Ba'athism: the hidden hand behind ISIS?

An examination of the Ba'ath ideology, Saddam-regime and ISIS

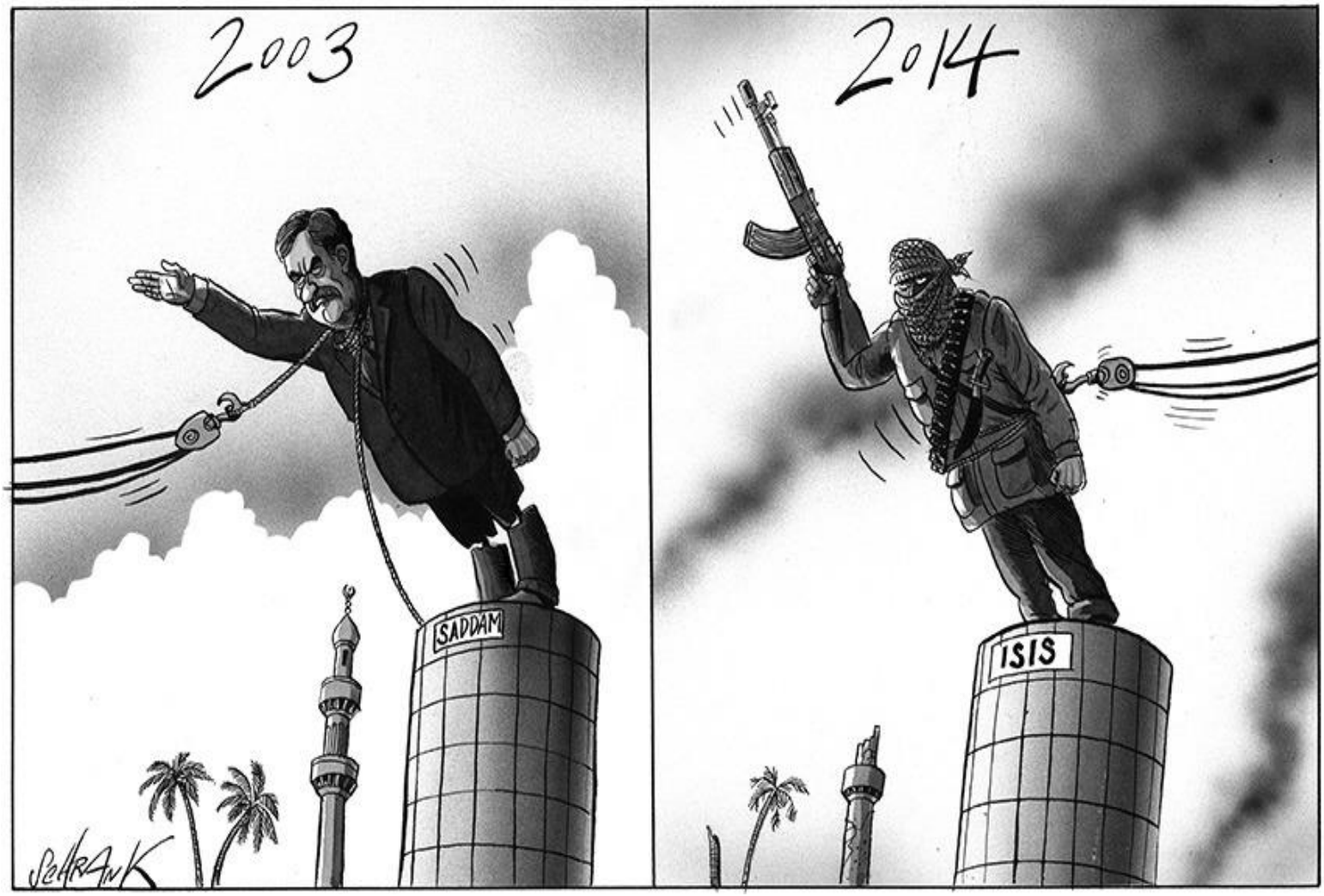

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Table of Contents

Abstract 3

Acknowledgments 4

List of Abbreviations 5

Introduction 6

- Historiography 8
- Academic relevance 10
- Analytic concepts 10
- Methodology and sources 13

Chapter 1: The foundation and development of the Ba'ath 15

- The historical context of Iraq 15
- The Ba'ath founders 16
- The Ba'athist ideology 17
- Arab Nationalism and Islam 18
- Pan-Arabism 20
- The Ba'ath and Iraq 22
- Concluding remarks 23

Chapter 2: The Saddam Hussein-regime 25

- The ascendance of the Saddam-regime 25
- The historical context of the Saddam-regime 26
- Saddam's view and policies on pan-Arabism 27
- Saddam's instrumentalization of religion 29
- Saddam's policies on sectarianism and network 31
- Concluding remarks 33

Chapter 3: ISIS 34

- The historical context of ISIS 34
- The Ba'athist network in ISIS 35
- ISIS' worldview 36
- The utopian caliphate 37
- Pan-Islamic aspirations 38
- ISIS' governance 39
- Concluding remarks 41

Conclusion 43

Bibliography 46

Appendix: a map of the distribution of ethnic and religious groups in Iraq 50

Abstract

This thesis examines to what extent the Ba'athist ideology and Ba'athist Saddam-regime can be considered forerunners of the ISIS-doctrine. It aims to map out the potential influence or overlap concerning pan-Arabism and the relation between the Ba'ath and Islam by using both literature and the analysis of primary sources. The latter comprises of speeches, essays, transcripts, and concerning ISIS specifically, Dabiq magazine. The first chapter explores the core ideas of the Ba'ath ideology, formulated by Michel Aflaq, and the Ba'athist party network. The second chapter discusses the network, political ideas and repertoires of the Saddam-regime. The third chapter examines the Ba'athist network in ISIS, next to the political ideas and repertoires of the organisation. The third chapter also pays attention to the governance structures of ISIS as the self-proclaimed caliphate seems to be a distinctive case in Iraq's recent state governance. At the end of the second and third chapter, the findings are compared to the ones in the previous chapter(s). This explorative research indicates that there is organisational overlap, or even influence, between the Saddam-regime and ISIS. From an ideological perspective, however, there seems to be no Ba'athist influence on ISIS throughout the intermediate Saddam-regime.

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The conclusions drawn in this thesis are my responsibility only.

List of Abbreviations

AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JTJ	Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Group of Monotheism and Jihad)
MSC	Mujahideen Shura Council
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council
UAR	United Arab Republic
UN	United Nations
US	United States

Introduction

On March 20, 2003, American and British ground troops invaded Iraq. Within three weeks, this Operation Iraqi Freedom toppled the Ba'athist Saddam Hussein regime. Paul Bremer, appointed as the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) by President Bush, had initiated a process of de-Ba'athification: he removed the administration of former Ba'athists and disbanded the Iraqi army. As a result, thousands of embittered armed men became unemployed, and hundreds of thousands of Sunnis were disenfranchised. A power vacuum arose that soon was filled with the previously suppressed Shia majority, at the expense of the Sunni minority that had been favoured by the Saddam-regime over other ethnic-religious groups.[1]

In May 2006, a new Iraqi government came to power under Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Despite the support from the United States (US), al-Maliki proved too sectarian to lead any national reconciliation efforts in Iraq. The Sunni minority in Iraq became marginalised and felt increasingly dissatisfied with the new dominant Shia power of the regime. The Shia electoral block divided itself into various factions while Kurdish leaders, representing another minority group in Iraq, engaged in further consolidating their autonomous rule in the North. Confronted by these sectarian divisions, the Iraqi government lacked the means and will to create any national consensus or compromises to bring all groups together.[2] The political, tribal and sectarian divisions manifested in violence. In a web of insurgent groups, the so-called 'Sunni triangle' emerged that consisted of former Ba'athists, Iraqi nationalists and al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). They attacked the occupying US forces and various Shia militias. Ultimately, after months of fierce fighting, the Americans were able to contain the violence somewhat via the Awakening Council, a Sunni alliance, in which they collaborated with tribal sheikhs, and by assassinating the AQI head Abu Musab al-Zarqawi by June 2006.

In February 2009, shortly after his inauguration, President Obama announced that by the end of December 2011 he would entirely remove the US troops in Iraq. While the number of civilian deaths dropped from 2009-2012, the American withdrawal intensified the internal political crisis. Iraq was left in a fragile environment with sectarian tensions of which jihadist groups - and especially the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) - could take advantage.[3] During the Arab Spring in 2011, ten thousand of Iraqis protested the shortages of electricity and water, high unemployment and government corruption. The second wave of protests started in the winter of 2014 when in

[1] D. Badie, *After Saddam: American Foreign Policy and the Destruction of Secularism in the Middle East*, (London: Lexington Books, 2017), 61-6; W.L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013), 510-3.
[2] Badie, *After Saddam*, XVI; Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 510-3.
[3] B. Isakhan, *The Legacy of Iraq: From the 2003 War to the 'Islamic State'*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 8/9; Badie, *After Saddam*, XVI & 114.

Sunni areas protesters demanded the end of the discriminatory policies of the al-Maliki government against their community. The government responded with extreme violence that spurred tribal leaders and armies to protect their people. Altogether, these experiences of circumstances encouraged much of the Sunni population to support the Islamic State when it began its conquest. By the time al-Maliki resigned in 2014, ISIS had already seized territory in a country where sectarian violence and anti-government revolts thrived.[4]

ISIS, also called *al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi Iraq wal-Sham* (*Daesh)* by Arabs, differed from its predecessor groups like AQI by its claim to have created a caliphate in both Iraq and Syria, and aimed to expand this territory further. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself caliph, and ISIS members viewed him as the only legitimate commander of global Jihad. Not only was ISIS constituted of former AQI members but also of former Ba'athist soldiers and commanders of whom some had held senior positions under the Saddam Saddam-regime and possessed valuable (combat) experience. After the de-Ba'athification process, a significant part of them transformed into jihadists and some of them even obtained essential positions within the ISIS hierarchy.[5]

It is remarkable how ISIS has efficiently mobilised local supporters and foreign fighters by using their radical doctrine. Even more interesting is how former Iraqi Ba'athist functionaries became involved in the organisation of the self-proclaimed caliphate while the Ba'athist ideology is known for being secular. It seems like religion replaced the secular element of the ideology or the whole ideology in itself as it appeared to be better suitable to mobilise Iraqi Sunnis for fighting foreign powers and striving to the establishment of a caliphate. The Lebanese professor of International Relations Amine Lebbos stated: 'religion is the best thing to fix people around a fight.'[6] However, it might also be that religion already had been an element of Ba'athism or became important over time. Another possible scenario would be that Saddam implemented religious policies during his regime.

