001:1

portraying 'ideology' as a non-dynamic, static imagery[27]. Rather, the area of social movement must be taken into consideration, as this is inextricably linked with the course and action of social movements[28]. Social, political and economic contexts define the strategies which co-determine the construction of these frames.

Such strategies involve find resonance among target audiences and are known as *frame alignment processes* and are described as "the linkage of individual and SMO interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary"[29]. Frame alignment processes basically work to find the match between interpretations of reality as performed by SMO's on the one hand, and that of potential adherents on the other, to enlarge the organization's frames' resonance, and enlarge its pool of participants. I consider frame alignment processes to be independent and manipulable variables, which have direct effects on the dependent variable of 'core framing tasks'. These, in their turn, forward these 'optimized' frames to the audience. The frame's resonance is then decided by factors operationalized as 'framing contest' (see paragraph 1.2.3, see *Table 1* for a visualization).

Frame alignment processes adjust diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames through processes of *amplification, bridging, extending,* and *transforming* them to gain resonance among various audiences, with the goal of achieving participation of mobilization[30]. *Frame amplification* refers to "the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame", and may be specified to the amplification of either values, or beliefs. Values can be "construed as modes of conduct or states of existence that are thought to be worthy of protection and promotion", and usually contains a certain value's identification, idealization, and elevation. These values are shared by the target audience, but may have fallen into disuse. The main importance however is that the given value is not yet used for collective action and may be manipulated to be used for mobilization. The other amplification process concerns *beliefs* and refers to "presumed relationships between two things or between something and a characteristic of it", such as "God is dead", or "black is beautiful".[31] In the social movement area, five main processes are identified: 1) beliefs about the seriousness of the problem, issues, or grievance; 2) beliefs about locus of causality or blame; 3) stereotypic beliefs about antagonists or targets of influence; 4) beliefs about probability of change or efficacy of collective action; 5) beliefs about the necessity and propriety of 'standing up'[32]. The second alignment process of *frame bridging* is defined as the "linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally

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[27] Byrd and Snow 2007:119-20
[28] Byrd and Snow 2007:120
[29] Snow et al 1986:464
[30] Snow et al 1986:467
[31] Snow et al 1986:469
[32] Snow et al 1986:470

unconnected frames regarding a particular issue of problem"[33]. This occurs when the frame articulator links its frames to "unmobilized sentiment pools or public opinion preference clusters". There may be no substantive similarities, although ideologically, sentiments connect. An example is provided in Snow et al's 1986 article, when citing a peace activist addressing people who had subscribed to left-oriented magazines: "We assume that most anyone whose name appears on these lists would share our views on the nuclear arms race, apartheid, and U.S. interventionism in Central America"[34]. The target audience may yet not even *know* that it cares about the matter at hand, but as the issue is bridged to other sentiments, it gains salience and the SMO's frame gains resonance. The third alignment process is *frame extension* and occurs when an SMO "extends the boundaries of its primary framework so as to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objects but of considerable salience of potential adherents".[35] Phrased differently, this means that the organization's frames extend into other narratives, but not with the primary goal to convince those audiences into participation or mobilization. An example is propaganda to the diagnosed opponent, and may primarily lead to a decrease in frame resonance of the enemy's articulator. The fourth and last frame alignment process is *frame transformation*. A relatively little used strategy which redefines "activities, events, and biographies", a "systematic alteration" reconstituting "what it is for participants that is going on"[36]. Two main processes are known: transformations of domain-specific, and global interpretive frames. The first one refers to the reframing of a particular situation, from acceptable to unjust. The second is of a remarkably larger scope: a whole new primary framework, comparable to the "displacement of one universe of discourse by another and its attendant rules and grammar for putting things together"[37].

These concepts, preceded by the core framing tasks of diagnostication and prognostication, provide the analytical tools through which this study is built up.

1.2.3 Framing contests

Framing inherently contends, in a struggle to produce a convincing version of the truth. Frames are usually questioned or contended by other political actors through *framing contests* between social movement actors or organizations. In these contests, the objective is to maximize the frame articulator's own frame resonance, while minimizing the opponent's: being successful in the framing contest   means   being
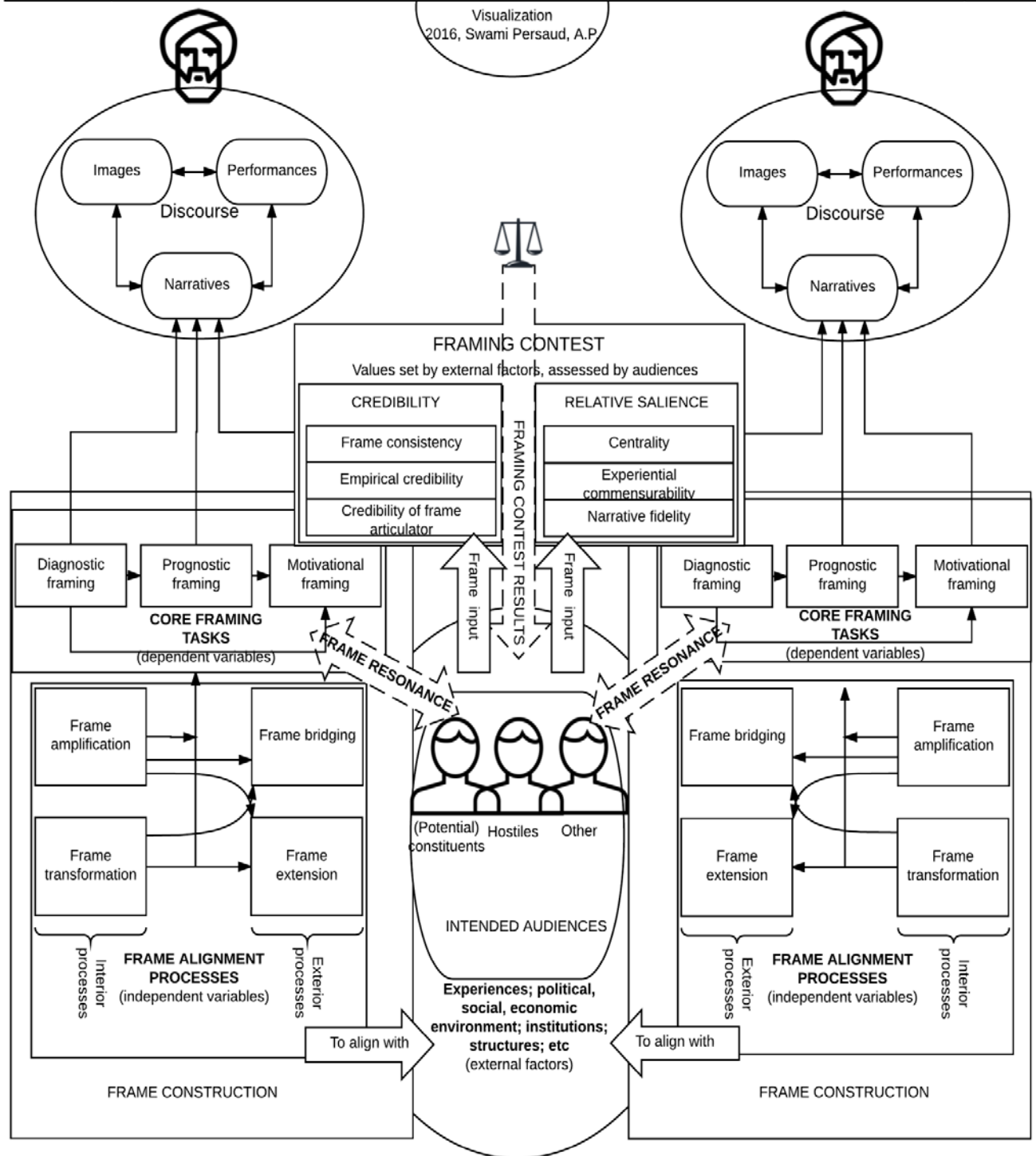
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[33] Snow et al 1986:467
[34] Snow et al 1986:470
[35] Snow et al 1986:472
[36] Snow et al 1986:474
[37] Snow et al 1986:475; Benford and Snow 1988

Table 1: FRAMING ANALYSIS

Based on Snow et al 1986; Benford and Snow 1988; 2000

Visualization
2016, Swami Persaud, A.P.

Images ↔ **Performances**

Discourse

Narratives

FRAMING CONTEST

Values set by external factors, assessed by audiences

CREDIBILITY	RELATIVE SALIENCE
Frame consistency	Centrality
Empirical credibility	Experiential commensurability
Credibility of frame articulator	Narrative fidelity

FRAMING CONTEST RESULTS

Frame input

Diagnostic framing	Prognostic framing	Motivational framing

CORE FRAMING TASKS
(dependent variables)

FRAME RESONANCE

Frame amplification	Frame bridging
Frame transformation	Frame extension

Interior processes

FRAME ALIGNMENT PROCESSES
(independent variables)

Exterior processes

FRAME CONSTRUCTION

To align with

(Potential) constituents   Hostiles   Other

INTENDED AUDIENCES

Experiences; political, social, economic environment; institutions; structures; etc
(external factors)

Images ↔ **Performances**

Discourse

Narratives

Diagnostic framing	Prognostic framing	Motivational framing

CORE FRAMING TASKS
(dependent variables)

FRAME RESONANCE

Frame bridging	Frame amplification
Frame extension	Frame transformation

Exterior processes

FRAME ALIGNMENT PROCESSES
(independent variables)

Interior processes

To align with

FRAME CONSTRUCTION

successful in convincing your adherents of your version of the truth.

Frame resonance is a function of two factors: (1) credibility and (2) relative salience. Credibility is made up of three components. The first component concerns the consistency of the frames: do the frames make logical sense or do they contradict? Also, do tactical actions match these frames? The second component is their empirical credibility, or whether the frames seem credible or believable to the intended audience; this is regardless of their objective truth, but rather concerns the perceived truth in the 'eye of the beholder', which may or may not be influenced by other framing exercises by the same or a competitive frame articulator. The third component refers to the credibility of the frame articulator itself: does the articulator have the status or presumed knowledge to proffer the suggested frames?[38] A frame's relative salience is also made up of three components. The first component is its centrality: how essential is the belief in the lives of the audience? Is it *salient* within the existing hierarchic belief system?[39] The second component is its experiential commensurability: are the framings congruent with personal experiences, or are they perhaps too abstract? The third component is its narrative fidelity: are the frames culturally resonant?[40]

While not a significant part of this study, I wish to lastly invoke that these understandings of subjective interpretations invoke Fairclough's lessons on the importance and 'realness' of effects of interpretations of credibility: successful framing is both dependent on, and determinant of "imaginaries, representations of how things might or could or should be"[41]. Fairclough emphasizes how such representations may lead to reifications in reality, what he calls "materialisations of discourse". In a context of violence, the violent nature of such imaginaries are a prerequisite for violence to be carried out[42]. David Apter agrees with this assertion and says that "people do not commit political violence without discourse, they need to talk themselves into it"[43]. This is important as I demonstrate in the following chapters that frame articulators often attempt to push its adherents in this direction by aligning their violent narratives to different audiences.

1.3 Methodology

In this study, I comparatively analyze two competing sets of discursive frames, of AQC and IS respectively. In *Chapter 2*, I analyze narratives by dissecting them into separate core framing tasks of diagnostication and prognostication. *Chapter 3* examines how individual frames within these sets are (re-)constructed by approaching them through consideration of their underlying frame adjustment

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[38] Benford and Snow 2000:619
[39] Benford and Snow 1988:205
[40] Benford and Snow 2000:621-2
[41] Fairclough 2003:207
[42] Schröder and Schmidt 2001:9
[43] Apter 1997:2

processes. *Chapter 4* tests these results against the criteria of framing contests and theoretical principles of functionalism, in order to determine each frame's respective success.

1.3.1 Data selection and triangulation

I have performed open source data analysis on a variety of sources, which may be categorized as follows:

- *Primary sources*. Written statements issued by (news agencies or affiliates of) concerned parties themselves. Examples include, but are not limited to, AQC's and IS's respective propaganda magazines *Inspire* and *Dabiq*, propaganda videos, and public letters written by leaders of the organizations, as well as recently declassified documents, including internal correspondence.
- *Secondary sources*: academic literature from peer-reviewed magazines; scholarly works such as reports published by think-tanks; governmental reports; etc.
- *Tertiary sources*: news and media reports.

I have deliberately chosen to triangulate my data among these different sources. Wherever applicable, I have always tried to track data to its original source, so as to limit gratuitous layers of interpretation. I have consulted meta-analyses in research reports to identify trends, but have not taken over subjective interpretations. For example: if it were mentioned in a report or article that any actor has 'aggravated' a situation, I do not repeat such statements but instead always refer to original sources included in this thesis, so as to minimize unaccounted lines of reason. Outlining the organizations' core frames is been done in congruence between existing meta-analyses and my own analysis of primary documents.

1.3.2 General methodology

I have analyzed the primary documents qualitatively using the methodology of Framing Analysis. Practically, I have based these methods loosely on a methodology outlined by David et al "that lies somewhere between the interpretive qualitative approach and the automated"[44]. I have (step 1) manually scanned through primary and secondary texts, looking for operationalizations of Framing Analysis's core components (diagnostication and prognostication). With 'operationalizations', I refer to interpretations and expressions of problem identification and attribution, as well as problem solution and prognostication. Due to the thematic diversity of primary sources, the asymmetry in

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[44] David et al 2011:332

online availability of comparable resources, and the often very symbolic or religious expressions used by both organizations, I have not engaged in automated primary-text methods of analysis, as this would likely, due to its enigmatic style 'dilute' important data[45]. Continuing from this first step, I then engaged in (step 2) structural codification of the found data. The results of these codifications are present in *Chapter 2* as core frames. For *Chapter 3*, I have (step 3) critically analyzed these core frames to find various instances of frame alignment processes *within* these core frames. I identified instances of *frame amplification* by decomposing each frame: of what exist the "relationships (…) between something and a characteristic of it"[46]? Determinations of *frame bridging* and *frame extension* are derived from the nature of the source itself: who is the audience, what frames are amplified, what is the stance of the audience on this message? *Frame transformations* have been operationalized by checking the chronological consistency of frames, and by looking for domain-specific or global-interpretative changes. For *Chapter 4*, I have (step 4) tested the outcomes of these processes against the operationalized background of its framing contest: through the respective criteria of credibility and relative salience. Each frame's value is tested against these criteria using all relevant information from primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, and using analogous deduction from results of *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 3*.

In *Chapter 4*, I have complemented to Framing Analysis methodology by borrowing a few elements from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The outset of Framing Analysis is rather positivist and enables us to take on the role of 'observer', or external analyst. Complementary to this are CDA's principles, which advocate that 'language is a social phenomenon', and that "institutions and social groupings have specific meanings and values, that are expressed in language"[47]. These expressions, especially when part of an ideology, are not isolated but are embedded in the 'social', have symbolic connotations, and are capable of guiding human action[48]. This is a complementary 'emic' approach (understanding from the actor's perspective) to understand the subjective *effects* of Framing Analysis's 'etic' approach (understanding from the observer's perspective)[49].