Altogether, it poses the question to what extent the Ba'athist regime of Hussein was secular and to what extent Ba'athist ideology was reflected in the Saddam-regime. If it was secular, how was this shift from supporting a secular ideology towards a radical Islamic doctrine of former Ba'athists overcome? Consequently, the central question of this thesis will be: to what extent can the Ba'athist ideology and Ba'athist Saddam-regime be considered forerunners of the ISIS-doctrine? As will be demonstrated in the historiography component below there is much debate among academics to what extent the Ba'athist core ideas featured the Saddam-regime.

[4] A.S. Hashim, *The Caliphate at War: Operational Realities and Innovations of the Islamic State*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 51 & 211; Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 518; J.L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 345.
[5] A. Ahmad, *Jihad & Co*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 164-5.
[6] Interview with Dr. Amine Lebbos (July 2016) in: Ahmad, *Jihad & Co*, 165.

Furthermore, many academics have discussed ISIS in relation to the Saddam-regime but did not extensively examine it in line with the Ba'ath ideology as it emerged during the 1940's.

Historiography

The Ba'ath, literally meaning resurrection, was founded in Syria during the French mandate period in the 1940s by Michel Aflaq, an Orthodox Christian, and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, a Sunni Muslim. They formulated a doctrine that combined aspects of pan-Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism and socialism. The Ba'ath believed in the existence of one single Arab nation. It envisioned a complete transformation of Arab society and the achievement of Arab unity. Interestingly, although Aflaq was Christian, he incorporated the Islam in the Ba'athist ideology.[7] In the early 1950s, a branch of the Ba'ath party was founded in Iraq and seized power in 1968. Saddam Hussein played a vital role in this coup and eventually became President in 1979. He welcomed Aflaq in Baghdad and used his presence as a proof that the Iraqi Ba'ath had remained true to the principles of the party's founder.[8]

To what extent the Ba'ath ideology was implemented in the Saddam-regime is questionable. According to William Cleveland, Professor of Middle East History, Saddam justified his rule with Ba'athist principles but at the same time loosened the pan-Arab mission. This was due to the development of rival Ba'ath branches in Iraq and Syria since both Saddam and the Syrian President Hafez al-Assad individually claimed regional supremacy.[9] However, examining the Ba'athist ideas of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism more closely could both point to a potential link between the Ba'ath and ISIS since the latter for example strongly denounces the Sykes-Picot treaty by which colonial powers determined the Middle Eastern borders.[10] Concerning the secular aspect of the Ba'ath, it is also interesting to examine to what extent the Saddam rule was secular. Especially this aspect of the Saddam-regime has been examined by scholars. Some argue that after the Gulf War (1990-1), sectarian tensions along Sunni-Shia lines increased. According to Fawaz Gerges, a Lebanese-American Professor of Middle East Politics at the London School of Economics, Saddam initiated the Faith Campaign (1993) which involved a socially conservative agenda containing religious references and symbols. Saddam himself, however, was not a born-again Muslim and continually suppressed radical Islamists throughout his rule.[11]

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[7] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 303.
[8] Ibid., 414.
[9] Ibid., 436.
[10] *Dabiq*, Issue 1, 13.
[11] F.A. Gerges, *ISIS. A History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 157.

The follow-up question is whether the Saddam-regime had any influence on ISIS and if so, in what way. In recent years, a substantial amount of research has been published that either comprises components of this discussion or examines this relationship. Examples of important works include *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* by Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan[12], *The Origins of ISIS: The Collapse of Nations and Revolution in the Middle East* by Simon Mabon and Stephen Royle[13], *A History of ISIS* by Fawaz Gerges[14], and *Under the Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad* by Sami Moubayed.[15] Research journalists Weiss and Hassan, for instance, argue concerning the Ba'ath that 'the secular socialist ideology is in a tenuous state of coexistence and competition with the caliphate-building jihadism of ISIS.'[16] They do see a parallel between Saddam and al-Baghdadi's hatred and slaughter of Shia.[17] Their work is based on many interviews with former US military intelligence, counterterrorism officials, Western diplomats but also defected Syrian spies and diplomats, and Syrians who worked for ISIS. This book also briefly mentions Amatzia Baram, a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Middle East History and Director of the Center for Iraq Studies at the University of Haifa, who argued that Saddam's Islamist policy, concerning the Islamic Faith Campaign in the 1990s, was a major factor behind the emergence of ISIS.[18]

However, Samuel Helfont, who holds a post-doctoral lectureship in the University of Pennsylvania's International Relations program, together with Michael Brill, a graduate student at Georgetown University, oppose the idea that 'Saddam created ISIS'. They argue that the notion that Saddam set the foundations for ISIS is 'inaccurate and dangerously misleading'. Both scholars criticise Baram for not researching relevant archives and assert that Saddam or his Ba'athist regime never displayed any sympathy for Islamism or Salafism. They indicate that their findings correspond to those of scholars like Joseph Sassoon, Professor at Georgetown University with an expertise in the Arab world, and Aaron Faust, a Foreign Affairs Officer at the US Department of State.[19] Joseph Sassoon indeed argues that Saddam's Ba'ath-regime behind the scenes was anti-religious and tried to repress any sign of real religiosity.[20] His research also relies on the massive

[12] M. Weiss, & H. Hassan, *ISIS. Inside the Army of Terror,* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015).
[13] S. Mabon & S. Royle. *The Origins of ISIS: The Collapse of Nations and Revolution in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).
[14] F.A. Gerges, *ISIS. A History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).
[15] S. Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).
[16] Weiss & Hassan, *ISIS. Inside the Army of Terror*, 118.
[17] Ibid., 119.
[18] See: A. Baram, *Saddam and the Rise of ISIS: The Faith Campaign's Long Aftermath,* Foreign Affairs, (June 5, 2016), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2016-06-05/saddam-and-rise-isis (accessed on April 3, 2018).
[19] M. Brill & S. Helfont, *Saddam's ISIS?: The Terrorist Group's real Origin Story*, Foreign Affairs, (January 12, 2016), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2016-01-12/saddams-isis?cid=soc-tw-rdr (accessed on December 7, 2017); S. Helfont, "Saddam and the Islamists: The Ba'thist Regime's Instrumentalization of Religion in Foreign Affairs." *The Middle East Journal Middle East*, 68 (2014): 3, 352-3.
[20] J. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

archive of government documents captured by the US after the fall of Saddam and therefore seems a very reliable and representative academic work. Helfont recently published his book *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the roots of insurgencies in Iraq*. Therein, he challenges the theory that Saddam's policies in the 1990s point to a shift away from Arab nationalism toward political Islam drawing from the regime's internal documents. Instead, Saddam promoted a Ba'athist interpretation of religion that was subordinated to Arab nationalism that remained 'fairly consistent throughout his rule.' Helfont contends that the authoritarian system that Hussein used to contain religion was destroyed with the US-led intervention in 2003 and paved the way for groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS to thrive.[21]

Academic relevance

As the historical component of this thesis indicated, there is no consensus on the influence of Saddam's Ba'athist regime on ISIS among scholars. Therefore, there still is much potential in researching this link. While some of the earlier mentioned academic works compare the Ba'ath and ISIS in their core ideas, the history of the Ba'ath itself and how the ideology was incorporated in the Saddam-regime is not explored extensively yet. By examining the Ba'ath as an ideology from its foundation onwards, this research will be of added value to the academic debate to see to what extent ISIS is a (dis)continuation of the Ba'ath. Thus, this thesis aims at bringing together secondary literature that specialises in the Ba'ath ideology, the Saddam-regime and ISIS.

Furthermore, this thesis helps to understand how the former Ba'athist party members got involved in ISIS and why. Examining the transition from former Ba'athist leaders to ISIS could expose their possible religious or perhaps opportunistic motives. The interplay of various motivational factors helps understand terrorism carried out by ISIS both on an organisational as well as on an individual level. The results of this research can be of added value to counter terrorism by revealing the reasoning behind joining a (terrorist) group and provides possible attention points for the aftermath of intervention concerning the former regime members.

Analytic concepts

As the concept of ideology is often confused with religion, it is essential to set out the differences for this thesis. According to Andrew Heywood, a leading writer of politics textbooks, it is difficult to define the concept of ideology. He asserts that it comprises of a political belief system and/or political ideas that embody or articulate class or social interests. The function of ideology is that it

[21] S. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the roots of insurgencies in Iraq*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-6.

provides a perspective in understanding the world, shapes political systems, and acts as social cement between groups. In a general sense, Heywood states that religion is 'an organised community of people bound together by a shared body of beliefs concerning transcendent reality, usually expressed in a set of approved activities and practices.' The transcendent aspect is difficult to define as it can refer to anything such as the creator God.[22] Ahmed Hashim, professor in Strategic Studies, states that ideology is central to understanding ISIS. He argues that 'it does not reflect the entirety of Islam' but did undoubtedly emerge out of a particular reading of Islamic theology and political philosophy.[23] To understand the analysis throughout this thesis, and more specifically ISIS' ideas and its goals in general, a brief overview of the Islamic concepts of Islamism, Salafism, Wahhabism and Jihadism is provided.

Islamists believe that the ultimate goal of true Muslims is to establish a state ruled by the laws of Islamic sharia that is governed by a caliph. This was once created immediately after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632. The idea of a caliphate has been a goal passed through by generations of Islamists.[24] In general, scholars view the ISIS ideology as a Salafist-jihadist movement.[25] According to Hashim, Salafism should be understood as an ideology: a very diverse theological movement. Salafism is a movement within Sunni Islam that first emerged in the nineteenth century in response to the rise of European influence in the Muslim world. However, the term Salafism is a direct reference to the early Islam years as *Salaf* means 'predecessors'. It calls for a return to the beliefs, practices and sincerity of the early Islam: the generation of the first Muslims that provided the four true caliphs of Sunni Islam. Salafists reject centuries of scholarship and interpretation which implies that one can be a dedicated Muslim without understanding the complex theological arguments. Thus, there is a lot of space for radical interpretations of Islam and therefore also enables persons claiming to be Islamic experts without having any study background in Islamic law. The latter also applies to several prominent leaders within ISIS. Besides, the ultimate Salafi goal is a unified Muslim community (*umma*) governed by the sharia: the caliphate. Salafists believe that God is the only one who can regulate human life and thus only the sharia as the judicial system is accepted by them. As it strives for the perfect society, Salafism is therefore a utopian movement.[26]

According to Megan McBride, a doctoral student focusing on religious violence and terrorism, ISIS is often labelled as Salafist but also includes Wahhabi principles. However,

[22] A. Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3-5 & 285.
[23] Hashim, *The Caliphate at War,* 8.
[24] Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag,* XIV.
[25] Gerges, *ISIS. A History*, 23-4; Weiss & Hassan, *ISIS. Inside the Army of Terror*, 216.
[26] Hashim, *The Caliphate at War,* 64-8; Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag,* XIV-XV; J. Stern & J.M. Berger, *ISIS. The State of Terror*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 257-269.

both Wahhabism and Salafism have become practically indistinguishable.[27] Wahhabism advocates a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam by drawing upon the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah. Muslims who engaged in 'idolatrous' practices such as polytheism, mysticism and Shi'ism were not considered Muslims at all. Thus, Jews, Christians, Shia and Alawites were all excommunicated. Members of ISIS also point to the ancient works of Taymiyya as the foundation of their ideology.[28]

Jihadism is a historically contentious and complicated term as Islamic sources like the Quran never provided one single accepted definition of it. The word 'jihad' means 'to struggle' or 'to strive' towards a specific goal. It is used to refer to spiritual struggles but also to physical struggles. In contemporary times and the context of jihadi Salafism, jihad has been associated with 'the physical struggle to promote and extend Islam, to defend Islam and its peoples from foreign invaders, and to eliminate oppression and tyranny imposed on Muslims by their rulers.' Therefore, for Salafi-jihadists, jihad as war is a 'central pillar of their ideology.'[29]

Throughout this research, the awareness of probable cultural differences in concepts is important. To understand the academic debate on the secular aspect of the Ba'ath-regime, one should first be aware of what secularism event meant for Iraq and its region. Dina Badie, assistant professor in International Studies with expertise in Security Policy in the Middle East, explains that secularism in the Middle East differs considerably from the Western conception. Western secularism 'finds commonality in strict adherence to legal frameworks that aim to separate church and state.' However, the Middle Eastern concept of secularism, according to Badie, cannot uniformly be defined. For example, in Egypt, President Gamal Abdel Nasser had developed his brand of secular pan-Arab socialism and uniformly fought to unite the Arab state. This goal did popularise the secular Arab identity, but then, on the other hand, the Ba'ath offered an alternative that instead aimed at national variations and ideological adaptations. Therefore, after World War II, the secular Arabs could choose between Communism, Nasserism, and Ba'athism. As Islam was viewed as a part of the Arab heritage rather than a way to organise the political structure, Iraqi Ba'athism did not attempt to remove religion from the public sphere. Secularism, according to Badie, could therefore be understood 'within a framework of nationalism as a way to subordinate religion to ethnic identity.' Arab secularism did not entail a strict legal separation of church and state 'by the elevation of non-religious markers to encourage national and transnational unity.'[30]

[27] Stern & Berger, *ISIS*, 268-9.
[28] Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag,* 9-10.
[29] Hashim, *The Caliphate at War,* 66-7; Stern & Berger, *ISIS*, 271.
[30] Badie, *After Saddam,* 55-6.

Furthermore, it is important to always bear in mind the context of events and the content of concepts when researching specific developments or phenomena. According to Badie, the ideological balance of power in the Middle East reflected the actual balance of power. During the Saddam-regime, Iraq and Iran were the region's dominating powers, secularism and Islamism balanced. In a broader context, the international Cold War at that time also took place in which capitalism and communism competed for over forty years. Since the toppling of the Saddam-regime, Saudi Arabia and Iran are the dominating powers in which a Sunni-Shia division has become prominent.[31] Therefore, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-8) together with the Gulf War (1990-1) will be focal points in this research. Mabon, lecturer in International Relations at the University of Lancaster, and Royle, a research fellow at the Richardson Institute, point to the three Gulf Wars (1980-8, 1991 and 2003) as important factors to the emergence of strong sectarian identities.[32] Also, Gerges underlines the importance of the latter two events, as he argues that the Sunni Arab identity was constructed due to wars, social turmoil and the ultimate destruction of the state in 2003.[33] Taking into account the sectarian-religious relations and the branding of it through time, therefore, is essential.

Methodology and sources

This thesis will comprise of three chapters: (1) the foundation and development of the Ba'ath, (2) the Saddam-regime, and (3) ISIS. The first chapter examines the core ideas of the Ba'ath ideology and the Ba'athist party network. Therein, it focusses mainly on the pan-Arabic element and the relation between the Ba'ath and Islam. The pan-Arabic mission was identified by the Ba'ath as its highest purpose, and also the focus on the Islamic aspect is important when answering the research question. Therefore, these focal points are chosen and remain the leitmotiv throughout this research. The second chapter discusses the network, political ideas and repertoires of the Saddam-regime. Lastly, the third chapter examines the Ba'athist network in ISIS, next to the political ideas and repertoires of the organisation. Furthermore, it also pays attention to the governance structures of ISIS as the self-proclaimed caliphate seems to be a distinctive case in Iraq's recent state governance. At the end of the second and third chapter, the findings are compared to the ones of the previous chapter. The conclusion provides a recap of all the findings and an answer to the central question of this research.

The content is primarily based on secondary literature and several primary sources. It is important to note that the research is limited as the author does not master the Arabic language

[31] Badie, *After Saddam,* XV.
[32] Mabon & Royle. *The Origins of ISIS*, 61.
[33] Gerges, *ISIS. A History*, 158.

fluently. For the chapter on the Ba'ath ideology, primary sources of the founders are essential. There are several English translations of Ba'ath party congresses, the Ba'ath constitution or speeches. While this research does not aim to focus on one person solely, in case of the Ba'ath ideology especially speeches of the founder Aflaq are looked at. As stated earlier, Aflaq was asked by Hussein to come to Baghdad and is, therefore, most interesting and relevant to explore. Also, Aflaq was seen as the ideologue and Ba'ath party philosopher with great influence.[34] The second chapter on the Saddam-regime examines internal Ba'ath party documents and speeches of Hussein that can either be found online or in appendices of academic books from inter alia Sassoon. For the chapter on ISIS, issues of the *Dabiq* magazine are used to analyse the doctrine and determine what elements and ideas are displayed. This glossy magazine is published by the Al-Hayat Media Center, the media department of ISIS. Its mission is to 'convey the message of the Islamic State in different languages with the aim of unifying the Muslims under one flag.' It not only produces the Dabiq but also other written products, audio material and videos.[35] Also, the speeches and videos of al-Baghdadi or other prominent members will provide useful insights. The *Dabiq* magazines are easily accessible online and published in English to address an international audience.

If core ideas of the Ba'ath and ISIS do overlap, this thesis takes into account that other motives for the former Ba'athist party members to join ISIS might have played a role, such as to retain power (again). Also, overlap in ideas does not necessarily have to point to direct influence. It could be that many core ideas were not integrated into the Saddam-regime and one could ask themselves the question to what extent Ba'ath party members believed in the Ba'ath doctrine or just used it as a tool to climb the hierarchy. However, this research will not and cannot focus on how sincere and genuine the reasoning behind specific policies, for example the Islamic Faith Campaign, was. Instead, it is crucial to bear in mind not only to what extent Hussein was a devout Muslim himself but also how his policies possibly influenced the Iraqi population. Furthermore, it is important to note that sentiments of being against a group or idea can also strongly bind groups of people. Besides, the thesis aims at revealing possible motives that could have been dominant in making specific policy decisions. The international and regional political context plays a vital role in this. A pitfall of this research could be that it focusses too much on what indeed binds groups or Iraqi people by solely looking at continuity. As time changes and Iraq has had a very turbulent history, also the feelings of Iraqi's can and probably have changed.

[34] S. Al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear: Saddam's Iraq,* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990), 186.
[35] *Dabiq*, Issue 2, 43.

Chapter 1: the foundation and development of the Ba'ath

The historical context of Iraq

Before the foundation and development of the Ba'ath are discussed, it is important to explain the relevant historical context of Iraq in which the Ba'ath became a formal party in 1952. The core features of the country that are pointed out remain recurring themes throughout this thesis.

After World War I, the post-war Paris peace talks in 1919 led to the implementation of the Sykes-Picot agreement (1916). It concerned the division of the Arab territories of the fallen Ottoman Empire into mandate territories of the United Kingdom and France.[36] Consequently, the Iraqi state was created in 1920 by British powers. They decided to put the three former Ottoman provinces Mosul, Baghdad and Basrah together. During the Ottoman rule, these three regions were administered as separate and distinct provinces. The northern province of Mosul was economically linked to Anatolia and Greater Syria, while the centrally located province of Baghdad traded primarily with Iran. Basrah, the southern province, was more oriented toward the Persian Gulf. Under the Ottoman rule, these provinces each possessed a certain level of autonomy but had never before belonged to one unified political entity outside the empire. Furthermore, the composition of putting the three regions together caused disproportionalities between religiously and ethnically distinct people. The Mosul province predominantly constituted of Sunni Arabs and Kurds, Baghdad comprised of Sunni Arabs, and the Basrah province by Shia Arabs (see appendix 1). Altogether, roughly 80 per cent of the population consisted of Arabs, but they were divided among religious and ethnic lines. Whereas viewed as Sunni Muslims, the Kurds were a distinct people that represented 20 per cent of the population that had their own language and culture. This caused ethnic tensions between the Arabs and Kurds. The sectarian divisions concerned the division between Sunni and Shia. The latter, making up 60 per cent of the Iraqi population, maintained close ties with the ulama in the neighbouring country Iran. The additional problem was that the Sunni Arabs came to power, a minority group that made up approximately 20 per cent of the Iraqi population. Consequently, after the formation of the state Iraq and its centralised rule in Baghdad, its regimes struggled in maintaining social and political cohesion among the three former provinces.[37]

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[36] A.N. Hamdan, "Breaker of Barriers? Notes on the Geopolitics of the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham," *Geopolitics*, 21 (2016): 3, 607.

[37] K. Abdi, "From Pan-Arabism to Saddam Hussein's cult of personality: Ancient Mesopotamia and Iraqi national ideology." *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 8 (2008): 1, 9-10; Badie, *After Saddam, 18;* Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 189-90; S.E. Holden, *A Documentary History of Modern Iraq*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 90.

To foster national integration, Pan-Arabism was used as an instrument. King Faysal, who ruled from 1921-1933, was the first to instruct Arab intellectuals to develop an ideology of Pan-Arabism. The most notable of them was Abu-Khaldun Sati' al-Husri, who was considered to be the founder of the ideology. He stressed that a common language and a shared history were the defining characteristics of a nation.[38] 'The Arabic language, originating from the Arabian Peninsula in ancient times (…) and the long Arab history, extending to times before the rise of Islam, formed the essential elements of Arab national identity.'[39] Hence, this was often referred to as *umma* (nation) which in classical Arabic had multiple connotations: a group of people, religion as well as physical and moral features that were distinguishable from other groups. According to Ofra Bengio, Professor Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University, from the 1920s up to the 1960s the concept of umma in Iraq concerned the Iraqi people only rather than the whole Arab nation.[40] However, this chapter will further elaborate on the Ba'athist concept of the umma and demonstrate that it referred to the whole Arab nation. However, first, the foundation of the Ba'ath is examined.