1.3.3 Adding to theoretical methodology: analyzing narratival functions

Paragraph 1.1 introduced the foundations of function analysis in violence. These foundations are located in the academic field of *functionality* of war and violence, and seek to address the 'why'-questions, concealed behind the 'how'-questions. In this study however, this function-focused analytical framework only provides the theoretical principles for understanding violence, but does

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[45] David et al 2011:332
[46] Snow et al 1986:469
[47] Meyer and Wodak 2009:6
[48] ibid.:9-10; Fairclough et al 2011:357
[49] Kottak 2006:47

not provide its main methodology, as such methodology would require irresponsible and dangerous endeavors, such as travel to the affected areas in Iraq and Syria, as well as cooperation from inside the command structures of IS and other jihadist organizations. Interviews through proxies may have been possible, although these too would require access to networks; additional time would have been a necessity. Given the relative exclusivity of informed populations, and the additional problem of validating specific cases positively, I have chosen not to make this the methodological core of this study. I do use its theoretical foundations as there is an academic body of knowledge to fall back on to. Through theoretical extrapolation of results from comparable studies on social movement organizations in contexts of violent warfare and conflict situations, as well from drawing on results from international organizations, we may engage in what Robben calls "macrocomparison of distant case studies"[50]. Those studies may teach us that framing processes by (violent) frame articulators are embedded in certain contexts which, as Collier rightly points out, often incentivize the construction of certain frames to secure organizational needs. These include the amplification of certain grievances to increase organizational legitimacy and popular resonance. The current literature has not yet provided a method to analyze framing processes while acknowledging these functional implications. Therefore, I have decided to contribute to it, by proposing a modest addition. This addition is as follows: social movement organizations such as AQC and IS have dual goals, which, although they *may* be bundled in the same narrative, need to be acknowledged and then untangled in order to be analyzed and understood. This duality refers to each social movement organization's two directions for which separate strategies and narratives are being developed. The first direction is 'inside' and concern organizational sustenance and must secure processes of mobilization, credibility, finance, and other strategic necessities. . The second direction is 'outside' and concern public tasks, which are articulated to outside audiences and concern core framing tasks and other processes which are explained in paragraph 1.2. I make this distinction by referring to either *interior* or *exterior* framing exercises. Each of these framing processes addresses its own interior or exterior needs, through its own strategies and narratives. The two needs *may* be in line with each other, in the same continuum, and reinforcement of one frame may or may not positively affect the other. We must acknowledge the additional complications and nuances brought by these functional differentiations as they have profound effects on the accuracy of our analysis on perceptions of strategy. We need to differentiate between the frames adhered to by organizations' leaderships and the ones they manipulate for mobilization or credibility. An example of this duality is explained in Naji's *Management of Savagery*:

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[50] Robben 2010

"[E]*stablish a media plan which seeks, in each of these stages, rational and Sharia justification for the operations, especially (targeting) the masses. (It must be a plan) which escapes the captivity of targeting individuals of the other Islamic groups, who already understand everything! However, the masses are a difficult factor which will be our back and our support in the future (…) the role of media politics is to gain their sympathy, or at the very least neutralize them.*"[51]

Acknowledging this distinction enables us to analyze the organizations' frames according to the frame's function. Examples of these differentiations and subsequent complications are core aspects of the analysis and appear throughout this work. In general, we may say that *Chapter 2* largely focuses on the exterior narratives (those brought out to the public), whereas *Chapter 3* emphasizes mainly interior narratives and processes (those meant for insiders).

In order to take away any confusion, I wish to recapitulate by emphasizing that I derive my assumptions on the nature of violent conflict on the *theoretical* principles of functionalism. The main methodological tools however are provided by Frame Analysis. Through Frame Analysis, I examine the separate frames of the proposed narratives, and then determine each frame's specific function by placing them in the right social, political, or economic context. This synthesis is demonstrated by adding to the existing theoretical framework with interior and exterior needs and narratives.

Having outlined the theoretical and methodological foundations of this study, it is now time to start with the actual analysis. The following chapter, *Chapter 2*, sets out the diagnostic and prognostic frames of each organization's narratives. The consecutive chapters examine these frames' respective adjustment processes and their ultimate framing contest analysis.

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[51] Abu Bakr Naji:51-2

CHAPTER 2: Core framing tasks

They note that 'ideology' should not be considered as an explanatory variable, but that it should be problematized and made a topic of analysis. This chapter sets out do so by analyzing how AQC and IS select, interpret and *include* these social and political contexts in their diagnostic and prognostic frames of identification, and prognostics to create ideologies disseminated through propaganda. This chapter is built up as follows: *paragraph 2.1* outlines the elementary ideological background required to understand AQC's and IS's narratives; *paragraph 2.2* introduces commonalities in frames and propaganda; *paragraph 2.3* sets out AQC's and IS's diagnostic frames, to be followed up by *paragraph 2.4*, which explores the subsequent prognostic frames. Motivational frames are not addressed separately in this analysis, as both organizations do not disseminate motivational frames 'per se': these are embedded within its diagnostic and prognostic frames. *Paragraph 2.5* wraps up this chapter and introduces *Chapter 3*.

2.1 Shared ideological backgrounds

In order to understand and analyze the different core framing tasks and subsequent frame alignment processes, some basic information on the ideological backgrounds of AQ and IS is required. This paragraph sets out to shortly outline a comprehensive relevant history of both organizations' similarities and differences.

AQC and IS share some theological principles and political philosophies, rooted in a branch of salafism, a fundamentalist reformist movement in Islam. Salafism advocates an interpretation of Islam which propagates the return to an austere and fundamentalist reading of the Quran, in which the life of Mohammed and his first followers is set as rigid example. While AQ, IS, and most other Islamist movements are categorized under the salafist movement, salafism consists of more than just militant groups. It knows roughly three branches: 'puritists' who adhere strictly to the religion and shun politics; 'politicos' who see religion as a factor of importance in politics and attempt to influence the political landscape with it; and finally the group of 'jihadis'[52]. What sets jihadis apart from the other branches in salafism is their explicit embrace of violence as a means, and a willingness to undermine ruling authorities and laws if those are deemed in opposition or contrast to Islamic teachings[53]. Regardless of its branch, salafist generally share the view that the US bears responsibility for many problems in the Islamic lands or *dar al-Islam* through its waging of a war of aggression against Islam. One more shared notion is the acknowledgement that, whenever threatened or (physically) attacked by non-Muslims, Muslims have the right to defend their fellow

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[52] Wiktorowicz 2006:207
[53] Mendelsohn 2016:11; Wiktorowicz and Kaltner 2003:79

Muslims and Muslim lands[54]. Theologically, this concept is known as 'defensive *jihad*' and there is a discursive struggle taking place on the interpretation of this concept which, as we will see, functions as major independent variable for jihadi-salafist groups in the legitimization of their courses of action[55].

In terms of its development, salafism is a relatively modern movement within Islam, starting in the mid-19th century. While conservative movements have existed for longer times, salafism originally primarily rejected traditional Islamic customs and sought for ways to combine the foundations of Islam with modernism, looking for a rational, *modern* reinterpretation of Islam[56]. It has changed in the sense that it still rejects traditional Islamic customs, but rather than a modern reinterpretation, is has fallen back on the premodern. Salafism has come to be an umbrella term of what is traceable to two major schools of thought: Qutbism and Wahhabism. Both AQC's and IS's ideologies are strongly rooted in these schools, although both organizations differ in their interpretations of these. We now focus our particular attention to the two most important ideologues and name givers of these religious branches: Mohammad ibn abd al-Wahhab, and Sayyid Qutb. These scholars both largely reject scholarly developments made by Islamic scholars and traditions, and based on this unfaithfulness to the Islamic scholarly tradition, the validity of their works is often contested. Despite this critique, their works have exerted major crucial formative influences on the contemporary jihadist landscape. Exploring the fundamentals and conclusions of the works of these two men provide the essential insights into the core principles of jihadism in the 21st century; therefore this next section covers an essential introduction into their works.

Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab lived in the 18th century and is name giver to the Wahhabi movement, a religious branch which has played a continuous role in the religious, political, and military consolidation of the three consecutive Saudi states from 1744 until the present day. Al-Wahhab's central thematics revolved his position towards the concept of *tawhid*, or the oneness of God. Al-Wahhab emphasized that this oneness principally rejects any form of polytheism, including Judaism and Christianity as these religions, according to Quranic interpretations, have been involved with idol-worship at several instances. This 'oneness', as well as the abolishment of all idolatry ('*shirk*') is a central focus in al-Wahhab's work and has resulted in the destruction of shrines, tombstones, or other objects of veneration during his lifetime. Additionally, his stoning of an adultering woman is used by his followers as an example to his commitment to Islam[57]. Wahhabism

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[54] Wiktorowicz 2006:208
[55] Mendelsohn 2016:11
[56] Stanley 2005: 8th and 9th paragraph
[57] Armajani 2012:126-7

rejected notions of modernity in favor of early Islamic teachings[58]. Due to Wahhabism's use as a political tool to strengthen the unity among Saudi Arabia's feudal-tribal nobility, merchants, and other populations, and to reinforce the power and legitimacy of the House of Saud, Wahhabism is the state religion of Saudi Arabia[59], the birthplace of Osama bin Laden 1957. Bin Laden was later taught by Sayyid Qutb's brother[60], who is founder of the teachings which came to be known as Qutbism.

The founder of *Qutbism* is Sayyid Qutb, born in Egypt in 1906. For the majority of his life, Qutb strongly opposed Western 'colonial' mingling in Egypt, but was familiar with, and perhaps supportive of, Western principles of individualism, modernism and liberalism, as apparent from his writings. After having visited the United States in 1948 however, Qutb concluded that Americans were materially obsessed, did not seek any compassion or spiritual strength, were mostly bigoted and racist, and that they had a repulsive attitude towards sex and sexuality. Qutb came to realize the 'truth of Islam' and saw it as a potentially effective way for solving individual and societal problems. Together with this development, Qutb waived earlier-held principles derived from Western thought and became a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic revivalist movement, upon his return in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood was in ill will with the Egyptian government, which strongly suppressed it. As opponent of the government, Qutb was sentenced to hard labor, suffered torture and feared being killed by governmental forces (which happened eventually in 1966). What came to be revolutionary about Qutb's thought was how he broke with the scholarly Islamic tradition, by observing and declaring that fellow Muslims, and those living in the Muslims regions ('*dar al-Islam*') were un-Islamic and *jahili*, or 'ignorant'. He was the first to declare 'Islamic' governments as un-Islamic and therefore illegitimate[61]. This is an early display of *takfir*[62] which has set an example for the justification of Islamist violence in later eras, not in the least so by IS.

The combination of Wahhabism and Qutbism provides the ideological background of contemporary salafism as adhered to by various jihadist groups. It advocates a fundamentally austere interpretation of Islam and a rejection of modernism. This worldview combines with a critique on secular political rule, which is considered to be the culprit of a pervasive deviation from religion throughout Muslim lands, resulting in political oppression. One book especially, *The Management of Savagery*, written by an unknown jihadi under the pseudonym of Abu Bakr Naji, combined these conservative diagnostics with an uncompromisingly violent policy projection, which

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[58] Stanley 2005: 9th paragraph
[59] Armajani 2012:128-139
[60] Armajani 2012:139-40
[61] Armajani 2012:58-9; Pankhurst 2013:87-9
[62] *"Pronouncement that someone is an unbeliever (kafir) and no longer Muslim. Takfir is used in the modern era for sanctioning violence against leaders of Islamic states who are deemed insufficiently religious. It has become a central ideology of militant groups such as those in Egypt, which reflect the ideas of Sayyid Qutb* (...)" Esposito, John L. 2014.

proscribes a long-term strategy involving numerous attacks on various goals to create a breakdown into 'savageness' and chaos. This chaos would force the victimized populations or countries to accept any organization as its ruler, as long as it is able to provide some kind of order, regardless of its other agendas or policies[63]. Whenever necessary, I will refer back to this book, which has proven to be a highly influential and somewhat explanatory work when analyzing AQC's and IS's respective actions[64].

Having said this, we have now drawn the backdrop for the development of AQC's and IS's ideologies. In the analysis of these organizations' narratives and frames, themes can constantly be traced back to the events and ideals mentioned above. Let us now start with the examination of what then, exactly, AQC's and IS's main narratives are.

2.2 Binary narratives

Inherent to propagandist political narratives, especially those with a religious component, is the setup of narratives in binary terms[65], phrased in manichaean terminology of good versus evil and presented in irreconcilable dichotomies[66]. AQC and IS are no strangers to these practices and further fuel these antagonisms with religious absolutist concepts which ultimately do not only legitimize, but *necessitate* violence against all non-believers. Exemplary to this is an essay published in 2002 by Ayman al-Zawahiri, AQC's main ideologue[67]: in an essay named after the theological concept[68] *al-Wala wa'l-Bara*, or 'Loyalty and Enmity/Disavowal', he emphasizes a division through an illustration of true Muslims which are expected to be loyal towards God and their fellow Muslims, while being in a constant state of hatred and distance towards everyone else[69]. *Al-Wala* refers to this first group: all those worthy of love, protection, help and support. *Al-Bara* on the other hand deserve to be despised, deserted or denounced: namely all non-Muslims or unbelievers, particularly the West and its Christians and Jews, with a special mention for the United States and Israel[70].

"[The believer] needs to know that he is obligated to befriend a believer -- even if he is oppressive and violent toward you, while he must be hostile to the infidel -- even if he is liberal and kind to you."[71]

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[63] Naji 2006
[64] Hassan 2015
[65] Hindery 2003:16-19
[66] See Mitchell 1981:5-6
[67] Saltman and Winter 2014:26
[68] Al-Qahtani 1981; Quran 9:29: "*Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture - [fight] until they give the jizyah willingly while they are humbled.*" (see footnote 97 for *jizya*)
[69] Quiggin 2009:2
[70] Schmid 2014:1
[71] al-Zawahiri (year unknown):84

This strict dichotomy is a recurring theme in AQC's narrative: AQC propagates itself as being the only vanguard against the oppressors of Islam[72]. A major implication conveyed in these publications is that those who do not support AQ, are automatically supporting the oppressors: there is no grey area in-between. IS too assents with this dichotomy unquestionably, as demonstrated in its first issue of its magazine *Dabiq*:

> "*O Ummah of Islam, indeed the world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the jews.*"[73]

AQC and IS both identify the enemy as all non-Muslims. However, there is an important difference between these organizations when it comes to the reasoning ultimately reaching to this conclusion, a difference with far-stretching consequences when it comes to the organizations' respective successes in upholding their frame resonance. Essential to these differences is their respective divergence 'in terms of diagnosis, prognostication, the best way to mobilize support, and identity'[74], leading to an intra-movement framing contest, of which the consecutive cleavage led to a divorce into two distinct movements. These differences are outlined in this chapter.

2.3 Core diagnostication

This section aims to disentangle AQC's and IS's core diagnostic frames. Our goal is to understand these frames and the ways these add up to the organizations' narratives. To comprehensively understand these narratives it is important to not just take the narratives at face value, but to look beyond them and analyze the different functions that they fulfill.

The diagnostication starts with an analysis of AQC's core frames, to be followed up by those from IS. Throughout this paragraph, the outlined ideology of *paragraph 2.1* serves as backdrop. *Paragraph 2.4* continues on the diagnostication by analyzing each organization's prognostication.

2.3.1 Al-Qaeda Central

When it comes to its ideology, AQC's diagnostic frames appear rather singular, centering around grievances of an oppressive and unjust West, encouraging and supporting deviation from Islam,

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[72] Quiggin 2009:2
[73] Dabiq, issue 1:10
[74] Wiktorowicz 2004:163

through wars of aggression and its overt and covert support for unjust dictatorial regimes[75]. Rather than considering these propagandist utterances and the narratives they contain as an explanation, let us take a close look at its separate components and their respective interactions. AQC's frames, and thus its ideology, have progressively developed in response to IS's growth and consolidation. We therefore take a chronological approach to the ideological development of both organizations' frames in order to identify their core frames and alignment processes in its respective strategic contexts.