The Ba'ath founders

The original Ba'ath (*Hizb al-Ba'th al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki*, the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party) took shape in Syria in the 1940s during the French mandate period and against the background of the Second World War. Interestingly, its founders, ideologues and leaders all originated from Syria, so the Ba'ath was not a 'home-grown Iraqi product'.[41] There seems to be controversy among academics about who was the founding father of the Ba'ath.[42] The rivals were Zaki al-Arsuzi, an Alawite, and Michel Aflaq, a Christian from Damascus. According to Bengio and John Devlin, former research associate at the Hoover Institution, Al-Arsuzi was one of the three key authors of the Ba'ath ideology. Also, in 1940 he created the group *al-Ba'th al-Arabi* that consisted of six like-minded men in Damascus. In 1943, Aflaq and Bitar adopted the same name for their group to which some of Arsuzi's followers joined.[43] Regardless of who holds the rightful claim, the Syrian President Hafez al-Assad chose the side of al-Arsuzi, both sharing their Alawi origins.[44] As mentioned earlier, Aflaq became influential in Iraq after they fled Syria in 1968.

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[38] Abdi, "From Pan-Arabism to Saddam Hussein's cult of personality," 8-10.
[39] W.L. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971). In: Abdi, "From Pan-Arabism to Saddam Hussein's cult of personality," 11.
[40] O. Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 35-6.
[41] Bengio, *Saddam's Word,* 33.
[42] P. Seale, *Asad. The Struggle for the Middle East*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 27.
[43] Bengio, *Saddam's Word,* 33-4; J.F. Devlin, *The Ba'th party: a history from its origins to 1966*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), 7.
[44] Seale, *Asad,* 27.

Aflaq (1910-1989) was born in a Greek Orthodox Christian middle-class family. During his youth, he was strongly influenced by nationalistic ideas from his father who ended up in prison several times because of his activism against the French oppressors. While studying history in Sorbonne, he read works of socialists such as Marx, Gide and Rolland. According to Nikolaos Van Dam, a Dutch former ambassador and scholar on the Middle East, this literature exposed to Aflaq the enormous social problems Syria was confronted with. Furthermore, during his time in Europe, Aflaq perceived that Syria not only suffered from foreign involvement but also from corruption and ignorance in Arabic society. In Paris, Aflaq also met Salah al-Din Bitar who studied physics and became inseparable friends with. Bitar shared the Damascene and middle-class background as Aflaq. When they returned to Syria, both became teachers at the most prestigious secondary school in Syria, *Tajhiz al-Ula*. By 1940, Bitar and Aflaq had created a study circle with students that meted on Fridays, the Muslim day of rest. They called their group the 'Movement of Arab Revival'[45], and the ideas that Aflaq had been developing were considered as the Ba'ath.[46] Eventually, the Ba'ath set up branches in Jordan (1948), Lebanon (1949), Iraq (1950), Libya (1954), Kuwait (1955), and Yemen and Aden (1955-6).[47]

The Ba'athist ideology

The term Ba'ath in early religious literature used to refer to 'the sending of a prophet or the resurrection of the dead.'[48] According to Arsuzi, the Ba'ath meant the return to the 'springs of national life': the revival of the language and the cultural genius of the Arabs.'[49] Aflaq, instead of language, referred to the revival of the Arab spirit. According to Seale, the core idea was that being Arab was something to be proud of since they belonged to an ancient race responsible for many glorious achievements. However, the Arabs lost faith in themselves due to a degraded history by which he referred to the Turkish rule for four centuries, the following French domination, and the Zionist presence in the region.[50] A revolution was needed to revive this national spirit again and give the Arab nation its positive outlook again.[51] Whereas the early interpretation of the Ba'ath had a religious connotation, both Arsuzi and Aflaq referred to the Ba'ath primarily in a secular way. Furthermore, it demonstrated the glorification of the early Arab history.

[45] Seale, *Asad,* 29.
[46] N. Van Dam, N. "De Ba'th en de Verenigde Arabische Republiek." *Internationale Spectator*, 25 (1971): 20, 1787.
[47] Seale, *Asad,* 98.
[48] Bengio, *Saddam's Word,* 34.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Seale, *Asad*, 30.
[51] Bengio, *Saddam's Word,* 34.

The Ba'athist Party slogan 'Unity, Freedom and Socialism' reflected the fundamental elements of the ideology. All the three components were equally important and intermingled according to Aflaq. The unity between Arabic territories would only be successful in combination with freedom and socialism. Freedom was perceived as freedom from foreign domination in military, political or cultural means.[52] This seems to be a paradox, as Aflaq with his western education had read European literature and philosophical ideas. However, he never acknowledged the influence of Western thinkers and even claimed to have stopped following the thoughts of western currents after the beginning of World War II.[53] Socialism, according to the Ba'ath, was the needed response on the concentration of wealth and power held by elites. Furthermore, true unity could only be accomplished when the population served as a cornerstone and not via a top-down approach by politicians. Still, Van Dam argues that unity was identified as a priority because it was the first word in the slogan.[54] Also, during the Fifth National Congress of the Ba'ath was declared that the goal of an Arabic unity was the strongest purpose of the party's existence.[55] The idea of Arab unity, nationalism and its relation to religion is further examined in the next part.

Arab nationalism and the Islam

Aflaq's definition of the concept Arab nationalism was very comprehensive. In one of his essays (1940), he wrote:

> 'Nationalism is spiritual and all-embracing, in the sense that it opens its arms to and spreads its wings over all those who have shared with the Arabs their history and have lived in the environment of their language and culture for generations, so that they have become Arab in thought and feeling.'[56]

This implied that nationalism was inclusive and not confined to the borders of a state but instead could appeal to all Arabs. Torrey argues that Aflaq indeed denounced Arab nationalism that was restricted to state nationalism and thereby divided the Arabs. He also was an opponent of so-called racial nationalism that would claim the Arabs to be superior and, therefore, would be of no difference than Nazism. On the other hand, the Ba'ath did not assert to be international but was

[52] Documents of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party, *Nidal al-Ba'th* (The Struggle of the Ba'th), (Bayrut, 1964), p. 63 in: N. Van Dam, "De Ba'th ideologie, Deel I: De orthodoxe richting van Aflaq." *Internationale Spectator*, 25 (1971): 4, 391.
[53] Al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear,* 184.
[54] Seale, *Asad,* 31; Van Dam, "De Ba'th ideologie," 391.
[55] Documents of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party, *Nidal al-Ba'th* (The Struggle of the Ba'th), (Bayrut, 1964), p. 63 in: Van Dam, "De Ba'th ideologie," 391.
[56] M. Aflaq, "Nationalism Is Love before Everything Else" (1940) in: S.G. Haim, *Arab Nationalism: an Anthology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 243.

restricted to the Arab world.[57] Aflaq also acknowledged a racial aspect in the sense that Arab nationalism put a sacred emphasis on the Arab race.[58]

An important difference with western nationalism according to Aflaq was that in the west they attempted to separate nationalism from religion. As he put it, this made sense because religion entered Europe from the outside and was 'foreign to its nature and history'. However, the opposite was true for the Arabs as the Islam for them was merged with their view on life, personality and language. While this seemed to be a controversy, there also was a place in the Arab nation for the Christian Arabs. As there was nothing else equal to Arabism, Aflaq envisioned the Arab Christians to immerse themselves in the Islam as a national culture that they could understand and love.[59] Supportive to his view, Aflaq stated that religion tended to divide people while there were no fundamental differences between religions.[60] Nationalism and religion were no opposites but instead worked supportively of each other since both flowed 'from the heart' and issued 'from the will of God'.[61]

An interesting aspect of the Ba'ath was that it implied a separation of religion and the state while many of the Arab countries declared Islam as the state religion. However, despite his Christian background, Aflaq recognised the Islam as an element in Arab nationalism but it had to conform and subordinate itself to the secular movement. Gordon Torrey, who was a professorial lecturer in Advanced International Studies, stressed that Aflaq had put himself in a difficult position since the Arab culture also entailed Islam. However, the Islam needed to adapt to 'meet the requirements of the new age'.[62] Also, Van Dam indeed contends that the Ba'athist position towards religion was vague. The Ba'ath constitution did not mention the Islam at all.[63] In a speech (1943) that Aflaq held at the University of Damascus on the occasion of the day of birth of the prophet Muhammad, he addressed the relationship between Arabism and Islam. He stated that the Islamic movement, embodied in the life of the Prophet, was not just simply a historical event but was 'directly linked with the absolute life of Arabs'. However, according to Aflaq, for hundreds of years, the Arabs had been reading the story of the Prophet without properly understanding it. As Aflaq put it, a strong passion was needed to comprehend it and thus a prerequisite to live and experience the Arab spirit the Prophet embodied.[64] Interestingly, Aflaq

[57] G.H. Torrey, "The Ba'th: Ideology and Practice" *Middle East Journal*, 23 (1969): 4, 449.
[58] M. Aflaq, "Nationalism Is Love before Everything Else" (1940) in: Haim, *Arab Nationalism,* 243.
[59] "Syrian Michel Aflaq Addresses the Relationship Between Arabism and Islam" (1943) in: Khater, *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*, 134-5.
[60] M. Aflaq, "Fi Sabil al-Ba'th" (1959) in: Torrey, "The Ba'th: Ideology and Practice," 449-50.
[61] M. Aflaq, "Nationalism Is Love before Everything Else" (1940) in: Haim, *Arab Nationalism,* 243.
[62] M. Aflaq, "Fi Sabil al-Ba'th" (1959) in: Torrey, "The Ba'th: Ideology and Practice," 449-50.
[63] Van Dam, "De Ba'th ideologie," 397.
[64] "Syrian Michel Aflaq Addresses the Relationship Between Arabism and Islam" (1943) in: Khater, *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*, 131-2.

made the life of the Prophet identifiable for every Arab. 'Any man - no matter how limited his ability- can be a miniature version of Muhammad (…) as long as this man is a member of the nation that Muhammad gathered all of his forces to (…).[65] This can be explained by Aflaq's recognition of the intimate link between Arabism and Islam. The story of Islam could not be separated from the Arab lands: the language of Islam was Arabic and the virtues that the Islam advocated were inherent Arab virtues. For Aflaq, this did not imply that the Islam was bounded to the Arab world only but was 'in its reality Arab and in its ideal humanistic.' The need of a strong Arab nation along with its virtues, morals and talents, was framed as a necessity because only therein the Islam could be embodied.[66] However, during the Fourth National Congress of the Ba'ath party in 1960, new guidelines on nationalism were determined. The Islam, or any religion in general, was not adopted in Arab nationalism as Aflaq had proclaimed earlier on. During the congress was declared that the secular aspect of the Ba'ath needed to be emphasized in order to polarise based on nationhood instead of sectarian groups. It was decided that the Ba'ath did not want any interference of religion in political affairs.[67]

Pan-Arabism

The constitution of the Ba'ath party, adopted in April 1947, states that 'the Arabs form one nation' as 'no Arab country can live apart from the others.' It also mentions that the Arab land belongs to the Arabs and that they alone have the right to manage it.[68] This implies that any non-Arab involvement in governance affairs was disapproved. Furthermore, one of the clauses defines the Arab as one 'whose language is Arabic, who has lived on Arab soil, or who, after having been assimilated to Arab life, has faith in his belonging to the Arab nation.'[69] This definition implied that being an Arab is not a fixed identity as one did not have to be born on Arab soil but could assimilate into the Arab culture and language. The Ba'athist definition of the Arab, therefore, seems to be very inclusive. However, as Bengio rightly points out, the Kurds, due to their different language and culture, did not fit into this definition.[70] Though, one of the articles also expresses its belief that any differences among 'its sons are accidental and unimportant. They will all disappear with the awakening of the Arab consciousness.'[71] The Arab fatherland, inhabited by 'the Arab nation', was specifically demarcated as the territory that stretched 'from the Taurus

[65] Ibid.,132.
[66] Ibid., 133-4.
[67] Van Dam, De Ba'th ideologie, 398-9.
[68] "The Constitution of the Ba'th Party" (1947) in: Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, 233.
[69] Ibid., 236.
[70] Bengio, *Saddam's Word*, 36.
[71] "The Constitution of the Ba'th Party" (1947) in: Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, 233.

Mountain, the Pocht-i-Kouh Mountains, the Gulf of Basra, the Arab Ocean, the Ethiopian Mountains, the Sahara, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean."[72]

In 1958 an attempt for a pan-Arabic union was made with the creation of the United Arab Republic (UAR), the unification of Syria and Egypt into one single state. Syrian Ba'athist politicians took this initiative because they were afraid that the communist movement in their country wanted to overthrow their regime. By approaching the Egyptian President Nasser about the Syrian-Egyptian merger, they hoped to maintain their dominance. However, when the formation came into practice, Egypt soon became dominant whereas the Ba'athists only had little to say. Syrian rebellions against their Egyptian commanders followed and led to the end of the UAR in 1961.[73] According to Van Dam, the party programme of the Ba'ath lacked a well thought and thorough plan on how the Arabic unity needed to be achieved and what it entailed. This also partly explains why the UAR could not continue to exist. Afterwards, instead of a union, ideas about a federal union or cooperation between progressive Arab states occurred.[74] While Aflaq was involved in the creation of the UAR, the driver behind the attempt to unite Arab countries did not only seem to be motivated by the fundamental idea of uniting the Arab people, as he formulated, but also by power.

Nonetheless, the UAR failure was regarded as a remarkable development. Apparently, the combination of Nasser's leadership and the Ba'ath doctrine could pave the way to achieving an Arab union.[75] Sassoon, however, argued that the UAR collapse made many Ba'athists in Syria resent from the idea of Arab unity. Also, the Iraqi Ba'ath party recognised that unity could not be achieved in the way Aflaq formulated it.[76] Hence, as we will see in the next chapter, unity remained only a slogan. The aftermath of the UAR failure also turned out to have unpleasant consequences for Aflaq. As a precondition for entering the UAR, The Syrian Ba'ath party agreed to dissolve itself, hoping that their position would consolidate by the distribution of senior party members in Syria. Instead, the exploitation of Syria by Egypt led to the rise of different Ba'athist factions. Many of those were very critical of Aflaq, the influential thinker of the Syrian Ba'ath party, for accepting the UAR and dissolving the Syrian Ba'ath party. In March 1963, one of these factions took power, followed by another coup within the Ba'ath in 1966 and 1970. The Ba'athist regime of 1966 disowned Aflaq and Bitar which caused the split between the Syrian and Iraqi branches of the party. Aflaq fled Syria and became based in Baghdad where the Iraqi Ba'ath party came to power in 1968. When the Iraqi Ba'ath party seized control in 1968, Aflaq was appointed

[72] Ibid., 236.
[73] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 292 & 304.
[74] Van Dam, "De Ba'th ideologie," 392.
[75] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 304.
[76] Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*, 9.

secretary-general of the all-Arab Ba'ath leadership in Iraq where the Ba'athists remained loyal to him.[77] However, as Patrick Seale, a former journalist and author on the Middle East, stated: 'a quarter of a century of teaching and struggle, the life's work of the Arab world's most celebrated political theorist, ended in exile and disgrace.'[78]

The Ba'ath in Iraq

As mentioned before, the Ba'ath was not founded in Iraq but Syria. The Ba'ath in Iraq became a formal party in 1952 as a branch of the Syrian party.[79] At that time, the party had around one hundred members, and even just before the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958, the number of members barely exceeded three hundred people.[80] It is important to note that Aflaq's doctrine in Syria did not gain attraction for his generation but the next. His followers consisted of pupils he taught and later on classes of students who passed on the doctrines to new generations. His traits of personal honesty and being satisfied with a simple life appealed to many of the younger generations. The way he preached the revival of the Arab pride and revival inspired the youngsters and helped to promote the ideas of Arab nationalism and resurrection. Regarding his view of Islam, the audience also needed to consist of youngsters who were educated in schools influenced by Europe and America and to whom the traditional Islamic practices and beliefs were not that relevant.[81] In general, it was the Iraqi Shia's that opposed the idea of Pan-Arabism because they would become a marginalised minority in an Arab union. Also, the minority group of Kurds threatened that if Iraq would enter an Arab union, they would demand an independent Kurdish state.[82]

Interestingly, concerning Iraq, Van Dam points to the combination of Shia's and Sunni's in major factions before 1963, and the secular association that bound Sunni and Shia Arab nationalist youth to a certain extent.[83] Until 1966, the members of the Ba'ath National Command and Regional Commands consisted mainly of Shia's because many of those early Ba'ath leaders belonged to that community. This composition changed after the Ba'ath took power in 1968 and an overwhelming majority of people from Sunni populated regions like Takrit, Samarra, and Ana were represented in the party and government. This not only confirmed the Sunni dominance of

[77] Bengio, *Saddam's Word*, 49; Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 436; Seale, *Asad,* 97-102; M. Farouk-Sluglett, & P. Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 56-7 & 89-90.
[78] Seale, Asad, 102.
[79] Al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, 183.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Devlin, *The Ba'th party,* 23-5; Seale, *Asad*, 98.
[82] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 304.
[83] N. Van Dam, "Middle Eastern Political Clichés: "Takriti" and "Sunni rule" in Iraq; "Alawi rule" in Syria." *Orient,* 21 (1980): 1, 46.

Iraq but also the shift from 'political leaders from big-city families to provincials.'[84] Van Dam explains that the number of Shia dropped since 1968 because many of them supported the Shia Iraqi regional secretary general of the Ba'ath, Ali Salih al-Sadi. Together with some other Shia party leaders, both military and civilian sections of the Ba'ath party were filled with Shia. However, due to a conflict with the military Ba'athist, al-Sadi was ousted from the party. As many of the members were admitted via personal circles by which personal factionalism consolidated, many Shia members were purged out of the party. Besides, an increase in discriminatory policies after 1963 applied to the Shia population. This was not determined because of sectarianism or the fact that so many Sunni Ba'athist shared the same tribe or town of origin. Instead, this situation was a continuation of the earlier Iraqi monarchy in which director generals of police assisted 'their kinsfolk and clansmen into service under their control'.[85] Until 1966, the composition of the Iraqi Ba'ath party members demonstrated the potential realisation of the Ba'ath inclusiveness Aflaq referred to. However, other aspects like personal factionalism seemed to overrule this idea in practice.

Concluding remarks

With the help of education and Aflaq's appeal, the Ba'athist ideology attracted young Arabs of the post-independence era with its revolutionary ideas on the revival of the Arab spirit, the glorification of the Arab history and pan-Arabism. Its secularist character was captured in the idea of separation between religion and government. However, the Islam was viewed as inherent to Arabism in which not only Muslims could and should take pride but also the Christians, supported by Aflaq's view that there were no fundamental differences between religions. The Ba'ath also presented an inclusive and fluid concept of the Arab man. Aflaq, with his Greek and Orthodox Christian background, would thus be able to identify himself as an Arab. Concerning Iraqi's ethnic and religious challenges, the Ba'ath seemed to present the perfect formula to create transcending nationhood. However, there was a possible racial aspect concerning the idea of sacred Arabs and the greatness of the Arab culture that could create an us-them division with other peoples. Also, after attempting to put Aflaq's envisioned Arab unity into practice, the failure of the UAR led to the adjustment of the pan-Arabic idea and a decrease in its appeal. Furthermore, while the Iraqi Ba'ath party attracted both Shia and Sunni Arab Muslims, again put in reality, other factors stood in the way of keeping its diverse support.

[84] Devlin, *The Ba'th party,* 343-4.
[85] Van Dam, "Middle Eastern Political Clichés," 46-7.

To what extent these Ba'athist thoughts influenced the Saddam-regime and if they were implemented will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: The Saddam-Hussein regime

The ascendance of the Saddam-regime

After an attempt in 1963, the Ba'ath party in Iraq formally came to power in July 1968 when its allies toppled the Arif-regime. A new government in which Hasan al-Bakr seized power was established. Al-Bakr (1941-1982) was a former military officer and had been the prime minister of the Arif-regime. He came from the town Takrit like Saddam Hussein (1937-2006) and both were even related. Saddam belonged to the Sunni Arab community and became a member of the Ba'ath party in 1957. After his involvement in an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Qasim (1959), who was President at that time, he fled the country. On his return in 1963, Saddam was imprisoned for two years and carried out Ba'ath party duties underground since the party was enlisted as banned opposition from 1963-1968.[86]

The Bakr-regime was consolidated by appointing Ba'ath loyalists and associates from Takrit to higher ranks or key positions in the government's organisations. Next to that, Bakr created the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) in 1968, an inner circle of associates that comprised of the main decision-making body in Iraq. Saddam became a political strongman by Bakr's appointments as secretary general of the Ba'ath party, the chairman of the RCC, and commander in chief of the armed forces while lacking a military background. Moreover, Saddam held the position as head of a complex network of security agencies that provided him with information to control all functionaries of the government. By the early 1970's, Saddam emerged as the driving force behind the regime and worked effectively together with Bakr. When Bakr resigned in 1979, Saddam immediately succeeded him as President while keeping his previous assigned positions. In the years that followed, Hussein became the sole ruler with absolute power.[87]

According to Faust, Saddam's Ba'athism did not reflect the original Ba'athist thoughts. There were some differences compared to the Ba'athism practised in Syria but also because Saddam's personality cult played a significant role in the Ba'ath. Hence, Faust referred to 'Husseini Ba'athism'.[88] Moreover, Sassoon contends that the party's ideology on unity, freedom and socialism was 'malleable'. This was reflected in Saddam's flexibility in changing policies that could sometimes result in 'a complete reversal of his declared beliefs and actions.'[89] These changes were, among others, a response to the events of the Iran-Iraq War. Throughout this chapter,

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[86] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 425; Farouk-Sluglett, & Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958,* 110.
[87] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 414 & 424-6; A. Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 155.
[88] A.M. Faust, *The Ba'thification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Totalitarianism*, (New York: University of Texas Press), 36.
[89] Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party,* 7-10.