Understanding now that AQC generally considers all non-Muslims as enemies, let us find the exact reasoning behind this understanding. AQC's interior narratives have always been religious in their essence, but are also fueled by a strong *secular* reasoning. In its exterior narratives, this secular reasoning is emphasized over its religious aspects. Let us first look at AQC's exterior narratives, particularly those written with Western audiences in mind. AQC's main diagnostic frame focuses specifically on what it understands to be the cause of the worldwide deviation from Islam: those who live in democratic societies whose governments support Israel or the 'war against Islam', most notably the U.S. This is apparent from an analysis of a selection of Osama bin Laden's '*Why we are fighting you*', originally published in 2002[76]. Bin Laden has, on several occasions, written letters directed at Western audiences, which all more or less contain the same message[77]. This letter is the installment in a series of letters, the first one being written by 60 American thinkers ('*What we're fighting for: A letter from America*') and the second one being a response this triggered from 153 Saudi scholars ('*How we can coexist*')[78]. In '*Why we are fighting you*', bin Laden seeks to clarify AQC's grievances, attributions and objectives in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. It is one of his few documents which were widely published in English in Western media, making it of his most prominent and influential documents, not in the least amidst jihadist circles in the West. In it, bin Laden addresses the questions which many in the West asked out loud: why does AQC fight the U.S.? Bin Laden's answer consists of a mixture of political and religious reasons, both called upon to justify the violent actions:

"*The answer is very simple. Because you attacked us and continue to attack us* (…) *It is commanded by our religion and intellect that the oppressed have a right to return the aggression* (…) *[through democracy] the American people have chosen, consented to, and affirmed their support for [Israel's] continuous killing, torture, punishment and expulsion.*"[79]

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[75] Schmid 2014:5-6; Wiktorowicz and Kaltner 2003:80
[76] Bin Laden 2002
[77] Ibrahim 2007:5
[78] Ibrahim 2007:196
[79] Bin Laden 2002

This letter was written in 2002. In a 2014 rehash of this letter, published in an issue of AQC's magazine *Inspire*, al-Zawahiri phrased it as follows:

"*We fight you because you attacked us and continue to do so…. In as much as it is recognized by both law and logic that the victim has the right to retaliate against his attackers, thus you should expect of us nothing less than more Jihâd, resistance, and retribution. Israel is a crime and must be destroyed, and everyone whose hands are steeped in this crime must pay the price, and pay it dearly.*"[80]

AQC's argument is twofold. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri argue that (1) the U.S. started and is continuing a war of aggression against Islam and that (2) AQC is the protector or vanguard of Muslims worldwide. The assertion to the American audience is that AQC's reason for attacking American citizens is therefore quite reasonable, and that any person in this position would be in his right to do the same. Following this, AQC argues that everyone would agree that the victims of such aggression, and so too Muslims, have the right to defend themselves. This defense is based on a religious right (*interior*) and on an intellectual right (*exterior*). The reason then that American *citizens* may be targeted is found in the democratic component of American society: democracy enables the American people to change their government's actions, but as the Americans choose not to do so, the American people have proven that they indeed choose to fight Islam, which makes all American citizens to be legitimate targets. Note here that this narrative expression is aimed at the Americans themselves: only little attention given to religious or theological arguments. Although bin Laden mentions that the Islamic nation is attacked, he primarily emphasizes the blame of the attacker itself: the American government's aggression.

Let's briefly analyze what exactly AQC refer to in their statements, starting with the message that the U.S. attacked Islam first. Both bin Laden and al-Zawahiri immediately elaborate upon this argument with examples of American and Jewish interference with Muslims in Palestine, Somalia, Chechnya, Kashmir and Lebanon[81]. Bin Laden furthermore lists sins of which the U.S. is guilty such as critiques on America's sinful culture and ways of life: "*acts of fornication, homosexuality, intoxicants, gambling, and trading with interest' as well as denying Sharia law and general hypocrisy*[82]"; al-Zawahiri wrote a similar list. These are societal arguments inspired by Sayyid Qutb and strictly adhered to by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri.

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[80] Al-Zawahiri in *Inspire* 13:12
[81] Bin Laden 2002:2
[82] Bin Laden 2002:4

Having diagnosed America as aggressor and promotor of sin, bin Laden attempts to legitimize AQC's actions by arguing that AQC is the legitimate protector of Islam in the world, and that it may therefore stage defensive actions in the name of Islam. In these American-oriented, exterior documents, these arguments are rather emotional and revolve around concepts of revenge and injustice, more so than having actual tactical components. The argument of democracy is ultimately the one legitimizing large-scale violence against civilians; in this letter, bin Laden only argues that democracy may incriminate a people if they do not object to its government's actions. This may seem cogent, or at least understandable for Westerners, however there is a lot that bin Laden hides for his American audience in these exterior narratives.

AQC's exterior narratives have demonstrably had a large influence on Western policy making and academia. For example, in many high-impact publications in American think tanks and government institutions, AQC's main grievances are often understood through its exterior narratives. One such example is this list of grievances: 1) the destruction of the Turkish caliphate in 1924 and the subsequent secularization of present-day Turkey; 2) the Sykes-Picot agreement and subsequent European colonization of the Muslim lands; 3) the creation of Israel and its subsequent wars; 4) the U.S.'s regional dominance after the fall of the Soviet Union; and 5) the presence of American troops in the Arabian Peninsula after the first Gulf War[83]. This list is flawed for at least two major reasons. First, it is constructed through a narrow security perspective and is strictly restricted to an analysis of grievances with an exclusively military or political nature or intention. When dropping this security perspective tunnel view, we could easily add non-military grievances to this list, such as America's constitutional right guaranteeing religious freedom[84], which hold no *military* content but are rather religiously facilitated. When analyzing AQC's diagnostication, it is exactly this religious lexicon which must be considered as the actual facilitator of many of its specious military grievances. This brings us to the second reason for the list's flaws, which is more revealing: its results are a consequence of AQC's success in the dissemination of its *exterior* narratives. This success has led to an overall biased understanding of AQC's ideology among Western audiences, especially so when placed within a general trend of American over-focus on defense and security, which has been used by bin Laden to directly affect the way secular and/or Western audiences *should* interpret its grievances: as a rational synthesis of theology and *political secularism*[85]. Another example is found in a 2007 report written for the U.S. Congress, where there is some minimal reference to AQC's (undefined) "broader ideological program", which is contrasted with a constant repetition of AQC's statements "*that strikes on American targets should be viewed by Muslims and Americans as a*

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[83] Ryan 2013: chapter 1 page 4
[84] Bin Laden *in* Ibrahim 2007:58
[85] Lia and Hegghammer 2004

defensively motivated response to perceived American aggression in the Islamic world"[86]. This secularist reasoning connects AQC's theological narratives to worldly experiences and makes its grievances appear understandable to Western audiences. Moreover, it makes the U.S. appear as the only genuine perpetrator of injustices, which 'logically' leaves AQC to no other option but to (violently) defend itself.

Meanwhile, as demonstrated before during the outset of its binary antagonisms, AQC's theological *interior* arguments have communicated its grievances in a whole other way. Unjust American military presence and its aggression towards the Muslim *Umma*, if accepted as an argument, may indeed result in the logic that AQC's actions are inherently defensive. Rather than this being the definite legitimization however, these narratives appear to be a pragmatic functional tool to increase frame resonance instead, obscuring much deeper ideological and theological intentions, propagated in its interior narratives. These theological intentions are described elaborately by Osama bin Laden in his letter '*Moderate Islam Is a Prostration to the West'*. This letter was aimed at Muslims worldwide and found little political attention or academic scrutiny outside this intended audience. In it, bin Laden vilifies 'moderate Islam' as an invention of the West in order to destroy Islam; moreover he explicitly justifies the use of Offensive *Jihad*, quite unlike his earlier statements to the West in which he assured the audience that AQC's actions were all a matter of self-defense:

"*What the West desires is that we abandon [the doctrine of] Loyalty and Enmity, and abandon [Offensive] Jihad. (…) The problem, however, is that Offensive Jihad is an established and basic tenet of this religion. It is a religious duty rejected only by the most deluded. (…) The essence of all this* [moderate Islam] *comes from right inside the halls of the United Nations, instead of the Divine foundations that are built upon hating the infidels, repudiating them with tongue and teeth till they embrace Islam or pay the* jizya[87] *with willing submission and humility.*"[88]

When taking this into consideration, it appears once more that the previously mentioned list of five grievances is dangerously inaccurate, even regardless of its security tunnel view. What matters here is that AQC interprets, manipulates and presents its causes and goals twice and dually, for at least two different audiences. To its American audience, AQC phrases its grievances in military and political terms, while to its jihadi adherents, a religious lexicon is upheld. This doublespeak[89]

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[86] Blanchard 2007:4

[87] *Jizya*: "Poll tax levied on non-Muslims as a form of tribute and in exchange for an exemption from military service, based on *Quran* 9:29 … There is no consensus about its applicability in the modern world" Esposito 2014.

[88] Bin Laden 2002b:30-32

[89] Ibrahim, Raymond. 2007 The al Qaeda Reader. Page: back cover

provides informational content on the specific meanings given to the various audiences that AQC attempts to reach. These strategies attempt to maximize resonance among different audiences, and ultimately determine the organization's success at achieving mobilization. These strategies and processes are further examined in *Chapter 3*. For now, we must understand that the grievances themselves can be interpreted, *selected* and presented dually. Likewise, the redressal of these grievances is presented as either a religious obligation, or *rational* or 'the sensible' thing to do. Often, though not always, AQC's religious arguments are aimed at sustaining its interior needs such as reinforcing legitimacy among its supporters, while its secular arguments are aimed at reinforcing its exterior narrative.

Before investigating the different ways of redressal proposed by AQC, I first continue to a similarly brief analysis of IS's core narratives, which enables us to highlight and compare the main differences between the two organizations. We will notice that while both organization's frames are *rooted* in the same theology of salafi-jihadism, IS has a significantly different understanding of how to understand Islam and its enemies than AQC. This next section explains, that while we see how AQC provides us with an exterior narrative which presents its justifications quite 'rationally' and secularly, IS's lexicon is rooted in a much stricter and more selective interpretation of Islam, also described as a splinter movement of *neo-takfirism*[90], which although derived from the same theological understandings of jihadi-salafism, provides an alternative lens through which the organization observes, interprets, and responds to its empirical surroundings. In response, AQC has toned down its aggressive theological lexicon and increasingly focuses on political grievances.

2.3.2. Islamic State

In AQC's heyday in the late 1980s, the jihadist landscape was not the competitive environment it is today. After the American invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 however, jihadist infrastructure splintered and scattered. AQC attempted to create and maintain an omnipresent image yet remain militarily evasive. It franchised different jihadist organizations worldwide and lent them its name[91]. This franchising led to complications when intramovement disagreements led to ideological and strategic differences between AQC and its Iraqi franchise (AQI), which was under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. AQI ultimately evolved into becoming IS and the organizational and ideological differences resulted in all-out enmity between what can be considered the two largest and most influential jihadist movements today. IS's diagnostics are symptomatic of this fiery past. Its identification of enemies is not limited to AQC's 'classic' identification of opponents such as America and Israel, but includes a much larger body of groups and associations and encompasses an

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[90] Alshech 2014
[91] Mendelsohn 2016

array of jihadist organizations, civil associations, and governments. This includes virtually anyone who has not explicitly pledged allegiance to IS's cause. It does not matter if a person identifies him- or herself as Muslim, or even as anti-American: it appears that everyone who has not sworn *baya,* or allegiance, to IS is considered an enemy. This hostile stance is ultimately to be traced back to Sayyid Qutb's approach to *takfir*, or the excommunication of Muslims, which makes attacking or killing 'them' justifiable[92]. IS's worldview originates from the same theological salafi-jihadist teachings which inspired AQC, although its embrace of neo-takfirism, which is objected by most other Islamist and even jihadist groups, sets the organization apart. Neo-takfirism is a movement developed from the views of al-Zarqawi, who justified the killing of anyone who would aid the enemy in any way, as well as all Shi'ite civilians, through religious interpretations. Alshech describes neo-takfiris as "[a]ppearing to consider resolute confrontation as a required form of piety and thus as *a goal in itself.* By contrast, Salafi-jihadis view confrontation as a means to achieve the end goal of establishing an Islamic state that should be employed only under appropriate circumstances and subject to the restrictions of Islamic law"[93]. As we continue with the analysis of IS' diagnostication and prognostication, we will indeed notice that *jihad* appears to become a goal by itself, unlike in AQC's narratives. This is one out of several important factors which clearly demarcate IS's diagnostic principles and resulting strategies from its elderly brother, and those will be outlined here.

Unlike attempting to convince its audiences of certain injustices or grievances per se, as AQC does, IS's narratives are overall inherently more *offensive* towards what it labels as unbelievers, apostates, and hypocrites. IS's narratives and propaganda are described as 'inward-looking'[94], aimed at its own organizational and/or military consolidation before anything else. This is demonstrated by its 'expansive' slogan '*biqaya wa tatamaddad'*, or 'remaining and expanding'[95]. IS's progress in this spectrum is made at the expense of other groups in the global jihadist movements for at least two important, aligned reasons. The first reason is that IS strives for absolute theological and political authority and supremacy[96]. This requires a narrative which is clearly focused on the interests of the consolidation of the organization as a political body carrying theological authority, rather than on theological discussions or perceived injustices per se[97]. IS's ideology is developed pragmatically, with its organizational goals actively in mind, preferably aimed at as many audiences as possible, and attempts to create a notion of constancy and (theological) credibility. A prominent example of this strategy already shows through the organization's very first propagandist expression: its name. While 'al Qaeda' has no direct religious connotation to it, and translates to the 'base' or 'foundation',

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[92] Mendelsohn 2016:11
[93] Alshech 2014:431
[94] Saltman and Winter 2014:9
[95] Bunzel 2015:14; Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016:11
[96] Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016:4-6
[97] Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016:4-6

from which it is implied that its adherents would strive to an Islamic state through *jihad*, Islamic State has named itself after its final objective: the (re-)institutionalization of the *Umma*. Meanwhile, the organization gowns itself in its sacred authority. The significance of the effect of naming is discussed at length in one of the letters found at bin Laden's compound in Abottabad:

"[The name Al Qa'ida] *allows the enemies to claim deceptively that they are not at war with Islam and Muslims, but they are at war with the organization of al-Qa'ida, which is an outside entity from the teachings of Islam (…) so if the word al-Qa'ida was derived from or had strong ties to the word Islam or Muslims; or if it had the name Islamic party, it would be difficult for Obama to say that (…) The name of an entity carries its message and represents it.*"[98]

What appears from this excerpt is the need to not only have a name which carries a message per se, but which can also be used or exploited for framing purposes. The letter mentions that Obama's attacks on AQC would create additional legitimacy for AQC if it were able to frame those attacks as religious attacks on the global Muslim *Umma*. Both AQC and IS have been aware of these issues and openly refer to its opposition as *Crusaders*, invoking a continuous history of religious warfare. IS considers its own reputation to be of absolute importance, to such an extent that the consolidation of its status and *name* prove to be one of its major focal points. This apparent narcissism serves a highly functional goal and is contextualized in the following paragraph, which provides a more in-depth analysis of IS's diagnostic narratives. Throughout the covering of these narratives, I also initiate a first demonstration of these narratives' prognostic functionality, which will be covered in the final section of this chapter.

Some additional attention needs to be focused on Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who is IS's founder, main ideologue, and long-time competitor of AQC's Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. IS's contemporary narratives, tactics, and images today are largely a product of al-Zarqawi's interpretive frames. After outlining these, we also determine their qualitative in-context value by reviewing responsive writings to these frames by al-Zawahiri. Based on this knowledge, we may then continue with both organizations' prognostic frames.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, born Ahmad Fadl al-Nazal al-Khalayleh, has been the driving force behind the first jihadist movements in Iraq and Syria. His relationship with AQC has been volatile, and his stance towards the organization rather unpredictable and fierce. After an early life as a criminal, al-Zarqawi spent his formative years as a jihadist in a Jordanian prison with al-Maqdisi, who

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[98] Unknown author, SOCOM-2012-0000009-HT, page 1

is now widely regarded as the most influential jihadist scholar alive[99]. During these years, al-Zarqawi's ideology focused increasingly on salafi-jihadist teachings *in praxis*, rather than on the acquirement of *theoretical* theological knowledge[100]. When extrapolated to the current state of affairs, it is clearly noticeable how this seemingly small shift in perspective has evolved and eventually contributed enormously to the sharp ideological rupture we can see in the jihadist landscape today.