Saddam's adaptability, as a response to internal and external events, of Ba'athist policies will come forward. Before delving into Saddam's policies and thoughts, a brief overview of the Iranian Revolution, the subsequent Iran-Iraq War (1980-8) and the Gulf Crisis (1990-1) is provided. These events are important in understanding the Middle East region, the societal dynamics in Iraq, and Saddam's policies and his relation to the Iraqi people.[90]

The historical context of the Saddam-regime

In the same year that Hussein ascended to the presidency (1979), the Shah of Iran was overthrown by a revolution inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini. He came to power in the new Shia regime: the Islamic Republic of Iran. The emerging tensions between Iraq and Iran came from a long-standing cultural rivalry between the Arab and Persian civilisations: the struggle for power in the Gulf region and the ideological collision between theocratic Iran and secular-socialistic Iraq. According to Cleveland, the biggest challenge posed by Khomeini to the Iraqi regime was his direct appeal to the Iraqi Shia to overthrow the Saddam-regime. The Iranian leader had singled out Saddam and his so-called 'infidel Ba'ath party' as enemies of the Islam. Saddam decided to aim at overthrowing the Khomeini-regime and received support from countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the US. In September 1980, Hussein invaded Iran and started a war that cost hundreds of billions of dollars and led to hundreds of thousands of casualties. When an UN-sponsored cease-fire took effect in 1988, neither Iran or Iraq had achieved its objectives. Saddam had only strengthened Khomeini's government, and Iraq was left with a huge debt and 105,000 deadly casualties.[91]

Another important event for Iraq was the Gulf Crisis of 1990-1. In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait and declared that Kuwait had been annexed as the nineteenth province of Iraq after six days. The event was a culmination of longstanding and more recent disputes between Iraq and Kuwait. Demarcated by British officials in 1923, Iraq never recognised the legitimacy of their border with Kuwait. The direct reason for the invasion was the Iraqi accusation that Kuwait stole oil from a field on the border of both countries. However, concerning the debts mentioned above, Iraq was highly interested in the rich and prosperous oil state and its strategic access to the Persian Gulf. Whereas the Iran-Iraq War only received international attention, Iraq's invasion in Kuwait led to the involvement of external powers. The UN Security Council condemned the annexation, imposed economic sanctions, and enforced Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. While the US supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, it now prompted a coalition to contain the Saddam-regime. The so-called Operation Desert Shield led to the stationing of the US-led coalition forces

[90] Badie, *After Saddam*, 57-8.
[91] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 431-5.

in Saudi-Arabia. Besides the latter, also other Gulf monarchies aligned with the US as they feared that Saddam's interventionist move. When the UN deadline of 15 January passed without Iraqi withdrawal, the war against Iraq started. In February (1991), Kuwait was proclaimed liberated by the US. The operation came to a halt and in April a cease-fire was accepted by all parties. Whereas Saddam remained in power, the persistent international sanctions after the Gulf War debilitated the Iraqi economy and influenced the societal dynamics.[92] Nonetheless, the Ba'ath party under Saddam was able to survive this unrest. The remainder of this chapter discusses to what extent and how the Ba'athists political thoughts on Arab unity and religion were implemented during the Saddam-regime. Furthermore, the Ba'athist network of the Saddam-regime is examined. In the concluding remarks, these findings are compared with the conclusions of the first chapter to examine to what extent Aflaq's Ba'athists thoughts were reflected in the Saddam-regime.

Saddam's view and policies on pan-Arabism

According to Cleveland and Tripp, Professor of Politics with reference to the Middle East, the pan-Arab nationalist rhetoric diluted under the Saddam-regime. While the idea was adhered to by some Ba'athists and other people in Iraq as an ideal, the Saddam-regime prioritised Iraqi sovereignty and the organisation within its territorial state. Especially with the increase of government's revenues after the rise of oil prices in the 1970s, the trend to 'place Iraq first' became more apparent. The Arab world became viewed as a stage on which Iraq could obtain supremacy complemented by the stature of Saddam himself.[93] Bengio contends that the Iraqi people were viewed as 'part of the Arab umma', for which they also served as a 'revolutionary base'. This revolutionary claim also pointed out the leading role for Iraq in the Arab revival.[94]

That Saddam considered it to be Iraq's historical destiny to lead the Arab world can be derived from the transcript of an internal meeting with his advisors between September 1980 and November 1981. At that time, Saddam explained that Iraq had an 'imposed' responsibility of leadership to 'raise the Arab Nation'. He motivated this by several qualifications. Iraq had 'the depth in its civilisation', 'the depth in the population density', 'the material capabilities as well as the historical events to support it.' Especially the importance of Baghdad, with its historical role during the Islamic era, was highlighted. Saddam even stated it was 'no one else but Iraq' that was tasked with the 'central support post of the Arab nation.' 'If Iraq falls, then the

[92] Badie, *After Saddam*, 60; Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 445-2; F.G.I. Gause, "The Gulf War as Arab Civil War." In: *The Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered*, ed. A.J. Bacevich and E. Inbar (London: Routledge, 2003), 56-7.
[93] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 436; C. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 193.
[94] Bengio, *Saddam's Word*, 35-6.

entire Arab nation will fall."[95] This document demonstrates the unique and revolutionary role Iraq was supposed to have in the pan-Arab mission. It also seems in line with Aflaq's take on the needed revolutionary base by highlighting the Arab history and its people.

As a result, Iraqi patriotism became harnessed in the party's ideology. To make the Iraqi people aware of their history, Saddam promoted archaeological work. The historical inheritance of Mesopotamia, the ancient culture of Babylonians and Sumerians, and local folklore was exploited for the party's ideology and supported the uniqueness of Iraq in the Arab and Muslim world.[96] Also, Badie argues that the Saddam-regime cultivated national mythology that merged any sectarian divide under the banner of Arab nationalism centred around Saddam. The "Mesopotamian myth" was used to allege historical ties linked all Iraqis together regardless of their ethnicity.[97] Arab heroes from both Sunni and Shia history were considered equal in Ba'athist ideology.[98] Outside the Iraqi Ba'ath Party was involved in helping plant Ba'ath branches in Arab countries as well to gather intelligence. According to Sassoon, Saddam reasoned that Iraqi members should help 'Ba'ath organisations in neighbouring countries but that it would be preferable to have local leaders once they obtained the right 'qualifications and characteristics.'[99] Badie states that Saddam followed 'the doctrine that the territoriality and politically divided Arab countries were merely regions of a collective entity called 'the Arab Nation'"[100]

The influence of the Iran-Iraq war becomes apparent from a meeting (circa 1988) between Saddam and inter alia Tariq Aziz, the Christian Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister (1979-2003) and Saddam's right-hand man. Aziz explained how imperialists fostered disunity in the Arab world. He mentioned the dissatisfaction among the Arabs and Arab Ba'athists about the Sykes-Picot agreement and the efforts that were made to bypass it. By any means, 'a second and third time in a new form of Sykes-Picot on a sectarian basis' needed to be avoided. Aziz also referred to the Iranian regime that was considered a dangerous threat as it attempted to divide the Iraqi society. Besides, Khomeini intended to divide 'the Arab Nation into segments that would be difficult to reunite'. It was undesirable that the structure of the Arab Nation would cease to exist, or even the situation at that time in which the Middle East was divided into separate countries. Aziz stated that 'several nations throughout history would have collapsed (…) had it not been for the Iraqi's who

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[95] "Saddam Claims that Iraq's History and Scientific Expertise Uniquely Qualify it to Lead the Arab Nation but Expresses Concern that Israel will Seek to Stem the Arabs' Ascent" (between September 1980 and November 1981) in: K. Woods, D. Palkki & M. Stout (Eds.), *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime, 1978–2001,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 121-2.
[96] Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party,* 61.
[97] Badie, *After Saddam*, 58-9; S. Mackey, *The Reckoning: Iraq and the Legacy of Saddam Hussein*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2002), 256. In: Badie, *After Saddam*, 59.
[98] Van Dam, "Middle Eastern Political Clichés," 45.
[99] Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party,* 42.
[100] Badie, *After Saddam*, 56-7.

played a great role in their stand to save the Arab Nation.' Therein, he mentioned the great role in this and the leadership of the Ba'ath party.[101] In January 1989, Saddam also expressed his thoughts on the need for unification between the Arab States during a discussion with his advisers. At this time, the Iran-Iraq War had ended, and interestingly Saddam mentioned the importance of Arab national security. He stated that 'every threat to any Arab state should bind all Arabs to unite.'[102] From these sources can be derived that Saddam saw the benefits and importance of pan-Arabism, although these seemed motivated by Iraqi security concerns.

Saddam's instrumentalisation of religion

Since the Ba'ath came to power in 1968, tensions between the Ba'athist regime and the Islamists of all currents had been high. Already in the 1970s, before his presidency, Saddam was afraid that the promotion of religion would empower religious leaders.[103] In 1977, Saddam wrote about the relationship between Islam and politics. While distancing himself from atheism, Saddam also stated that 'our [Ba'ath] party is with faith, but is not a religious party, nor should it be one.'[104] Furthermore, he regarded the sharia as 'unsuitable for contemporary times'.[105] Helfont contends that Saddam's view on the Islam was influenced by the Ba'athists version on the Islam, formulated by Aflaq. However, Saddam's Sunni background was of influence on his take on the Islam. It made him more open to instrumentalising Islamic legal concepts and more comfortable with Islamic rituals like visiting mosques and praying. Still, Saddam quoted Aflaq in public and private sphere, and Aflaq's ideas 'formed the basis of Ba'athist conceptions of religion in Iraq' despite small differences. Therefore, Helfont copied Faust's definition of 'Husseini Ba'athism for this religious matter: it emphasised Arabism, the belief in God and practices that Ba'athists considered traditional religious rituals.[106] The Islam was regarded as an inherent element of Ba'athism in the same way as discussed in chapter 1.

Already before the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam began infiltrating the Iraqi mosques to ensure that the proclaimed version of Islam would be in line with the Ba'athist one. Furthermore, it enabled Saddam to gain control of Iraqi's religious landscape.[107] When the Iranian revolution took place (1979), Saddam feared Khomeini's threat to his Sunni political dominance

[101] "Tariq Aziz Explains How Imperialists have Fostered Disunity in the Arab World" (circa 1988) in: Woods, Palkki & Stout, *The Saddam Tapes,* 123-4.
[102] "Saddam and His Advisers Discuss Economic and Political Unification Efforts in Europe, and the Need for Arab States to Similarly Unify to Expand their Influence and Face Foreign Threats" (January 1989) in: Woods, Palkki & Stout, *The Saddam Tapes,* 124-5.
[103] Hashim, *The Caliphate at War,* 35; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion,* 12.
[104] S. Hussein, *On History, Heritage and Religion,* (Baghdad, 1981), 24. In: Hashim, *The Caliphate at War,* 36.
[105] Hashim, *The Caliphate at War,* 36.
[106] Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion,* 23-28.
[107] Ibid., 23.

and Ba'athist secularism that was needed to hold Iraq together. The threat of a Shia-inspired revolution in Iraq was worrisome. As a response, Saddam enforced secular nationalism through silencing both Shia and Sunni clerics or demanding their public support for his regime. Throughout the Iran-Iraq War, the Saddam-regime subsequently established religious institutions with leaders loyal to Saddam and represented an ideologically acceptable interpretation of Islam as an Arab religion.[108] While it may seem a paradox that Saddam's oppressing religious policies also applied to Sunni clerics because of his Sunni-regime, Helfont explains that the Saddam-regime needed a Ba'athist interpretation of Islam that was also acceptable for the Shia population.[109] This was especially important during the Iran-Iraq War, as the majority of Saddam's army during the 1980's consisted mainly of Shia's.[110]

Bengio argues that Saddam needed to use Islamic terminology to counter Iran's appeal to the Iraqi (Shia) population. The Ba'athist slogan appeared not to be sufficient to motivate the Iraqi soldiers. Therefore, among others, the slogan *Allah al-Akbar* (God is great) became frequently used throughout the 1980s and in particular during the Gulf War. While the words did not appear in the Quran, they were central to Muslim life and used to give thanks to God. Besides, after the beginning of the war against Iran, Saddam announced to some of his soldiers that it was 'the day of your *jihad*.' The term coincided with the 'Arab-Muslim concept of liberation war.'[111] Besides the tactical use of Islamic jargon, Saddam also potential cooperations with religious groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. This can be derived from a closed meeting of Saddam and Ba'ath party members from all the Arab countries in 1986. Here, Saddam explained that Islamists could 'consider any state as a non-Islamic state in an unaware [uneducated] community, including our current state in Iraq'. In the meeting, Saddam proposed dialoguing with the Islamists in a way that would not enable them to accuse them of being apostasy and to avoid 'a clash with the religious current in the Arab homeland'. [112] While not neglecting that the Ba'ath doctrine was completely different than the one of the Muslim Brotherhood, Saddam proposed a bargain in which the Ba'ath would stop criticising a religious state while the Muslim Brotherhood would stop talking about it for example. Concerning the Iraqi enemy Iran, it was required to handle the religious currents with flexibility and prevent Iran from winning them over as allies.[113] This meeting illustrates the strong strategic and rational considerations made by Saddam and other Ba'athist

[108] Badie, *After Saddam*, 58; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion,* 12.
[109] Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion,* 57 & 68
[110] Ibid., 57; Tripp, *A History of Iraq,* 234.
[111] Bengio, *Saddam's Word*, 184-191.
[112] Conflict Records Research Center, "Saddam Hussein and Ba'ath Party Members Discussing the Status of the Party in the Arab World and Potential Cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood" (July 24, 1986), 2.
[113] Conflict Records Research Center, "Saddam Hussein and Ba'ath Party Members Discussing the Status of the Party in the Arab World and Potential Cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood" (July 24, 1986), 4-5.

leaders, instead of religiously motivated reasoning of supporting religious currents like the Muslim Brotherhood. Although Saddam used expressions of belief in Islam during private conversations, he seemingly did so in line with the Ba'athist interpretation. For example, in the last month of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam stated, 'to end the war with the Iranians broken and our army strengthened by God, able to end this war', and 'we have truly been able to be the victors in our dependence on God.'[114] Furthermore, in 1989 and 1991, the Iraqi newspaper *Al-Thawra* quoted Saddam: 'every believing Muslim is a Ba'athi, even if he does not belong to the party.'[115] This fusion of the Islam and Ba'ath into one identity was also something that Aflaq had proclaimed.

During the Gulf War, jihad was understood as Muslim Iraq against the 'infidel Christian world' led by the US.[116] According to Gregory Gause, Professor of International Affairs, Saddam aimed at mobilising support in the region by using Arabist and Islamist rhetoric. Saddam not only used Islamic themes but also linked the Gulf crisis to the Palestinian cause by making an offer to consider withdrawal from Kuwait if Israel would withdraw from the occupied Arab territory. Especially the use of religious symbols and rhetoric was deemed cynical by Gause. Saddam used Quranic passages in his speeches to portray himself as a devoted Muslim. Furthermore, in January 1991, he added the slogan *Allah al-Akbar* to the Iraqi flag.[117] Moreover, Saddam introduced *Hamla al-Imanitta* (1991), meaning 'return to faith', in which he appealed to Islamic values.[118] This included, among many things, banning the public consumption of alcohol, valorising Islamic teachings in mosques and schools and reintroducing the call for prayer in the Iraqi media. However, according to Gerges, these policies were motivated by tactics instead of sincerity. The 1990's showed more Shia and Sunni religious activism as a response to the worsening socioeconomic conditions since the Gulf crisis. As Saddam understood that many Iraqi's visited mosques during hard times, he tried to present himself as a pious Muslim. However, during a discussion with one of his advisors, Saddam stated 'I do not like those who engage in politics under the guise of religion. I don't trust them.'[119] Therefore, Saddam remained 'a staunch nationalist and did not alter the ideological foundation of the Ba'athist ruling party.'[120] The latter argument is supported by Bengio and Helfont, who contends that Saddam kept regarding nationalism and the Islam as essentially the same.[121]

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[114] "Saddam Recounts Some of His Favorite War Stories during the Last Month of the Conflict" (between 18 July – 20 August 1988) in: Woods, Palkki & Stout, *The Saddam Tapes,* 162.
[115] *Al-Thawra*, (12 December, 1989 & 25 September, 1991) in: Bengio, *Saddam's Word*, 35.
[116] Bengio, *Saddam's Word,* 35.
[117] Gause, "The Gulf War as Arab Civil War," 60-1.
[118] Mabon & Royle, *The Origins of ISIS*, 100-1.
[119] "Saddam and Military Officials Discussing Reorganizing the Intelligence Service" (January 14, 2001) in Woods, Palkki & Stout, *The Saddam Tapes,* 84.
[120] Gerges, *ISIS. A History*, 61-2.
[121] Bengio, *Saddam's Word,* 176; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion,* 181-201.

Saddam's policies on sectarianism and network

After two devastating wars, the Iraqi population was angered by the Saddam-regime, holding his regime responsible for the following socioeconomic problems. It resulted in a rebellion sparked in the Shia south and that soon spread to the Kurds in the north. The demonstrators attacked Ba'ath party buildings, headquarters of the secret police and killed Ba'athist officials. However, because of the lack of organisation and leadership, the Iraqi military was able to crush the rebellion and execute its participants in March (1991).[122] According to Hassan and Weis, this event was notorious in the repression that the Shia had to endure during the Saddam-regime. The authors, therefore, see a parallel between Hussein and ISIS in their hatred of the Shia. However, they stress the difference in scale and possible different ideas behind it. As Shia's were tolerated in the higher ranks in the Saddam-regime, ISIS vied the Shia as 'religiously void' and 'only marked for death'.[123]

Hashim indeed argues that the relation between the Shia community and the Ba'ath regime were tense since 1968.[124] However, Shia's were not the only ones that were suppressed during the Saddam-regime. The Kurds were also brutally suppressed, and despite being a Sunni, Saddam also crushed Sunni Islamists factions for example. Instead of 'overt personal sectarianism', it was a matter of 'his perceived need to maintain absolute control.' Anyone who openly expressed sectarian loyalties at the expense of common ethnicity Saddam attempted to proclaim a common ethnicity became a victim of Saddam's violent campaign.[125] Although Saddam primarily targeted Shia's, the reasoning of Hassan and Weis seems to overlook the other oppressed groups in Iraq which weakens their argument.

As aforementioned, 'the importance of the Ba'ath ideology to the unification of Iraq cannot be overstated.'[126] It was also forbidden for Ba'athists to use sectarian language.[127] While Saddam's regime appeared to be sectarian because of its Sunni minority rule, he instead appointed people based on trust and loyalty. Consequently, his family and tribal network from his birthplace Takrit were numerously represented in his regime. They were assigned positions in the higher ranks of inter alia Iraqi security services and the army. This also partly explained why Saddam was able to remain in power for from respectively 1968-2003.[128] According to Mabon and Royle, the Iraqi military had been dominated by Sunnis. The years after 1958, 70 per cent of all the officers in the

[122] Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 450-2.
[123] Weiss & Hassan, *ISIS. Inside the Army of Terror*, 119.
[124] Hashim, *The Caliphate at War,* 35.
[125] Badie, *After Saddam*, 58-61.
[126] Badie, *After Saddam*, 60.
[127] Ibid.; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion,* 55-6.
[128] Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion,* 56; Tripp, *A History of Iraq,* 193; B. Reich, *Political Leaders of the Contemporary Middle East and North Africa: a Biographical Dictionary*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990), 242.

army comprised of Sunnis, 20 per cent Shia and 10 per cent of Kurds and other minorities.[129] The Ba'ath Party Secretariat also stressed the importance of the Ba'ath members being originally Arab because those who were not could be a potential danger for the party in the future. After the start of the war with Iran, the Party also decided not to grant membership to people with an Iranian nationality anymore.[130] However, over time, higher numbers of Shia were appointed to high-ranking posts in the Ba'ath party and armed forces since Saddam was concerned with Shia loyalty.[131]

Concluding remarks

While Saddam spoke of the Arab nation, the strong pan-Arabic thought as Aflaq formulated was not present. Instead of the genuine thought of uniting the Arab people, Saddam possibly used the Arab unification rhetoric to gain support for his war against Iran and Kuwait or to expand his power. Furthermore, the emphasis on the uniqueness of Iraq in the Arab history implied a sense of superiority instead of the equality of the Arab people. However, both revolutionary and glorifying elements point to overlap with Aflaq's thought. Also, Saddam seemed obligated to create the sense of oneness among the Iraqi population due to inter alia the threat of the Iranian revolution that threatened to create a Shia division. The national ideology that was used put pan-Arabism central and aimed to unite all sectarian and religious groups. Besides, the identity of being a Ba'athi was intermingled with the Islam, in accordance to what Aflaq stated. Saddam therewith envisioned an Arab identity to which all people could belong, whether they were Christian, Sunni or Shia. However, the Saddam-regime did not refrain from using brutal and violent oppression of the people who revolted against the regime, displayed sectarian loyalties or proclaimed religion in a way that was not in accordance with the Ba'athist guidelines. The secularist character was also captured because the Saddam-regime separated religion and government. While an increase of Islamic repertoires throughout the years was evident, these did not subordinate the nationalist Arabist thought to the Islam. As shown in the first chapter, Aflaq stated that the Islam should adapt itself to modern times and that was exactly what Saddam did when the Iraqi people showed an increased need for religion over time. Therefore, regardless of the strive towards Arabic unity as Aflaq had intended, the discussed policies and thoughts, although influenced by internal and regional events, seemed to remain in line with the Ba'athist thought.