Al-Zarqawi adhered to an extremely strict interpretation of salafi-jihadism. He founded and guided the group al-Tawhid wal-Jihad in Iraq which, after months of deliberation and negotiation, pledged allegiance to AQC in 2004 and changed the group's name to Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, better known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)[101]. Fighting under the flag of AQC was a highly functional framing exercise, as doing so expanded the name and fame of the organization, its network, and increased the likelihood of new recruits. Ideologically however, the Iraq franchise had major differences with its elderly brother. AQI staged bloody attacks at the Shia population in Iraq, performed public beheadings, and quickly came to be known for its brutality, so much that in a letter, Zawahiri expressed confusion and disbelief towards al-Zarqawi's actions, requesting him to:

"(...) *avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve (...) [do not] throw the masses - scant in knowledge - into the sea before we teach them to swim (...) we can kill the captives by bullet* [instead of beheading]. *That would achieve that which is sought after without exposing ourselves to the questions and answering to doubts. We don't need this.*"[102]

Al-Zarqawi believed otherwise, and kept to his own interpretation of salafism, strongly rooted in a narrow interpretation of *al-wala wa'l-bara* (see paragraph 2.2) and *takfir*, or accusing Muslims of apostasy without a legal basis, implying the legitimization to kill them. The schism between the two organizations has scarred the global jihadist landscape to such an extent that it has come to be known as a doctrinal crisis, in which the extremist branch, originally led by al-Zarqawi and now inherited by IS, has matured from a splinter movement to a full organization, using neo-takfirism as its name brand[103]. This ideological discord is rooted largely in the organization's interior objectives and has far-stretching consequences on the development of the organizations' respective strategies. For now it suffices to say that derived from al-Zarqawi's view, the most conspicuous and and far-reaching diagnostic aspect is that, unlike bin Laden or al-Zawahiri in AQC, Al-Zarqawi did not

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[99] Wagemakers 2011:524
[100] Saltman and Winter 2014:28
[101] Mendelssohn 2016:116-119; Saltman and Winter
[102] al-Zawahiri 2005
[103] Alshech 2014:420; Schmidt 2015:1

consider the Americans to be his primary target; rather the Shiite Muslims were considered to be the ultimately culprit. To illustrate this doctrinal shift, here follows an excerpt of a letter by his hand:

"[The Shia] are the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom (…) Shiism is a religion that has nothing in common with Islam (…) Our combat against the Americans is something easy. The enemy is apparent, his back is exposed, and he does not know the land or the current situation of the mujahidin because his intelligence information is weak. We know for certain that these Crusader forces will disappear tomorrow or the day after (…) This enemy, made up of the Shi'a filled out with Sunni agents, is the real danger that we face, for it is [made up of] our fellow countrymen, who know us inside and out."[104]

Al-Zarqawi soon openly opposed his former mentor al-Maqdisi[105], and gained fame and notoriety for his brutality in mind and deed towards all those who, in his perspective, assisted 'the enemy', regardless of their faith, or whether they are combatants or not[106]. This still happened under the flag of AQI, although the AQC leadership strongly disagreed. Al-Maqdisi, previously nonpartisan, warned against al-Zarqawi's doctrine, and told him that he should be careful not to go overboard by becoming too extreme in his understanding of *takfir*[107]. Al-Maqdisi witnessed how, under al-Zarqawi, ownership of concepts of *jihad* and *takfir* shifted from Islamic scholars (*ulema*) to fighters[108]. Despite this opposition to al-Zarqawi's ideology, philosophy and theology, which is extremist and unfounded in the eyes of bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and al-Maqdisi, it has translated to the current worldview and strategy of IS[109]. IS proclaims a strong emphasis on, or even a central role for *takfir* through which it justifies the killing of virtually anyone who does not fit in IS's description of a Muslim, *or* who is allegedly supportive of the policy, strategy or philosophy of those opposing IS. There is a strong hint of religious circular reasoning here, as IS has promoted itself to be the sole religious authority capable of determining such judgments: nobody may legitimately judge IS's policies as other, non-IS sharia courts are rejected a priori since they do not follow IS' course. Anyone who does not pledge their loyalty (*al-wala*) to IS, is deserving of its enmity. This is illustrated by the variety in targets attacked by IS, ranging from Paris to Medina, whether aimed at state armies or competing jihadist organizations, and at Muslim or non-Muslim civilians alike.

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[104] al-Zarqawi 2004
[105] Alshech 2014: 425-428
[106] Alshech 2014:427
[107] Alshech 2014:424-426; Wagemakers 2011
[108] Wagemakers 2011
[109] Dabiq Issue 4:3-4

IS's narratives can be primarily identified by its overall high degree of direct functionality. In its writings, propaganda, and media releases, there is far less difference found between interior and exterior narratives than has been the case with AQC. As most of IS's narratives seem to be aimed at convincing Western audiences and potential adherents alike, this makes sense. IS actively tries to mobilize people living in Western societies, people who are often born and raised in Western countries and may or may not have an Islamic background; its propaganda therefore is aimed at multiple audiences at once[110], and even its most 'exterior' narratives still contain 'interior' calls for mobilization. This is elaborated upon in this section, which demonstrates the difference in proposed solutions and strategies between both organizations, derived from their stated goals.

2.4 Core prognostication

Identifying both organizations' primary diagnostic frameworks has been the first step into understanding the respective constructions and justifications of their *actions*, which is what we will do now. After this, in *Chapter 3*, we look at how at a more technical level, both organizations adjust their frames: stretching and bridging them in order to attain maximum support from potential adherents. This section covers both organizations' proposed actions to be taken as a response to the identified injustices and against their perpetrators. In line with the structure of its objectives, both organizations advocate two separate strategies, an *interior* strategy aimed at its organizational sustainability, and an *exterior* strategy aimed at the consummation of public goals as proposed in diagnostic frames. There are different methods following each organization's interior diagnostication, as they require fundamentally different approaches to doctrinal understandings, most notably of the concept of *takfir*, which is used to legitimize each organization's political theorem. IS's prognostic methods are fundamentally different from AQC's, regardless of both organizations' roots in salafi-jihadism. Ensuing the structure of this thesis, now follows a chronological analysis of both organizations' prognostication and their dynamically responsive interactions.

AQC's exterior prognostication is, perhaps unsurprisingly built up in terms of secular-rational reasoning, and again rooted in a religious lexicon. The principal core derived from the diagnostic framework is that the West under leadership of the U.S. wages a war of aggression on Islam, and that defending fellow Muslims or the *Umma* is the obligatory *and/or* logical course of action; this is a form of motivational framing as well. AQC's ultimate *interior* goal is found in its theology and is for the 'original Islamic *Umma'* to be restored. Qutbist ideology describes this as a 'restoration' of the

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[110] Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016:4; Saltman and Winter 2014

entirety of humanity, from barbarity or ignorance (*jahiliyyah*)*,* cleansing it from any non-Islamic influences[111]. This is AQC's overall main objective. Other, more practical, questions arise on this premise: where should the enemy be fought, through which means, using which strategies? In other words: *how* does AQC seek to solve the problems it has diagnosed?

AQC has provided us with several different answers to this question. We have read the diagnostic differences between bin Laden's '*Why We Are Fighting You'* and *'Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West'*. What are we to conclude from AQC's *prognostication*, given these apparent contradictions? First, we may conclude that AQC's outset is, in principle, aimed at a worldwide audience and that it has a global worldview, especially compared to many other, earlier Islamist movements[112] - IS of course being the notable exception. Although AQC's interpretation of salafi-jihadism means a categorical rejection of all secular modern societal constitutions and jurisprudence, institutions, and governments[113], it is possible to ascribe certain 'nationalistic' traits to its frames, as it perceives the *Umma* to be a 'nation', with the ultimate difference being that this nation of the Muslim *Umma* is divinely ordained so it cannot be defined or confined by man-made borders and institutions[114], such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement or the United Nations. Nonetheless, AQC's strategies are aimed directly at one nation-state: the U.S., which is understood to be the primary, most important and influential enemy. AQC's ultimate prognostic narrative therefore is to continuously attack the U.S. and Americans, until it fully retreats from, and ceases any activity in Muslim lands (*exterior*), or is defeated, humiliated, and with the rest of the world submits to the new Islamic Caliphate or is killed[115] (*interior*). This stance is explained in the (recently declassified) papers found in 2011 in bin Laden's compound in Abottabad, Pakistan:

"*The enemies of the Ummah, for example, is a malicious tree with a huge trunk of 50 cm around and has many different sizes of branches, including the countries of NATO and other regimes in the regions. We want to cut this tree at the root. The problem is that our strength is limited, so our best way to cut the tree is to concentrate on sawing the trunk of the tree. We need to concentrate on cutting around 30 cm in the bottom of America's leg (trunk). Even though we have the chance to attack the British, we should not waste our effort to do so but concentrate on defeating America, which will lead to defeating the others, God willing.*"[116]

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[111] Alshech 2014:420
[112] Snow and Byrd 2007:125
[113] Ryan 2013: chapter 1 page 11-13
[114] Bunzel 2015:24; bin Laden *in* Ibrahim
[115] Ibrahim 2007:19-20
[116] Bin Laden 2012: 7

AQC's simple visualization of its prognostication by "Operation Hemorrhage" (*Inspire* issue 14)

The logic is that AQC's constant attacks will fatigue, and in the end defeat the Americans, is rooted in the experience that earlier jihadis had with the Soviet Union[117]. AQC appropriately refers to this tactic as 'Operation Hemorrhage'[118]. The reason that these actions take a military or violent form is justified in twofold, religiously and secularly. In the 2002 letter '*Why We Are Fighting You'*, AQC explains its religious and secular right of self-defense, to return that what has been done to you[119], rationally adding the explanation that "*America does not understand the language of manners and*

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[117] al-Zawahiri 2012:1
[118] al-Awlaki 2014
[119] Armajani 2012:13; Saltman and Winter 2014:16; Ryan 2013:6-8

principles, so we are addressing it using the language it understands"[120], which is that of violence. When addressing a Muslim audience in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden justified the use of violence in quite a different context: through stressing the necessity of establishing Islamic rule around the world, enforcing discrimination against infidels, and by advocating *offensive jihad*[121] as a sensible means to bring justice to the world:

"*For it is, in fact, part of our religion to impose our particular beliefs upon others. Whoever doubts this, let him turn to the deeds of the Companions* [of Muhammad] *when they raided the lands of the Christians and Omar imposed upon them the conditions of* dhimmi[tude]. *These conditions involve clothing attire, specific situations, and class distinctions known to* ulema *as the pact of Omar, and they are notoriously famous. (…) we* are *to force people by the power of the sword to [our] particular understandings, customs, and conditions, all in order to induce debasement and humility.*"[122]

This brings us to the specifics of AQC's interior prognostication. There is a visible trend discernible in its narratives and strategies which demonstrate how its ideology has dynamically evolved over time, responding to the rise of IS and the consolidation of that organization's narratives. The core remains the same however: AQC continues to advocate to attack the U.S. until it is defeated[123]; only then would it be possible to 'create an Islamic State' which would 'include all currently and formerly Muslim countries [and] would stretch from Indonesia to Spain and would serve as a launching pad to spread Islam and Islamic rule throughout the rest of the world'[124]. This last, offensive component however seems to have lost emphasis in AQC's latest propaganda publications.

AQC adopted a strategy involving 'franchising out' its brand by delegating authority, forming local groups, and merging with existing jihadi groups, spreading out its presence on a much larger scale in an attempt to conceal its weaknesses and leadership crises[125]. This strategy has not unambiguously led to the organization's desired success, as the franchising has led to instances where AQC gradually lost control and suffered from severe internal (ideological) conflicts; the Central branch is now considered to be significantly weaker than its affiliates[126]. The most significant and far-stretching of these conflicts has been with al-Zarqawi's movement in Iraq. AQC originally considered that movement, founded under the name al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, as a 'lifeline' or a possible

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[120] Bin Laden 2002:3
[121] Ibrahim 2007:19
[122] Bin Laden 2002a:51
[123] Bin Laden 2012a
[124] Mendelsohn 2016:65
[125] Mendelsohn 2016:61-63
[126] Saltman & Winter 2014:22

"nucleus for the caliphate"[127], and as described previously, managed to incorporate it under the name of AQI. The ideological differences between the AQC and AQI soon started to backfire in the face of AQC. In a 2004 letter for example al-Zarqawi proclaimed, against the wish of AQC leadership, a desire to incite sectarian warfare between Sunni and Shia Muslims in an effort to provoke Shiite retaliation in order for AQI to appear as the vanguard of true Islam, defending it against Shiites, Americans, Jews, and any other opponent:

> "*Targeting and hitting them* [Shia] *in [their] religious, political, and military depth will provoke them to show the Sunnis their rabies and bare the teeth of the hidden rancor working in their breasts. If we succeed in dragging them into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death.*"[128]

This prognostication directly opposed AQC's strategies. One year after al-Zarqawi's statement, al-Zawahiri wrote to him in a 2005 letter, in which he listed AQC's prognostic goals to him, as if to simultaneously plead and remind him: "*1) expel the Americans from Iraq; 2) establish an Islamic authority or emirate, and make it develop into a caliphate; 3) extend the jihadi wave to secular countries and 4) clash with Israel*"[129]. Al-Zarqawi however stuck to his own neo-takfirist plans. In Iraq and Syria, al-Zarqawi set out to follow the lessons set out by Naji[130]: deliberately create total chaos, killing government forces, Shias, Kurds and all other non-Sunnis in order to provoke retaliations and create utmost insecurity:

> "*Shaykh Abu Mus'ab [al-Zarqawi] implemented the strategy and required tactics to achieve the goal of Khilafah without hesitation. (…) he strived to create as much chaos as possible (…) The jama'ah[131] would then take advantage of the situation by increasing the chaos to a point leading to the complete collapse of the taghut[132] regime (...) The next step would be to fill the vacuum by managing the state of affairs to the point of developing into a full-fledged state, and continuing expansion (...) This has always been the roadmap towards Khilafah for the mujahidin.*"[133]

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[127] Mendelsohn 2016:65
[128] al-Zarqawi 2004
[129] al-Zawahiri *in* Snow and Byrd 2007:128
[130] Naji 2006:40
[131] *Jama'ah* translates from Arabic as a form of (spiritual) 'gathering' and is used by a variety of Islamist groups when referring to themselves. (Esposito 2014)
[132] "Quranic term for false god or idol. Also applied to tyrannical rulers who arrogate God's absolute power and use it to oppress people." (Esposito 2014)
[133] Dabiq, issue 1:38

This quote from *Dabiq* is an excellent example of al-Zarqawi's and IS's prognostication. Although al-Zarqawi was killed in a 2006 American bombing, his ideas have solidified, and have found institutionalization in IS's ideology: from its conception in late 2006 until the final rupture between AQC and IS in 2014, IS developed its ideology mainly based on al-Zarqawi's heritage[134]. IS actively promotes this ideology to its audiences, and every issue of IS' magazine *Dabiq* starts with al-Zarqawi's quote that "*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 Dabiq*"[135]. These magazines serve as propagandist media and minutely outline IS's interior and exterior narratives in multiple languages. In one magazine, a lengthy personal biography of an alleged former associate of al-Maqdisi outlines the theological wrongdoings and gradual corruption of AQC, based on beliefs and values promoted by al-Zarqawi, such as refusal of condemning or attacking Shias[136]. Indeed, attacking and killing all those judged infidel, apostate or hypocrite in the eye of IS' ad hoc sharia councils, is a central part of the organization's strategy and is aimed at reinforcing IS's narratives of authoritative rigor and invincibility, and to fuel further conflict with other groups[137]. Complementary to this glorification of violence, IS has contributed many positive attributes to the participation of *jihad*[138], through which the organization presents *jihad* as a *goal* on itself, rather than as a *means* to achieve an objective.

Parallel to IS's development, al-Zawahiri and al-Maqdisi also released several documents in which they advocate a *jihad* shaped by scholars rather than fighters. Contrasted with IS's narratives and with AQC early interior publications, there is a noticeable development in relative 'moderation' being advocated by al-Zawahiri and other AQC-affiliated *ulema*. Increasingly, AQC is engaged in attempts to counter IS's increasingly influential and evolving extremism:

"Avoid attacks amongst the Muslims (…) remain the ones defending the Muslims and fighting [our] biggest enemy, the Crusader Zionist alliance - without killing those that the general public consider Muslim.'"[139]

In the publication '*General Guidelines for Jihad*', released in 2013, al-Zawahiri provides an extensive list of warnings aimed at 'securing interests and averting harm', which actively oppose IS' strategies and narratives. Following is an excerpt from these 'guidelines' which demonstrate these contrasts:

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[134] Saltman & Winter 2014:28
[135] Dabiq issue 1 to 15
[136] Dabiq issue 6:40-55
[137] Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016:5
[138] ibid.
[139] Bin Laden 2012a

"Avoid fighting or targeting those who have not raised arms against us (…) refrain from harming Muslims by explosions, killing, kidnapping or destroying their wealth or property (…) observe respect of Islamic scholars (…) Our differences with other Islamic groups should not distract us from confronting the enemies of Islam (…). [P]rovide help and support to the victims of oppression, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, against those who oppress them. Support and encourage everyone who helps them, even if he is a non-Muslim."[140]

These frames raise immediate questions: what happened to the calls for offensive *jihad*, for the humiliation and debasement of all non-Muslims? What are the strategic processes that have led the AQC leadership to decide that it would be better to raise a more moderate voice? These matters are discussed in *Chapter 3*.

2.5 Conclusion

AQC, in its exterior narratives, sees the U.S. as its first and foremost enemy, as the cause of all deviation of Islam. The U.S. and its allies are accused of waging an unholy war of aggression against Islam. All citizens of democratic societies whose governments support this war are deemed legitimate targets for retaliation, in defensive terms. As the U.S. is considered to be the leader of this 'Crusader' alliance, AQC advocates the importance for the U.S. to be defeated, as only then it is possible for the Muslims in the world to start building a united and utopian Islamic State. In AQC's early interior narratives, a much more religiously-fueled, apocalyptic narrative is found. This narrative is rooted in a strong, divinely-ordained binary conception of good and evil, by which people are identified as either believers or infidels, who may either live or be killed. This worldview is supported and reinforced by Quranic verses and hadiths, and is applied to worldly affairs through the use of analogies. AQC made clear that its theology is ultimately irreconcilable with any other dogma, such as the principles of Western society, and that the struggle between Islam and the non-believers must involve the forced subjugation of all non-believers under the doctrine of sharia law and Islamic government. However, since the American invasions in Afghanistan, AQC expanded its presence to other regions, and the ideological weight of its central branch has decreased, benefitting its affiliates, who enjoy large degrees of autonomy and may uphold agendas and ideologies different, or more radical, than AQC's. AQI, later IS, was one of those affiliates, and interpreted AQC's frames through a neo-takfirist extremist perspective. Responding to this increasingly influential extremist narrative, AQC started calling for a return to scholarly-led interpretations of defensive *jihad*, which has become symptomatic of the ideological battle between neo-takfirism and

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[140] al-Zawahiri 2013

salafi-jihadism[141] re-focusing on targeting the U.S. and its forces, and the cessation of violence against non-Muslims and Shias. These calls for moderation are extended to its various propaganda channels, which continuously emphasize injustices committed by the U.S., and interpret *jihad* as a defensive fight against Americans only.

IS's narratives are not as rigidly divided over different audiences as AQC's used to be, and are more unitary and closely interrelated. IS employs rather singular narratives which are aimed at potential adherents, non-believers, and victims alike, who may all be part of a same audience, although its diagnostic frames may contain too many theological influences to be properly understood by non-believers. IS greatly completes its discourse by complementing to its narratives by actively disseminating performances and symbolic images, such as attacks and publicized executions and destructions. These aim to demonstrate the organization's theological justness, its physical presence, and its invincibility all at once, aimed at various audiences at the same time. The organization stresses the importance of cleansing the Muslim lands of all un-Islamic behavior through command of the concept of *takfir*, which is most notably aimed against Shia Muslims and government officials. In its narratives, interior as well as exterior, IS posits itself as the sole legitimate political as well as religious authority, a stance much more ambitious and confident than AQC's. Through a prognostic strategy which requires ubiquitous extreme violence, IS attempts to create nullifying chaos, which follows Abu Bakr Naji's prognosis: to expect that foreign forces will be deterred, so that the organization may seize the opportunity to fill the consecutive power vacuum with its reinstallation of the Caliphate. Motivational frames are interwoven with the various diagnostic and prognostic frames, for example through the message that it is every Muslim's obligation to defend its fellow Muslims, or by the assertion that no participation equals opposition to the organization, meaning that you might end up as a defenseless target yourself.

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[141] Alshech 2014:435-437

CHAPTER 3: Frame alignment processes

This chapter builds forth on the results of last chapter's analysis of AQC's and IS's mostly exterior narratives and strategies and gives us insights into the interior processes of frame construction. Based on these results I have extracted four main themes which are leading for this chapter's analysis: (1) Blame and causality; (2) *Jihad*; (3) Organizational and sectarian (dis)unity; and (4) Narratives for the enemy.

This chapter provides a minute examination of these thematic frames through the lens of four frame alignment processes, which enables us to understand the functions of these narratives and its effects on frame resonance and credibility. These frame alignment processes are frame *amplification*, *bridging*, *extension*, and *transformation*; for an introductory theoretical explanation of frame alignment processes, please refer to *Chapter 1*. Note that despite the apparent isolation of each of these processes, there is no predetermined or structured order in which they take place. Instead, all of these interior processes mutually and dynamically influence one another in a continuous dialectic process. Ultimately, each of the frames propagated in the mentioned thematics is derived from the organizations' interior strategies: 'ideally', these strategies are expressed in the exterior frames *through* frame alignment processes. The interiority of these processes imply that processes of frame alignment are inherently kept out of view from the intended audiences, and must be seen as an independent, manipulable variable leading to the dependent variable of interior and exterior frames which, if successful, carry the desired strategic effects when incorporated in the organizations' exterior propaganda narratives. We are basically peeling the layers off the narratives themselves, in order to determine in what ways the organizations have used frame alignment processes in order for these exterior frames and narratives to reflect the organizations' interior needs *and* maximize resonance among the intended audiences.

Categorized by the four mentioned thematics, I provide an overview of the independent components and subsequent development of all core narratives promoted by each respective organization. By analyzing each frame's function (usually the intended response by its audience), we co-determine how techniques of frame alignment processes have been applied, opening up the road to our final comparative analysis of the organizations' respective successes in frame resonance and organizational sustenance.

TABLE 2: OVERVIEW AL-QAEDA CORE FRAMING TASKS AND FRAME ALIGNMENT PROCESSES

Theme	Core Framing Tasks			Frame Alignment Processes			
	Diagnostic	*Prognostic*	*Motivational*	*Frame Amplification*	*Frame Bridging*	*Frame Extension*	*Frame Transformation*
1. Blame and causality	*Interior:* Pre-IS: al-wala wa'l-bara and Offensive *jihad* against non-believers with America as main target; Post-IS: Defensive *Jihad*, restricted focus on U.S. *Exterior:* see Post-IS	*Jihad* against Americans	*Interior:* Religious obligation to participate in *Jihad* *Exterior:* Intellectual right to defend against oppression (also included in AQC's later interior narratives)	*Value*: Belonging to the *Umma*; *Belief*: When *jihad* is waged with focus against Americans, victory ensues	High profile attacks to create awareness among unmobilized potential constituents (fellow *jihadist* organizations; anti-Americans, Muslims, etc)	Extending beliefs to Americans to justify Islamic hate and violence against Americans; Extending moderate beliefs to media to amplify distance between AQC/IS	No transformation per se, however, in later narratives, a re-emphasis on the necessity of attacking exclusively *American* targets
Effect/function:	*Pre-IS: theological justification for violence; Post-IS: finding frame resonance among anti-IS sentiment pools*	*Mobilization*	*Interior: maximizing constituents for mobilization; Exterior: justifying attacks to foreign audiences*	*Maximizing number of constituents/ mobilization*	*Maximizing reach to potential constituents; increasing frame resonance*	*Maximizing reach to potential constituents; increasing frame resonance*	*Finding frame resonance among anti-IS sentiment pools*
2. *Jihad*	[Pre-IS: *jihad* as prognostication] Post-IS*: Jihad* lost its focus and efficacy	Pre-IS: Offensive *jihad* to defeat U.S. and create global Caliphate. Post-IS: Defensive *jihad* to restore grievances; focus on American targets exclusively	Offensive and/or Defensive *jihad* are religious obligations for all Muslims. Defeating America is a necessity for the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate.	*Value*: Belonging to the *Umma*; *Beliefs:* When *jihad* is waged with focus against Americans, victory ensues	Pre-IS: to potentially all Muslims, particularly jihadis; Post-IS: to all Muslims deterred by IS's extremism	Post-IS: extending frames to all anti-IS jihadist organizations	Transformed from aggressively anti-non-believer Offensive *Jihad*, to an interpretation based on Defensive *jihad* which is inclusive for all those oppressed, including non-Muslims

Effect/function:	Distinguishing from IS	Regaining religious authority	Mobilization	Mobilization	Maximizing reach to potential constituents; increasing frame resonance	Maximizing frame resonance among anti-IS sentiment pools	Regaining religious authority and maximizing frame resonance among anti-IS sentiment pools
3. Organizational and sectarian (dis)unity	Pre-IS: AQC is the vanguard of Islam; other jihadist groups are welcome to join the fight Post-IS: Worldwide *jihad* suffers from al-Zarqawi's extremist interpretations	Active franchising of other jihadist organizations. Calling for internal unity and focused enmity against the U.S.	AQC provides ulemic *jihad* and has a consistent strategy	*Value*: Belonging to a unified *Umma*; *Belief*: *Jihad* must refrain from attacking others than Americans; AQC's jihadi network is omnipresent	Reaching out to all other jihadist groups to receive bay'a and maintain influence	Reaching to to IS-affiliated groups, urging them to return	n/a
Effect/function:	*Securing image of AQC responsibly bearing religious authority*	*Expanding and consolidating area of organizational influence and air of omnipresence*	*Reassuring organizational religious authority and consistency*	*Mobilization*	*Maximizing number of constituents/ mobilization*	n/a	n/a
4. Exterior narratives	The U.S. is waging a war of aggression against Muslims worldwide, legitimized through democracy; The U.S. is deaf for calls to reason; Muslims have an intellectual right to return oppression and attacks	Muslims must attack the Americans worldwide in order for Americans to leave the Muslim lands	All Muslims are attacked and must therefore join the fight against the Americans	*Value*: all Muslims are part of the same nation; *Beliefs*: Americans wage a war of aggression against Muslims, and they will stop doing so when Muslims strike back	To jihadis in the U.S. and other Anglophone countries; to anti-American sentiment groups; to Western audiences in general	Into American and Western narratives, both mainstream and activist, revealing American aggression and hypocrisy	n/a
Effect/ function:	*Justifying violence against American citizens*	*Mobilization; decreasing domestic support for American gov't*	*Mobilization*	*Mobilization*	*Maximizing reach to potential constituents; increasing frame resonance*	*Decreasing domestic support for American government*	n/a

46

TABLE 3: OVERVIEW ISLAMIC STATE CORE FRAMING TASKS AND FRAME ALIGNMENT PROCESSES

Theme	Core Framing Tasks			Frame Alignment Processes			
	Diagnostic	*Prognostic*	*Motivational*	*Frame Amplification*	*Frame Bridging*	*Frame Extension*	*Frame Transformation*
1. Blame and causality	All non-believers are enemies; also all those who do not pledge allegiance to IS; Shiites are the largest threat	Offensive *Jihad* against all enemies; inciting sectarian tensions; to expel ruling regimes and foreign forces; to discredit jihadist organizations; high profile attacks	Guaranteed victory against enemies; participation in *jihad* is endowed with adventure, camaraderie, and belonging	*Value*: Participation in *Jihad* as highest virtue; *Beliefs:* IS' Caliphate will successfully defeat and humiliate Shiites and all other enemies in its victorious fight leading to restoration of the divine Caliphate	To all unmobilized potential jihadis; to those agreeing with the organization's diagnostication/ perceived to be duped by Shi'ites	To perceived victims of Shiites; to all audiences considered 'enemies' for fear or submission	Transformed AQC's 'classic' diagnostic frames to frames with direct salience and resonance to the intended audiences
Effect/function:	*Maximize frame resonance in correspondence with empirical realities*	*Consolidating organizational power, creating a usurpable power vacuum; mobilization*	*Mobilization*	*Consolidating theological and organizational supreme authority; mobilization*	*Maximizing reach to potential constituents; increasing frame resonance*	*See prognostication: inciting sectarian tensions, intimidating/ terrorizing enemies; repelling foreign forces*	*Maximizing frame resonance; mobilization*
2. *Jihad*	IS is the only legitimate authority leading global *jihad*	To discredit other jihadist organizations; reinforce own interpretation of *jihad*	Endowing *jihad* with positive attributions; associating IS's *jihad* with a winner's message and guaranteed victory	*Value*: Participation in *Jihad* as highest virtue; *Beliefs*: *Jihad* is the ultimate road to adventure, camaraderie and belonging and is divinely ordained	To Muslims who feel that the current state of the *Umma* is deteriorated and is disgruntled, and does not oppose violent *jihad*	To people seeking the mentioned amplified beliefs of belonging adventure without being jihadis at first; also to enemy audiences for fear or submission	Transformed AQC's frames of *jihad* to frames with a much *broader* resonance, by endowing them with additional attributions
Effect/function:	*Consolidating theological and organizational supreme authority; mobilization*	*Consolidating theological and organizational supreme authority; mobilization*	*Maximizing number of constituents/ mobilization*	*Maximizing number of constituents/ mobilization*	*Maximizing number of constituents/ mobilization*	*Maximizing number of constituents/ mobilization; creating intergroup tension*	*Maximizing number of constituents/ mobilization*

3. Organizational and sectarian (dis)unity	All non-loyal jihadist and Islamist groups are illegitimate; Sunnites must pre-emptively kill Shiites; a priori hostility towards all other groups	To incite sectarian warfare against Shias; discredit competitive organizations and recruit their members	If prognostication is successful: demonstrate validity of core diagnostication	*Value*: Participation in *jihad against other groups* as highest virtue; *Beliefs:* all other organizations are inefficient, illegitimate or archaic; sectarian warfare is part of a divine plan to restore the Caliphate	To jihadis from other jihadi / Islamist organizations	To rival organizations and hostile groups for fear or submission	Transformed AQC's frame of jihadi unity to one centralizing IS as sole legitimate political and theological authority
Effect/function:	*Maximize frame resonance in correspondence with empirical realities: maximizing number of constituents/ mobilization*	*Consolidating organizational power, creating a usurpable power vacuum; mobilization; expansion*	*Consolidating organizational power and political/theological authority; mobilization*	*Legitimizing violence; asserting theological authority*	*Mobilization; expansion*	*Mobilization; expansion*	*Consolidating organizational power and political/theological authority; mobilization*
4. Exterior narratives	IS embodies and represents Muslims worldwide, who have right to restoration of their divine Caliphate, which Crusader forces deny them	To consolidate the Caliphate and subsequently attack non-Muslim people globally, until total submission to Islam through IS.	All Muslims in Western societies are encouraged to attack Westerners to receive divine glory	*Value:* Islam and *jihad* are the highest virtues; *Beliefs*: There is an inherent hostility between Muslims and non-Muslims which needs to be fought	Attempts to reach sympathizers living in Western audiences	To hostile audiences for fear, intimidation and/or submission	Transformed AQC's 'later' theoretical frame of purely Defensive *Jihad* to one which actively aided IS's resonance
Effect/function:	*Legitimizing violence; asserting theological and political authority*	*Consolidating organizational power; expanding and consolidating area of organizational influence*	*Expanding and consolidating area of organizational influence and air of omnipresence*	*Consolidating organizational power; expanding and consolidating area of organizational influence*	*Mobilization*	*Consolidating organizational power; expanding and consolidating area of organizational influence*	*Consolidating organizational power; expanding and consolidating area of organizational influence; mobilization*

Refer to *Table 2* and *Table 3* for a comprehensive oversight of four core themes in AQC's and IS's narratives, which are extracted from *Chapter 2*, as well as their respective frame alignment processes. The thematics in this table guide us through this chapter as we analyze both organizations' implementations of frame alignment processes and their strategic functions.

3.1. Blame and causality

Chapter 2 outlined both organizations' diagnostication when it comes to causing blame: AQC consistently focuses on American presence, while IS perceives all non-Islamic presence, and Shiites in particular, as the most important threat. There are some significant strategic effects resulting from this different identification of the enemy. The first and most obvious effect adheres to both organizations' exterior prognostication: AQC's prognostication advocates to attack exclusively American targets. Any action or attack against other targets must therefore be accounted for in additional publications in order not to lose frame consistency. IS has not imposed this restrictive measure on itself and allows attacks on anything non-Islamic, whether they be tombs or ancient architecture (regarded as *shirk*, or idolatry), non-Sunni Muslims, Westerners, or anyone or anything in service of creating intimidation or 'chaos'[142] leading to a power vacuum. The second, and organizationally more important effect of this different identification has to do with motivational frames and their alignment with mobilizationable pools.

Since its conception, AQC has consistently *amplified the belief* that the U.S. are, and remain, Islam's ultimate enemy and the foremost target to be fought. By doing so, AQC's mobilizationable pool is limited to those who are susceptible to this belief. IS however is able to tap from sentiment pools which advocate hostility and enmity towards many other groups, even if IS co-incites these hostilities on the go. By doing so, IS has actively broadened its pool of potential adherents and thereby the quantitative likelihood for mobilization.

Foundational to AQC's core narratives are several instances of frame alignment processes. Following the data in *Table 2* and *Table 3*, we start with *frame amplification*, which AQC applied in several dimensions. First, AQC idealizes one major value: the value of being part of the Islamic *Umma*, through which it seeks to enlarge its pool of adherents, theoretically encompassing every Muslim. Secondly, it amplifies five beliefs among its (potential) constituents: (1) the seriousness of an existing and growing threat against this *Umma*; (2) the identification of this threat as American; (3) antagonistic and stereotypic beliefs about Americans as hypocritical and untrustworthy; (4) the efficacy of attacking American targets as done against the Soviet Union; and (5) the religious

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[142] See paragraph 2.4; Dabiq issue 1:38; Naji 2006

obligation of 'standing up' against oppression, for Muslims *and* for non-Muslims[143], as stipulated by the writings on defensive *jihad*. Through its propaganda channels and attacks against American targets, AQC attempts to *bridge* its frames to all unmobilized potential jihadis. These frames are also aligned to the American audience itself through the process of frame *extension*. Narratives are extended to media and news agencies, attempting to amplify the ideological distance between AQC and IS.

This last paragraph only focused on AQC's exterior narratives. This is because of AQC's last frame alignment process: its frame *transformation.* When analyzing the emphasis of AQC's contemporary narratives, it become clear that its diagnostic and prognostic frames have shifted since the success of al-Zarqawi's movements, especially since IS's successes. Whereas AQC advocated in its earlier narratives that 'indiscriminate' violence against *all* non-Muslims is allowed if this leads to the creation of an Islamic Caliphate in its earlier interior narratives[144], it appears that in recent years, and especially after the rise of al-Zarqawi's movement, these narratives have ceased and made place for a return to a much more moderate approach, in which once again the Americans are portrayed as the only 'real' cause for the worldwide deviation away from Islam, as well as the only legitimate goal. These post-IS interior frames are largely consistent with AQC's continuous exterior frames. Its apparent frame transformation is likely in an attempt of AQC to regain support and sympathy from Muslims who are deterred by IS's cruelties through the amplification of disassociation between AQC and IS. AQC's 'status' as a reasonable voice in the jihadist landscape is one that is also being extended to opponents of IS.

IS' identification of enemies, when analyzed through this lens, looks somewhat different. Rather than a 'mere' idealization of the value of being Muslim, it seems to instead force that 'value' down the throat of non-believers through extreme violence. This *value* amplification is supported by *belief* amplifications as well. IS also emphasizes the (1) threat of 'Crusader forces' against Islam, but adds that Shiites are much more dangerous and cunning than Americans, as the Shiites live among, and know 'us'[145]. While IS also (2) places the locus of blame at worldly regimes and infidels, it lacks AQC's principal *theoretical* rejection[146] of Western state institutions as 'sinful' or apostate: it rather emphasizes that borders and institutions will no longer matter when the Islamic Caliphate extends itself to secular, Crusader lands. IS also (3) creates and promotes beliefs of antagonism, although it changes the direction here: rather than placing Muslims in an underdog position from which it has

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[143] al-Zawahiri 2013:6
[144] See paragraph 2.3.1
[145] See paragraph 2.3.2
[146] Note here the salafi-jihadi criticism on neo-Takfirism, as referred to in footnote 141

no other choice but to fight, it glorifies the invincibility of the Muslims' new Caliphate[147]. IS transforms AQC's frames into motivational frames and warns its opponents for continuing attacks, offensive rather than defensive[148]. These offensive attacks are endowed with many positive qualities, adding (4) motivational characteristics to the frames. IS, too, (5) outlines the necessity to defend Islam, although IS frames this necessity as an obligation in expanding the influence of the Caliphate, rather than as an obligation to help defend fellow oppressed people. It very actively *bridges* these frames to all unmobilized potential constituents by attempting to physically expand the Caliphate, thereby incorporating those under its rule. By staging attacks and provoking (excessive) retaliations, it reinforces its narrative that all other parties in the world must be fought. It *extends* its frames effectively through its public performances, such as its recorded beheadings and mass executions, as well as by destroying ancient and symbolic architecture which makes the world's eyes focus on IS once again. Concerning its own mobilization tactics, IS has taken advantage of the classic frames of Islam versus the West laid out by AQC, which IS has *transformed* to frames which found direct salience among its intended adherents, such as attacks suffered by certain groups, even if those were provoked by IS itself.

The most important differences in the outcome between the two organizations' frame alignment processes in *blame and causality* are determined by the active alignment that IS has sought with its intended audience. IS' frames are built to gain maximum resonance, while AQC's frames sometimes appear to be a remnant of the old days, which it nevertheless attempts to *extend* to various audiences. As will be covered in *Chapter 4*, al-Zarqawi's identification of Shiites as main 'evil', rather than the Americans, has played a large role in the consolidation of its organization. For now, it suffices to know that al-Zarqawi, and later IS, did not attempt to extend its frames to its audience with the idea of *convincing* them, but rather aligned its frames to what its audiences *wanted to hear*. Given these fundamental differences in diagnostication, frame alignment processes have also led both organizations to fundamentally different interpretations of their otherwise according answer of *jihad*, covered next.

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[147] See Dabiq issue 13:30 "*The weakness of the Muslims militarily in comparison with their enemies can, therefore, never be an excuse not to wage jihād, because {Allah is predominant over His affair} [Yūsuf: 21] and as such will support His slaves and grant them victory even over an enemy that is exponentially more powerful than they are. The odds mean nothing, for {Indeed, the plot of Shaytān has ever been weak} [An-Nisā': 76], and {How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allah} [Al-Baqarah: 249]. So how much more guarantee do the believers need from Allah in order to understand that victory has been decreed for them and all they need to do is to march forth and seek it!*"
[148] Gartenstein-Ross 2016:5-6; 15

3.2 *Jihad*

Both organizations prognosticate the necessity of fighting the enemy in *jihad* to successfully deter the enemy, and ultimately re-create the Islamic Caliphate. In its narratives, both organizations tap from theological resources justifying hostility to non-believers, as well as from political narratives of injustice. Some major differences occur in their respective interpretations of *jihad*. The first of these is *jihad* as either a *defensive* or an *offensive* process[149]. The second major difference lies in the overall qualities and properties attributed to, or *beliefs linked with jihad*, rooted in the framing agent's interior strategic needs. Differences between the organizations, aside from the discussed matter of identification of the enemy, often boil down to a competition for perceived religious and political validity and credibility as messenger of these respective interpretations of *jihad*.

Chronologically, AQC started the process of framing *jihad* in a social movement context, by invoking the teachings of *al-wala wa'-bara*, legitimizing religious hostility, humiliation and even slavery against all non-believers: it amplified *beliefs* that non-believers, more particularly Americans and Jews, would have only one goal: to destroy Islam. AQC further amplified *values* of the importance of behaving according to the rules of Islam, accompanied with *beliefs* that Muslims are religiously obligated to participate in Offensive *Jihad* and that no form of concession or dialogue was allowed to be held with non-believers, as religion already provided Muslims with the absolute truth. At the same time, AQC also published documents in Arabic newspapers, which explained and justified the attacks against Americans as *defensive jihad.* By applying this doublespeak, AQC attempted to maximize the breadth of its resonance by *extending* its frames to a majority of non-jihadi Muslims, who would support AQC's *defensive* actions against a confirmed aggressor. Simultaneously, AQC's more aggressive and offensive narratives would be *bridged* to religious jihadist hardliners, who considered violence as an inherent component of the process of *jihad*, and whose support was unmissable for the actual execution of the organization's plans. Both processes aimed at maximizing mobilization, and these processes led to the construction of AQC's characteristic 'interior' and 'exterior' diagnostic and prognostic narratives.

The currently most influential and recent frame alignment process I have identified in AQC's conceptualization of *jihad* is its *transformation*. AQC does no longer publicly define *jihad* as inherently offensive and aimed against all non-believers; it has now transformed its interpretation to an almost exclusively reading of *jihad* as *defensive*, aimed at the American oppressor, and including the need to defend *all* oppressed people, including non-Muslims. This may be considered as a form

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[149] Armajani 2012:13; Saltman and Winter 2014:16; Ryan 2013:6-8; Quran 2:190 "*Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like transgressors",* Quran 22:39-40 " *Permission [to fight] has been given to those are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory"*

of frame *extension* to advocates of the rights of the oppressed. AQC no longer actively propagates its old *al-wala wa'l-bara* frames, and attempts to be a voice of reason in the jihadi landscape, for example by condemning some of IS's attacks (against Muslims). AQC's original advocacy for offensive *Jihad* has decreased or disappeared from the public stage altogether, in exchange for a retreat to its 'secular' narrative. After bin Laden's death, AQC's message has been one which appears to have borrowed increasingly from liberal narratives of equality and freedom: there is a stark contrast between the 2002 '*Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West*', which dismissed any compromise to Islam as a form of slavery to West, and 2013 '*General Guidelines for Jihad*', which directly contradicts these statements.

Despite this apparent frame transformation in the interior sphere, this has not led to ground shifting changes in its exterior narratives. AQC's value amplifications remain unchanged: the value for all Muslims to belong to the *Umma* and live according to the teachings of the *salaf*. AQC still repeats the belief that *jihad* is a concept which should be interpreted and shaped by (its own) *ulema* rather than by fighters, as it has done in congruence with al-Maqdisi since the early 1990s. However, somewhat paradoxically in its recent narratives, AQC rarely delves into theological details (unlike IS), which it nonetheless 'mentions' are important. Rather, it keeps on emphasizing that *jihad* should focus on the injustices suffered by the hand of the U.S. These basic beliefs of aiming efforts against Americans also remained relatively unchanged. However, where AQC used to bridge its frames of *necessitating jihad* to all Muslims who (potentially) shared common diagnostic frames with the organization, now its bridged narrative seem to have largely lost these motivational elements, and instead calls its audiences to moderate and a re-focus on *jihad* through a 'scholarly approach'. Its *extended* narratives are in line with this trend, as they appear to primarily stress the disassociation between AQC and IS, and thereby create the impression that AQC wishes first and foremost to not be confused with IS. AQC's efforts put into active mobilization of its audiences are only marginal when compared to IS. Whereas for AQC *jihad* is a 'means' to achieve an ultimate goal, to IS *jihad* is a concept which, through properly framing, is an effective propaganda tool in itself, maximizing its number of constituents.

IS has tapped from the same ideological frames as AQC, but openly disagreed with notions of defensive *jihad*, and has *transformed* those to religious rights to attack, inspired and fueled by Abu Bakr Naji's notion of the strategic necessity of creating chaos and destruction; the ashes hereof would provide the soil from which a new Islamic Caliphate would arise. By doing so, IS has effectively taken over intellectual and theological ownership of *jihad* from AQC. AQC framed *jihad* as no more than a necessary step towards restoration of the *Umma*. IS *transformed jihad* as a being a divine

purpose in itself[150], endowed with many other positive qualities and attributions such as camaraderie and brotherhood - not necessarily to the theological essence of *jihad* per se, of which AQC continuously stresses the importance. As IS has already reinstated the Caliphate, the primary *value amplified* by IS is participation in *jihad* as the highest attainable ideal. The *value* of *jihad* is endowed with many *beliefs*: it provides an opportunity to find a sense of belonging with fellow believers, it brings adventure, camaraderie, and on top of that, it is also the surest way of getting into paradise. These frames are *bridged* to all jihadis worldwide through modern media campaigns, and it adds an extra nudge to those who are currently ranked in organizations which are actively discredited by IS. Furthermore, IS *extends* these frames to all other possible audiences in attempts to recruit individuals among them. The factors determining vulnerability or receptivity to these frames would however require a (more interpretive) study by itself.

Taken together, IS reinvigorated the allure of AQC's decades-old classic message of *jihad* against America, by having actively transforming its core frame. For over a decade, AQC has been the public flag carrier of the message of jihadism, but as covered in *Chapter 1*, it has often spoken with two tongues. While its objective diagnostication *about jihad* has remained the same over the years, the beliefs and properties attributed to the concept have found moderation over the years, in sharp contrast to IS, which has elevated the concept to such an extent that it has become a recruitment tool by itself. Since the rise and consolidation of IS, AQC stresses continuously and repeatedly that *jihad* (under IS) has lost its theological and practical focus, and that ownership of the concept needs to be returned to the hands of (its own) *ulema*, rather than to IS fighters who, as AQC rightly assesses, primarily use the concept to gain resonance and achieve organizational goals. This may have affected AQC's mobilization negatively as it may have (further) estranged jihadis perceptive to IS's extremist narratives and actions. IS's attraction is reinforced by its 'winner's message' and physical consolidation and alleged expansion. IS's frames are a combination of ubiquitously hostile narratives, prognosticated with a *jihad* endowed with characteristics of youthfulness, belonging and adventure, and combined with religiously justified revenge and wrath and promises of assurances of victory. This frame transformation not only actively aligned IS's organizational activities with the interests and aspirations of a large group of potential constituents, but has considerably *expanded* this the boundaries of this group of constituents.

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[150] Following the neo-takfirist tradition: see Alshech 2014

3.3 Organizational and sectarian (dis)unity

Theoretically and conceptually, AQC attempts to incorporate as many jihadi groups as possible through franchising is a practical way of translating *frame bridging* to recruitment policy. By doing so AQC simultaneously amplified a *belief* that it is omnipresent and powerful. Nevertheless, an unforeseen consequence of this policy has been the overshadowing of the organization by its former godchild. AQC has not transformed its frames; it rather keeps on amplifying its decade-old values of a united *Umma* which should stage concerted attacks at the U.S. In its later documents, AQC repeated the belief that *jihad* should only be used against Americans, and may not target or attack other jihadis or Muslims. It *bridges* these narratives to jihadis who do not recognize themselves in IS's extremist neotakfirism in an attempt to have these organizations ascribed under the AQC franchise. To a lesser extent, though not wholly absent, AQC also *extends* these frames to its former members and sympathizers who now fight under the flag of IS. Although it seems unlikely that any of these members would actually return to AQC, the organization does repeatedly remind its intended audiences of the belief that its prognostication demands the absence of internal struggle in the Muslim nation.

IS' look on organizational (dis)unity is easily understood when acknowledging that it considers itself to be the only legitimate religious and political authority, and that therefore any organization disagreeing with it is declared *takfir* and hostile. It has fully transformed AQC's frame on unity and re-interpreted this as unity *only* under its own flag, using an extremely narrow interpretation of the same theological narratives of *al wala wa'l-bara* that fueled AQC in its earlier years. After all, for IS this once again meant an opportunity to elevate the *value* of (its 'recruitment tool' of) participation in *jihad*, as *jihad* is framed as a fight against all those who are not allied to IS. IS legitimizes and justifies its all-round hostility by *amplifying beliefs* that all other jihadist or Islamist organizations are fighting under false pretenses while using the name of Islam; this is an act of apostasy and harms rather than advances the Caliphate. IS straight-forwardly dismisses AQC's messages and further *transforms* and *amplifies* stereotypical beliefs about AQC as archaic, old-fashioned, and out of touch from the realities on the ground. IS simultaneously *bridges* and *extends* these frames to jihadis who are members of other jihadi organizations, attempting to recruit them through either making them known with IS' narrative, and alternatively through threats and fear.

Both organizations have fundamentally different approaches to matters related to other jihadist and Islamist organizations, ranging from cooperation to hostility. IS manipulates its frames to maximize their motivational functionality, and has primarily been engaged in processes which aim to further *consolidate and expand* the alignment between its organisation frames and its constituents.

These narratives and the resulting strategies are rooted in the organization's violent past and its embrace of neo-takfirism, and don a reactionary cloak if compared to AQC's frames, whose vision on cooperation is rooted in an ideal of a united jihadi movement focusing its bundled powers against the U.S. AQC invites jihadi organizations to join its cause, while IS is more likely to threaten the concerned organizations with annihilation if they do not pledge allegiance.

This outlook has created more than just ideological differences with other organizations: it has reinforced much of the present power vacuum in Syria and actively sustains inter-organizational conflicts. IS may deliberately sustain such ubiquitous hostility for reasons related to its interior strategies. First there is the dissemination of narratives aimed at discrediting its jihadist adversaries, which are paired with persuasive narratives aimed to recruit *from* these competitive and discredited organizations, so that the organization can mobilize 'their rank-and-file militants and mid-level commanders to abandon their sinking ship and join IS'[151]. Secondly, inter-organizational hostility raises the belief that IS's Caliphate is indeed the only one religious authority on Earth as it refuses to share any of its power with inferior or untrue organizations. This is contrary to AQC, which has traditionally taken a far humbler approach towards other organizations and has stressed on multiple occasions that it wishes to avoid conflict within the jihadi community. Exemplary of this is AQC's stance towards IS: rather than declaring hostility towards IS, AQC published quasi-interior statements containing pleas and warnings not to deviate from what is supposed to be their common goal. In its more radical publications on IS, AQC merely 'took distance' from the organization; never has it declared hostilities[152]. This stance may have been chosen deliberately as recruitment strategy, *amplifying* the belief that AQC is a more mature and scholarly-led organization, unlike the aggressive and contentious politics practiced by IS.

3.4 Narratives for enemies

The last core framing exercise occupying IS and AQC concerns their messages for enemies, that is to say the narratives they construct to disseminate to Western audiences. These narratives do not contain any 'exclusive' or strategic information unknown to jihadis themselves as they are not meant to be read *exclusively* by Western audiences, as both organizations, and IS in particular, have demonstrated to be well aware of the potentiality of constituents dwelling among Westerners who may join the respective organization if they are convinced by its respective narratives, for example by acting as 'lone wolfs'. Indeed, these narratives may serve to justify actions, intimidate or warn opponents, and explain motivations, but no less also serve to recruit, or to create disharmony among people in secular countries themselves. The common denominator in these narratives is that

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[151] Gartenstein-Ross et al 2016:20

[152] McCants *in* Stuster 2014

the information is usually framed in such a way that the organizations' frames tend to align with sentiments and realities relatable to secular Westerners, whether they be sympathy or fear. Both organizations enhance and infuse their narratives with arguments and language taken from other movements critiquing Western imperialism, such as ideas and arguments rooted in revolutionary, separatist-, far-left, far-right, or conspiracy literature. Both IS and AQC have been found 'lending' from these existing bodies of modernist political, intellectual, and strategic literature. These influences serve two functions: there is a first interior goal to enhance the organization's members knowledge on armed struggle; the second is to apply a form of frame *extension* to hostile audiences. This results in the fusion of jihadi literature with social-revolutionary and military theorists such as Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara, but also Clausewitz and even American military articles on asymmetrical warfare[153]. Extending the the organizations' frames aligns them to like-minded anti-American non-believers and effectively increases the breadth of the organization's exterior narrative resonance and depth of its interior narrative resonance. These frame extensions comprise a whole different body of arguments and literature which has even been dubbed the '*jihadi strategic studies*'-genre[154].

In general, AQC uses its narratives to its enemies primarily to extend its narratives in an effort to explain its actions and to 'warn' Westerners, in an urge for governments to change their policies. IS on the other hand is preoccupied by extending its narratives through the promotion of fear and intimidation. For both organizations, lengthy religious excerpts are usually replaced with emotional arguments legitimizing the organizations' actions based on injustices done or commissioned by Western governments, of which is assumed that Western audiences are insufficiently aware. AQC's goal appears to be creating such awareness by *bridging* its 'secular' narratives to Western non-believers, and implies that if Western governments would change its policies, AQC would stop attacking Americans. IS usually *extends* divinely determined primordial differences and attempts to reinforce and reify those, such as the 'unbridgeable' cultural and civilizational gap between Westerners and Muslims[155]. If such tensions are successfully reified, this would ultimately benefit the organization's motivational frames.

Let us take a closer look at the organizational differences in frame extension. Osama bin Laden mentioned in his letter to America, '*Why we are fighting you*', that it is the Muslims' intellect which commands them to return (sic) aggression, rhetorically asking "*is it in any way rational to expect that after America has attacked us for more than half a century, that we will then leave her to*

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[153] Ryan 2013:6; Papaj 2008; Lia and Hegghammer 2004
[154] Lia and Hegghammer 2004:356-7
[155] See Demmers 2012:24-5

live in security and peace?!!"[156]. This argument is not at all religious, but *extends* AQC's frame to its enemy's framework of justice perception. As may be expected, AQC primarily concerns itself with emphasizing America's hypocrisy and lack of principles. AQC attempts to convince its Western audiences of this hypocrisy by outlining the standards to which America holds itself, and contrasting these to the standards to which it holds the rest of the world:

"The freedom and democracy that you call to is for yourself and white race only; as for the the rest of the world, you impose upon them your monstrous and destructive policies and Governments, which you call the 'American friends'. Yet you prevent them from establishing democracies."[157]

This frame is clearly not constructed in social and political isolation as it holds frames propagated by a vast array of political activists, such as American (black) civil rights movement activists, anti-globalists, and anti-(neo)colonialists, among others. This demonstrates the *frame extension* which AQC implements in order to create resonance among formerly unmobilized groups to other sentiment pools. While AQC might not expect these audiences to join its cause, it may create a basic resonance among Western audiences who are already susceptible for criticism on their Western governments, thereby creating or increasing domestic (Western) understanding for AQC, which may influence public debate and/or public acceptance of governmental actions. Such strategies aimed at making the Western audiences aware of their governments' wrongdoings fit the general longitudinal strategy of AQC of slowly weakening support for American government, attributing to the goals of its 'Operation Hemorrhage'. Reversely, it is argued that exposure to these 'foreign' frames influences the internal narratives of jihadi organizations as well: a 'hybridization' of ideologies[158].

When it comes to IS's exterior frames, this longitudinal strategy seems to be all but disappearing and is replaced by a much more aggressive, theologically-infused narrative. This narratives incorporates continuous and repetitive assertions of primordialist sectarian tensions; the only possible result of the current state of warfare is an all-out apocalyptic war between Islam and its enemy. When IS extends its frames to its enemies, the only security-related function that may be comparable to AQC's outward narratives is the warning that Western powers should stop bombing IS' territory. These warnings are primarily serve as pragmatic justifications for IS's atrocities and may contribute to diminishing support for Western counter-attacks, as those can be framed as counter-productive and provocative.

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[156] Bin Laden 2002:3
[157] Bin Laden 2002:5; Ibrahim 2007:5-6; also an ever returning mantra in the *Inspire* magazines.
[158] Lia and Hegghammer 2004

Comparatively, IS's narratives to its enemies serve a much more intimidating and fear-inducing agenda, reinforcing the organization's strength and message. IS asserts that it is not open for any negotiation, and that the only possible outcome is to either submit to Islam and IS, or to face an apocalyptic battle. AQC on the other hand repeats that its actions are a direct response to Western foreign policy and its incurred injustices.

CHAPTER 4: Contending credibility

Having outlined both organizations' frame alignment processes, we now have now reached the point where each organization's respective frames and respective alignment processes will be analyzed in context of the framing contest they are part of. As set out in *Chapter 1*, the outcome of this framing contest is determined by its credibility and its relative salience. Credibility consists of respectively *frame consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of the frame articulator*. Its relative salience is determined by the frames' *centrality, experiential commensurability,* and *narrative fidelity*[159]. The covered frames and corresponding processes will be addressed in this order.

4.1 Credibility

The fact that credibility is a major factor in frame articulation may be accounted as a given. Because it is such an important factor in the determination of frame resonance, I will now systematically analyze the issues of credibility. There will be a focus on the issue of frame consistency, to be followed up by matters of empirical credibility and credibility of the frame articulator.

4.1.1 Frame consistency

Frame consistency "refers to the congruency between SMO's articulated beliefs, claims, and actions"[160]. It should appear clearly now that IS has a demonstrably cleaner sheet regarding its frame consistency in comparison to AQC. As demonstrated in *Chapter 3*, for years AQC has contradicted itself in its different narratives, by rationalizing its actions as politically defensive while simultaneously advocating theological hatred towards non-believers. IS has repeatedly pointed out these contradictions and publicly called AQC upon its hypocrisy and inconsistencies[161]. In its efforts to regain influence and create a more unifying narrative, AQC may have worsened its case by relying less on its theological narratives and more on its political, secular narratives. Meanwhile, AQC continues to stress the *importance* of remaining true to theological interpretations of *jihad*. In its attempts to create and maintain control over a broad range of audiences, AQC seems to have lost the consistency needed to simultaneously keep control over its frame consistency, which is exploited (and exaggerated) gratefully by IS. AQC may have also lost regard in its frame consistency when it comes to the actions which are attributed to AQC. The 2004 Madrid bombings for example, although probably[162] not carried out by AQC, are widely attributed to the organization and do not fit in its narratives of the U.S. being the only legitimate goal of *jihad*. This is further enhanced by actions of its

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[159] Benford and Snow 2000:619-622
[160] Benford and Snow 2000:620
[161] Gartenstein-Ross 2016:18
[162] Although the 2004 Madrid train bombings are usually attributed to AQC, there has been no conclusive proof for its responsibility; rather is referred to independent cells 'inspired by AQC'. For a detailed study, see Reinares 2010.

franchised affiliates which, although fighting under the flag of AQC, often have somewhat different agendas. Exemplary to this is the organization Jabhat al-Nusra which might be AQC's strongest affiliate but whose diagnostication and prognostication is aimed almost exclusively against targets within Syria, such as Bashar al-Assad and IS[163]. In what can be assumed are attempts to regain such credibility, AQC has gone far and wide to claim the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings[164] as being part of its tactical ideology. Nevertheless, among sympathizers of IS, the message that AQC is inconsistent with its implementation of Islamic law, combined with its two-faced narratives and its refusal to condemn Shiites despite their 'evil', has corroded AQC's narrative's consistency.

In contrast, although perhaps attributable to its relative relatively young age, IS has so far been rather consistent about its goals, which have been in line with its tactical actions. This is partly due to its incredibly broad scope: all those not in line with the organization's leadership are automatically declared hostile, and there virtually no points on which there is any chance of compromise. IS has minimized differences in its propaganda narratives to different audiences through images and videos which have been distributed among friends and foes alike. This may have arguably created a more uniform and authentic image, but above all a *consistent* frame through which the organization claims to operate, especially when put next to the doublespeak and consecutive frame transformation by AQC.

4.1.2 Empirical credibility

Empirical credibility refers to "the apparent fit between the framings and events in the world", and whether "their empirical referents lend themselves to being read as 'real' indicators of the diagnostic claims"[165]. AQC has actively tried to build this empirical credibility by targeting visible American presence in Saudi Arabia and its influences on the country's governance and people. It attempted to reinforce this credibility by allegedly provoking disproportionate American military action on Muslim lands through the operations of 9/11, proving its diagnostic frames. Especially during those years of physical American presence, AQC's diagnostic framing of the U.S. being the cause of all Islamic deviation is likely to have gained credibility as credible among its constituents. After all, the removal of the Taliban regime and consecutive war, as well as the ensuing civil war following the American invasion in Iraq, proved that the U.S. engaged in causing widespread destruction in the heartlands of Muslims. However, the Americans have not been alone in their actions and were accompanied by the so-called 'Coalition of the Willing' which at its peak consisted

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[163] Facts caught up with this statement, as on July 292016, al-Nusra announced that it would break its ties with AQC, and would continue under the name Jabhat Fath al-Sham, or Front for Liberation of al-Sham (al-Jazeera 2016, ICCT 2016). This is an incredibly important event however; I briefly touch upon it in paragraph 5.1.
[164] *Inspire* issue 13:50; Reuters 2016
[165] Benford and Snow 2000:620

of no less than 38 countries[166]. Despite this, AQC's diagnostication did not change, and kept on blaming the decrepit environments of Muslims exclusively on the Americans. Especially after the Americans left in Iraq in 2011, AQC's diagnostic empirical credibility diminished. By this time, AQI had gained ground as it not only blamed Americans for the desperate state of affairs in Iraq, but included a large group of other suspects in its frames, most notably Shiites. By identifying Shia rather than the U.S. as its main culprit, IS might have hit the 'frame resonance jackpot' when it comes to the *salience* of this proposed antagonist among the organization's constituents[167]. Shiites in Iraq have for a long time been perceived as a threat to the Hussein-regime, and there has been societal and political distrust along sectarian lines for decades[168]. When Americans cleansed the Iraqi state apparatus of all former Baath-party members and reinstalled Shiites in many of its influential positions[169], this frame found (in)credible resonance. Al-Zarqawi has actively pursued a goal of inciting civil war along sectarian lines, based on religiously fueled hatred against Shiites. His theological narrative was found to have very 'real' resonance, not in the least among former Baath-officials, who flocked to join what is now IS[170]. The extend of these events enabled IS to effectively *co-opt* administrative and military structures from the former Iraqi regime, including local intelligence and experience. IS cleverly created a self-fulfilling religious prophecy, based on a pragmatic and lucid analysis of Iraqi society, and easily bridged its narratives of blame and causality to different layers of Iraqi society. AQC on the other hand seems to have been primarily involved in the reiteration of its existing frames of blaming America which, ultimately lost its touch with everyday experiences[171].

4.1.3 Credibility of frame articulator

The credibility of the frame articulator corresponds with the 'fact that speakers who are regarded as more credible are generally more persuasive' and is associated with the "status and/or perceived expertise (…) from the vantage point of potential adherents and constituents"[172]. This factor is largely determined by the earlier mentioned credibility of the frames itself, as their respective credibilities naturally influence the perceived credibility of the articulator itself. Factors such as the acceptance of status and knowledge[173] are highly subjective and depend on the empirical credibility

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[166] Beehner 2007
[167] Benford and Snow 2000:621
[168] For more on this, see Nasr 2006
[169] Nasr 2006:58-9
[170] Hashim 2016; Warrick 2015:117: "If Abu Musab al-Zarqawi could have dictated a U.S. strategy for Iraq that suited his own designs for building a terrorist network, he could hardly have come up with one that surpasses what the Americans themselves put in place over the spring and summer of 2003"
[171] Benford and Snow 2000:620
[172] Benford and Snow 2000:620-1
[173] ibid.

and frame consistency as well. Nevertheless, this is not to say that both organizations have put effort in increasing their respective credibility. AQC portrays itself as the jihadi organization which has the scholarly knowledge and experience, implying that its construction of the truth must be valid. IS however refuses to go along in this authoritative fallacy and instead builds one with itself as the central party. IS attempts to break down AQC's status and credibility by portraying it as archaic and overly cautious[174], whereas it posits itself as the new flag carrier of global jihadism. IS knows that its own credibility is strengthened with each victory and exploits these in a continuing winner's message which conceals its defeats and amplifies its victories[175].

4.1.3.1 Online presence

An aspect which I found in need of additional attention when assessing this criterion of articulator credibility, concerns the presentation and professionalism of the organizations in digital media. IS is known to have a large online presence, for example through the dissemination of its online magazine *Dabiq*, its various online news agencies, as well as a large social media presence distributed over multiple platforms. Before its resurgence in 2013, it was even known only as a 'paper', or 'digital' Caliphate[176]. I have found that the professionalism in media expressions between the two organizations varies greatly, which may impact the credibility of each actor as a frame articulator. While this may conduct a wholly different kind of study on its own, I have noticed that AQC's *Inspire* is ridden with type- and spelling mistakes, contains half-hearted attempts to combine its message with some comic relief and sadistic humor[177], and generally has a clumsy feel to it. Up until its most recent issues in 2016, *Inspire* included 'Q&A's' with sheikh Anwar al-Awlaki and encouraged readers to send in more questions, despite the sheikh's death in 2011. On the other hand, IS's *Dabiq* is filled with inflammatory religious hatred, graphic images of deaths, and continuous promises of apocalyptic battles, accompanied with photos of heroic men in battle. Contrary to what would AQC its adherents to believe, does IS accompany its calls to violence with many religious readings; in contrast, AQC's statements are religiously rather meager. Given the large importance and familiarity of digital environments for a majority of the intended audiences, AQC's image of being archaic might be reinforced by its somewhat off-point and old-fashioned online presence.

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[174] Gartenstein-Ross 2016:14
[175] ibid.15-17
[176] Bunzel 2015
[177] See for example *Inspire* issue 13:46-47, as well as the recurring column "make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom"

4.2 Relative salience

The final factor determining frame resonance, its salience, is itself a function of the three components of centrality, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity. This final section examines the effects of the outlined framing processes on these factors, which can then be deduced back to determine each frame's final credibility.

4.2.1 Centrality

A frame's centrality is determined by the 'essentiality' of "the beliefs, values, and ideas associated with movement frames [in] to the lives of the targets of mobilization"[178]. The concerned belief or frame needs to have a relatively high or central place (*salience*) in the hierarchy of an existing belief system and should connect to other frames and beliefs[179]. As mentioned before, despite its own provocation, AQC may have caused a temporary peak in its diagnostic frame's centrality when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. However, this frame also had a rather restricted range: when AQC main belief that the U.S. was indeed still the cause of all harm, was questioned, this belief lost salience in this greater hierarchy of beliefs. As most of the organization's mobilization efforts hinged on this one belief, the organization's narratives were "vulnerable for further discount"[180].

When it comes to centrality, IS, again, scored higher on the chart. This is attributable to the fact that its narratives do not hinge on one belief per se, as IS divides its diagnostic frames over many different groups. Analogous to al-Zarqawi's sectarian civil war incitement, IS engages in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy when it declares that all other organizations and movements are hostile towards it. The sheer breadth and depth of the resulting violence and destruction raised the salience of IS's frames in the belief hierarchy of those affected. This ubiquitous hostility is both bridged and extended (depending on the emitter) to potential IS constituents as well. We may summarize that the recession of centrality of AQC's frames strongly coincided with the rise of IS's, the latter once again gaining a lead in their contest for resonance.

4.2.2 Experiential commensurability

The second component determining a frame's relative salience is its experiential commensurability (EC). This EC is concerned with an individual's or collective's *experience*, asking whether "the answers and solutions to troublesome events and situations harmonize with the ways in these conditions have been or are currently experienced"[181]. An overly simplified example of this factor would be that in societies which have not experienced violence in a long time, the population would

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[178] Benford and Snow 2000:621
[179] Benford and Snow 1988:205
[180] Benford and Snow 1988:206
[181] Benford and Snow 1988:208

generally be less inclined to join fighting forces - it is not part of their experiential commensurability. The cuts in military budgets in recent years in the Netherlands may be illustrative to this example, as such cuts would be unsupported in countries with a more military recent past, regardless of the threats they currently face.

Ironically, this is a situation in which AQC may have actually -again- paved the way for IS mobilization in Iraq. As we have learnt, the salience of AQC prognostic frame diminished due to the singular focus on American targets. Before this diminishing however, Iraq had turned into a war zone where violent bombings, assassinations, firefights and other acts of war became commonplace. IS's prognostication revolves around extreme violence to be targeted at relatively 'familiar' actors. We might say that AQC co-incited the original violence to be brought to the Iraqi population. Instead of exploiting the experience of this violence in line with its own diagnostication and prognostication, AQC remained silent and unchanged. Although its narratives are filled with mentions of standing up against oppression, and returning aggression against Americans, these are theoretical and abstract. When growing up in a region where, due to the widespread infrastructural and economic collapse, *local* cleavages and power struggles and violences define the everyday experience. IS seems to have understood this and proffered answers and solutions in a lexicon rooted in these experiences of violence caused by, and aimed against, those close by: fighting fire with fire. AQC repetitively and rather passively reminded its adherents of a certain predefined set of values and beliefs. Al-Zarqawi and his followers created narratives which were ideologically and theologically rooted in the same pool as AQC's, but which provided much more 'real' and direct reference to daily experiences. Through the active recruitment of ex-Baath government officials, IS reaped fruits from American bureaucratic cleansing, as IS managed to tap its frames in sentiment pools of people who directly lost their livelihood to American, and through proper framing, *Shia* actions. This is not to say that AQC's narratives are *purely* theoretical; rather its leadership failed to adapt to changing realities, regardless of its own complicity in these changes. AQC attacked the Twin Towers in 2001 with the idea of a disproportionate American retaliation in mind, as that would only strengthen AQC's EC and reinforce its narrative of American aggression against Islam. However, the American attacks caused immense damage to its AQC's infrastructure and effectively incapacitated the organization. The consecutive war in Iraq was effectively 'out of reach' for AQC, an opportunity which al-Zarqawi profited greatly from by actively creating new narratives while starting to renounce AQC's narratives as archaic, a process which has been continuing up to this day.

4.2.3 Narrative fidelity

The very last component making up the narrative's salience, leading to the determination of their credibility, is narrative fidelity. Narrative fidelity concerns the matter of *cultural* resonance. How foreign or familiar is the frame? This time, AQC appears to gain a short head start. Both organizations tap deeply into local cultural and religious 'inherent ideology' and resonate with local narrations, not in the least by asserting the belief that Islam is inherent to the Arab lands. Emphasizing 'the local' is further reinforced by an a priori rejection of Western influences. It appears fundamentally counterproductive for IS' narrative fidelity to promote efforts to create and fuel sectarian tensions for its own benefits, while AQC stresses the importance of maintaining unity, and avoiding fights with other groups simply because of their religious or ethnic affiliations[182]. IS has two main responses to this lag in narrative fidelity: it attempts to create local narratives connected to other salient frames, and it uses brutal violence, which may alternately lead to either submission regardless of narrative fidelity, or to the self-fulfillingness of its other narrative 'prophecies'. Despite AQC´s hypothetical advantage in this field, all other factors contributing to its relative salience and credibility may have already done irreparable damage to its resonance.

Now that we know of each organization's core narratives, the functions these narratives bear, and the frame alignment processes through which these narratives are translated to the intended audiences, we continue with the final conclusion of this study, comparing and analyzing both organizations in terms of their respective successes in achieving and maintaining credibility and frame resonance.

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[182] This critique, originating from AQC, is also voiced through Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, leader of al-Nusra, now Fath al Sham. In a his July 29, 2016 video message, he praises AQC for 'putting the needs of the community and their higher interests before the interest of any individual group', quoting bin Laden as 'The interests of the Ummah take precedence over the interest of any state'; then continuing to assert that the group would 'strive to bridge the gaps between the groups of *Mujahideen* and ourselves' (al-Jazeera 2016). This may be interpreted as a direct reference to IS's strategies, centering around its own functional interests.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

This study has set out to research frame alignment processes, underlying core framing tasks in comparative narratives propagated by AQC and IS, to examine how these processes account for assumed dissimilarities in a framing contest. This framing contends for frame alignment with its audiences, and needs to maintain frame credibility and relative salience. The available theoretical literature does not contain any kind of heuristics to a structural historical and pragmatic understanding of contemporary jihadism and Islamic terrorism. Given the novelty of the current situation, there is a lack of analysis of contemporary jihadism's systematic diagnostic and prognostic frames. Nor is there much literature available on the construction of these frames in their respective contexts of social movement action, or on the various factors playing a role in positively or negatively affecting their resonance. It is here that I wish to contribute, and that I, motivated by some pervasive questions that occupy society, have formulated the research question *"How do frame alignment processes, underlying al-Qaeda's and Islamic State's diagnostic and prognostic narratives, affect each organization's respective frame resonance and organizational sustenance?"*

I have anatomized both organizations' respective narratives by applying Framing Analysis: I have first identified instances of core framing tasks, contextualized by relevant social and historical events and background. Secondly, I explored these frames' underlying frame adjustment processes. Lastly, I examined the effects of these adjustment processes on frame resonance by analyzing these processes in their relation to their respective credibility and relative salience. Through an interpretation of the outcome of this frame resonance, we may now finalize this study by formulating an answer to the research question.

5.1 Empirical findings

Looking at the organizations' diagnostic and prognostic frames, we may conclude that AQC's narrative is quite one-dimensional. Even regardless of its deep religious motivations, both its diagnostic and its prognostic frameworks hinge on a fundamentally anti-American belief system. For a while, AQC has engaged in doublespeak regarding its motivations, as it simultaneously advocated defensive justice as well as offensive domination, perhaps to deepen its religious legitimacy. Soon after the commencement of its infrastructural, American-induced crippling, AQC's daughter franchise AQI created an extremist narrative based on a pragmatic interpretation of the situation in post-invasion Iraq. AQI has been able to successfully extend its diagnostic and prognostic frames to former Baath-party members disposed by Americans and replaced by Shiites; its narratives were complemented by strong performances and imagery, taking precedence over AQC's narratives. AQI's extremism evolved, and the organization ultimately split from AQC. In attempts to regain support,

AQC subsequently attempted to transform its narrative to one of reason and theological contemplation, which it tries to bridge and extend to its former constituents, so that they would acknowledge its theological authority and prognostic usefulness. However, this effectively resulted in the amplification of the same, old defensive narrative. AQC's 'transformed' frames are a rehash of its old narratives, which have simply lost alignment with its intended audiences, who no longer consider AQC's frames to link to any of the factors needed for credibility or salience.

AQC engaged itself in a continuous frame amplification of the same values and the same old beliefs. These frames amplify the value of belonging to the *Umma*, and beliefs of inherent evilness of the U.S., and the necessity of its defeat for a restoration of the Muslim *Umma*. The outdatedness of these frames are put in the center of attention again. IS attacks AQC's frames by amplifying beliefs that AQC has proven not be credible as frame articulator, and that the organization is disintegrating. Additionally, it repeats that AQC's frames are archaic and no longer applicable to the current situation. AQC's empirical credibility decreases, while IS's own credibility increases. IS reinforces its salience by basing its frames on direct readings of the current state of affairs in the Levant. Its credibility is reinforced by the organization's uniform narrative and consistency. This process is all-encompassing, as AQC's frames of centrality and experiential commensurability are contended and consumed by IS. There is hardly any centrality of narratives of American presence left the experiential commensurability of Americans influence is drowned out by IS's diagnostication and prognostication aimed against Kurds, Shiites, and all other opponents. IS increases the relevance of its own frames by not only identifying its own enemies, but by simultaneously acting upon its frames through provocative attacks and tactical performances.

IS exploits AQC's inflexibility by developing its own frames based on AQC's, and outlining AQC's archaic nature. IS' success lies in the combined function of its own frame consistency, empirical credibility and articulative credibility, as well as the centrality and experiential commensurability of the beliefs it amplifies. Where IS's narrative fidelity lacks, it makes up by using brute power and force. Its hostile diagnostication and actions against Shias has enabled it to co-opt existing governmental and army structures by recruiting former government officials serving under Saddam Hussein. Meanwhile, AQC appears to stick to its existing narrative *ad nauseam*. Illustrative to this overall decline, and its incapability of adapting to new frames, is the very recent development of al-Nusra Front, splitting from AQC as it wished to focus all its efforts on the Syrian cause[183], a cause which can, a priori, not be incorporated in AQC's narrow narrative.

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[183] al-Jazeera 2016; Berger 2016

5.2 Theoretical implications

In this study, Framing Analysis provided a solid base from whence to explore the ideology and motivations of the two organizations. Processes of diagnostication, prognostication, and the interwoven motivational framing were able to capture most of the organizations' messages and narratives. I have added to the theory where I encountered that different framing processes served different goals which lacked an overall categorization, which I named the *interior* and *exterior* processes. By acknowledging these differences, we can make a clearer distinction in the goal or *function* of a certain frame amplification or transformation. It may also help to distinguish between frame *bridging* and *extending*, as this difference fundamentally comes down to the intended audience, which may be determined by the interior or exterior character of the message.

The data I found demonstrate the importance of interior processes. Extrapolating from papers found in AQC's strongholds, we already know that internal correspondence from within an organization (say IS) may hold details on diagnostication and prognostication which may not be expressed in exterior narratives. In the current theoretical literature, there is no systematic way to address such research, and I hope that my categorization of interior and exterior narratives may lead to the development of a more holistic and heuristic theoretical model. This also leads me to the next paragraph concerning future research.

5.3 Recommendations for future research and policy implications

This study focused on the ways AQC's and IS align their frames in relation to certain mobilizationable audiences. However, I am certain that inclusion of analysis of economic incentives could provide a far *more* complete picture of motivations for decision-making in the realm of framing. In this study, processes of frame alignment are studied within the limits of the social and with its effects on *audience.* I have not been able to research to what extent frames have been aligned to secure other interests. There is plenty of evidence indicating that economic or power-fueled incentives may go a long way in deciding how organizations construct and present their diagnostication, going beyond policies of 'hearts and minds' or mobilization. IS may be the ultimate contemporary example of this: its involvement in international oil trade, and an apparent continuous weapon supply raises questions, such as whether mobilization of jihadis really is its prime objective; what use is a huge army without any means of sustaining itself? As we have seen now, it appears that IS's emphasis is ever more shifting to the neo-takfirist stance of engaging in *jihad* as an objective *per se*, there is hardly any objective to be achieved. What sense can we make out of such motivations?[184] As I have referred to in this thesis' introduction, Caroline Nordstrom demonstrated that war economies and

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[184] Keen 2008:15-6: "civilians will frequently point to motivations that have very little to do with 'winning'"

greed-driven motivations may deepen and broaden conflicts, far beyond the scope of any narrative-driven research. However, the *combination* of framing analysis with an analysis on economic incentives may provide us with correlations between these two research fields[185] which can cast a wholly different light on the tactical implications of narrative framing. I would therefore recommend to trace and to map historical social movement organization's economic trails, and correspond those with its framing endeavors which happened in that same timeline. If data demonstrates correlations between economic needs and activities on the one hand, and narrative adjustments on the other, we may be able to learn of contemporary economic sustainability of comparable organizations by assessing its manipulation of different framing processes using methodologies of "macrocomparison of distant case studies"[186]. Knowledge of such processes automatically has its effects on the field of policy.

Policy interests in jihadism and Islamic violence is growing more than ever before, in line with the growing perceived threat coming from the realm of jihadism. Whereas AQC's apparent aim was to target American targets only, subsequent attacks by other jihadist organizations, often affiliated with AQC or IS, have attacked military and civilian targets in Turkey, Europe, Nigeria, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, to name but a few. This study's principle outset is straightforward: to understand why people engage in jihadi violence, and how framing exercises, placed in a social context, may subjectively affect different interpretations of what might have been a common grievance. Policy makers dealing with the effects of jihadism, Islamic terrorism and public security in these contexts should, as explained by David Keen[187], first and foremost have a holistic understanding of the phenomenon they are dealing with. Judging from the contents and motivations found throughout the different primary sources in this study, I cannot escape the diagnosis that jihadi strategists have a rather real and complete knowledge of sentiments and ideas in the societies they target, which is why tactical acts of terror can be so successful. This does not mean that jihadi fighters, too, share this knowledge; those are however the ones under the influence of narratives provided by these strategists (who themselves may have wholly different (economic) agendas). As part of the *defending* team, policy makers are already one step behind; therefore the primary policy implication is to enhance activities within the realm of 'cultural intel'. To *deal with* jihadi violence, we first need to *understand* its violence, and 'the *social*' it is embedded in (determinants of its 'narrative fidelity'). Security enforcement achieves nothing but symptomatic damage control, and chronic securitization may in fact lead to increasing levels of violence. Policy makers and academics should therefore join forces.

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[185] Mendelsohn 2016:51 "Empirical work is required to determine whether the ideological shift preceded the group's organizational orientation, rather than the other way around"
[186] Robben 2010:9
[187] See paragraph 1.1

Through objective analyses of frames, and the economic incentives and cultural narratives in which these frames are constructed and constantly renegotiated, we may determine these frames' functional roles in matters of tactical strategies and organizational sustenance. Only when taking in consideration this triangle of *functional framing*, *the social*, and *economic incentivism*, can we successfully and holistically counter jihadi discourses. Doing so would require an integrated approach, a team-up by the realms of policy and academia. Ideally, this joining of forces would be in service of global society, and would venture to create an a-political and holistic understanding and explanation of the threats facing the world.

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