[129] Mabon & Royle, *The Origins of ISIS*, 64.
[130] Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party,* 44.
[131] Badie, *After Saddam*, 57; Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 455.

Chapter 3: ISIS

The historical context of ISIS

ISIS is a relatively new organisation of which the exact roots are often disputed in academic literature. Some scholars point to the period after the US invasion of Iraq (2003) while others state that *Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (Group of Monotheism and Jihad, JTJ) is the starting point.[132] In both cases, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is the key figure in its history. ISIS had gone through several stages before it reached its present form.

In 1999/2000, JTJ was founded by Zarqawi as a militia in Jordan but operated exclusively from Iraq. Its initial objective was to end the Jordanian monarchy of King Abdullah II that JTJ considered an instrument for Western influence in the Arab world.[133] After the US invasion (2003), JTJ developed into a network that, among other things, aimed at the establishment of an Islamic state and targeted the Shia population, the interim Iraqi government and the US coalition forces. In 2004, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden and JTJ got involved in the al-Qaeda network. A new organisation, *Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*, better known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), was formed. In an attempt to unify Sunni insurgents in Iraq, AQI created an umbrella organisation called the *Mujahideen Shura Council* (MSC) in 2006. However, their violent tactics against civilians undermined its efforts to recruit Iraqi Sunni nationalists and secular groups. In June (2006), Zarqawi was killed, and soon afterwards AQI announced the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) of which Abu Omar al-Baghdadi[134] became the leader. By the end of 2008, ISI was supposedly defeated due to increased US pressure in Iraq. However, when the US started to withdraw its troops from Iraq (2009), ISI began to sabotage government infrastructure and launched attacks against civilians. In 2010, ISI suffered a setback when its top leadership of inter alia Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was killed in a joint US-Iraqi raid. His successor was the notorious leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[135]

In May 2010, Baghdadi[136] became the new leader of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). Under his leadership, many violent acts such as suicide attacks were carried out in 2010 and 2011. By 2012, Baghdadi had rebuilt the organisation substantially and was able to start a campaign called 'Breaking Down the Walls' to liberate Iraqi recruits from prisons overflowing with insurgents and

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[132] Works that point to the period after the US invasion of 2003 are inter alia: Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag,* XIV; Mabon & Royle, *The Origins of ISIS*, 48-9. On the other hand, some scholars argue that ISIS has its origins in JTJ like: A.S. Hashim. "The Islamic State: From Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate". *Middle East Policy*, 11, no. 4 (2014): 70.
[133] Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag,* 87.
[134] Not to be confused with his better-known successor Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.
[135] Hashim, "The Islamic State," 69-73.
[136] Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi from now onwards will be referred to as Baghdadi.

jihadists. That same year, ISI declared an expansion into neighbouring Syria where, after the Arab Springs (2011), a civil war was taking place. Baghdadi sent a number of operatives to set up a new jihadist organisation in Syria. Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani, whom Baghdadi knew from their time in Camp Bucca, a US-led detention camp where radical extremists were detained, became the leader of this insurgent group called Jabhat al-Nusra. Both ISI and al-Nusra were expanding territory in Iraq and Syria. On April 9, 2013, Baghdadi announced the merger of both organisations. He unilaterally established himself as the leader of both organisations, calling the group the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). However, al-Nusra refuted Baghdadi's statement and instead pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda Central and its leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Eventually, Baghdadi's ISIS was able to draw away a great amount of al-Nusra's foreign fighters and quickly became dominant in Syria. Hence, Baghdadi's organisation kept being known as ISIS. The expansion continued and cities including Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq were seized in 2014. On June 29 (2014), Baghdadi announced the reconstitution of the caliphate during a sermon at a Mosul mosque. This new caliphate was called IS because dropping the countries names of Iraq and Syria reflected its 'global claim of dominion'. However, many observers, as does this thesis, still refer to the group as ISIS.[137]

The Ba'athist network in ISIS

Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, who became emir of ISI in 2006, made a start in recruiting ex-Ba'athists from Saddam's army that were willing to 'take on an Islamic character' even though they were previously considered 'secular Sunni's'. [138] Also when his successor Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became the ISI-leader, Moubayed, a Syrian historian and author, contends that 'they [the former Ba'athists] saw no better platform than Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's militia, regardless of whether they agreed with its Islamic programme or not.'[139] Since Baghdadi was looking for experienced personnel to revive the Islamic State, the un-Islamic background of some of the officers did not really matter. The Ba'ath veterans had a lot of military expertise that helped ISIS to boost its activities. As a result, one-third of them comprised of Baghdadi's top 25 commanders.[140] According to Samia Nakhoul, a Middle East News Editor at Reuters, ISIS insiders said Baghdadi was not the most powerful figure in the organisation. Instead, Abu Ali al-Anbari, who was second-in-command in ISIS and a general under Saddam, held the real power. Another key figure was Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, a former military intelligence colonel. Besides their expertise, another advantage of having former

[137] R. Barrett, *The Islamic State*, The Soufan Group, (November 2014), retrieved from: http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf, p. 12-3; Stern & Berger, *ISIS*, 37-8 & 41-7.
[138] Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag*, 104.
[139] Ibid., 107.
[140] Ibid., 106-7; Stern & Berger, *ISIS,* 33-45; Weiss & Hassan, *ISIS. Inside the Army of Terror*, 116-130.

Ba'athist officers in ISIS' leadership was their ability to encourage recruitment among their (big) tribes. This made organising the army way easier than training troops from scratch [141] Furthermore, in July 2014, Baghdadi's 'cabinet' constituted of 'ex-Saddamists' born between 1955 and 1965, who belonged to middle-class Sunni families and were once part of an associate circle of Saddam's son Uday. Next to that, they had lived a wealthy, liberal and secular lifestyle under the Saddam-regime. From this background, they could help obtain revenues via the Iraqi elite and had connections with business figures to acquire weapons. All of these Ba'athists were of use for Baghdadi. [142]

However, the ideology of ISIS has not become clear yet. In order to compare the Ba'ath ideology to the one of ISIS, the remainder of this chapter, therefore, focusses on ISIS' doctrine and its political repertoires.

ISIS' worldview

According to ISIS, the world is divided into two camps: the (Sunni) camp of Islam and faith, and the one of *kufr* (disbelief) which includes respectively the *mujahidin* referring to all the people that are 'led or mobilised by their enemies such as the Jews, US and Russia, and inter alia non-Islamic religions.'[143] Especially the hatred against the US is set out in different issues. It is blamed for killing women and children during its occupation and many more.[144] The last issue specifically clarifies the motivation behind ISIS' hatred and fighting against the west. The reasons mentioned are, among others, the western rejection of oneness of Allah, the secular and liberal societies in which is permitted what Allah prohibited, and the crimes against Islam.[145] ISIS claims to perform jihad so that 'Allah's word becomes supreme and the religion becomes completely for Allah' and 'everyone who opposes this goal or stands in the path of this goal is an enemy to us and a target for our swords.'[146] Therefore, the organisation claims to fight a 'religious war' and not a nationalist one.[147]

Dabiq states that Ba'athism, secularism, liberalism and democracy contradict the essence of *tawhid* (monotheism).[148] The latter is an important principle in Salafism that stands for the oneness of God, Allah, and is the defining basis of Islam It means that 'God is the only one

[141] Nakhoul, S. *Saddam's former army is the secret to ISIS success,* Business Insider, (June 16, 2015), http://www.businessinsider.com/r-saddams-former-army-is-secret-of-baghdadis-success-2015-6?international=true&r=US&IR=T (accessed on May 21, 2018).
[142] Moubayed, *Under the Black Flag,* 110-2.
[143] *Dabiq*, Issue 1, 10.
[144] *Dabiq*, Issue 3, 3-4 & 35-8.
[145] *Dabiq*, issue 15, 32
[146] *Dabiq*, Issue 11, 20.
[147] *Dabiq*, Issue 5, 12; Issue 9, 9.
[148] *Dabiq*, Issue 2, 10.

who can regulate human life'.[149] The Ba'ath is singled out a couple of times in Dabiq and is framed as incompatible with ISIS doctrine.[150] For example: 'the Islamic State conquered some of the areas, which used to be ruled by other than what Allah revealed, areas which were ruled by the laws of the kāfir [unbelieving] Ba'ath party.' Furthermore, one issue shows a picture in which schoolteachers showed enforced repentance because of apostasy for 'upholding Baathist principles.'[151] Saddam is called one of the *tawaghit* (tyrants) like Bashar al-Assad, the President of Syria.[152] Given the aforementioned positions of ex-Ba'athists in ISIS' organizational structure, the negative framing of the Ba'ath seems remarkable. It also poses the question to what extent the Dabiq issues sincerely reflected ISIS' ideology as it perhaps adapted, concerning its translations into English, itself to a western Muslim audience. However, on the other hand, it is not surprising since ISIS' intended to expand its territory into Syria, ruled by the Ba'ath-regime of Assad. Furthermore, as argued in the earlier chapters, the Aflaq's Ba'ath and the Saddam-regime advocated the separation of religion and state while ISIS established a caliphate.

The utopian caliphate

In July 2014, a couple of days after the official announcement of the caliphate, Baghdadi held his first public sermon in the Great Mosque of Mosul in which addressed all Muslims:

> "They [the *mujadiheen*] hastened to declare the establishment of their Caliphate and the appointment of an imam. This is a duty incumbent upon the Muslims – a duty that was neglected for centuries and was not implemented. Many Muslims were ignorant of this duty. Muslims who ignore this duty are committing a sin. They must always strive to carry out this duty."[153]

The self-proclaimed caliphate did not emerge without a prior plan. Instead, Dabiq's first issue set out a five-step plan: (1) emigration (*hijrah*), (2) coming together (*jama'ah)*, (3) destabilise 'the tyrannical regime' (*taghut)*, (4) consolidation of power (*tamkin*), and (5) caliphate (*Khilafah*). It is explained as follows: immigration takes place 'to a land with a weak central authority that is used as a base where a jam'ah can form, recruit members, and train them.' Attacks on 'apostate forces' are conducted, leading to a situation in which chaos leads 'to the complete collapse of the taghut

[149] Hashim, *The Caliphate at War,* 65.
[150] *Dabiq*, Issue 14, 42.
[151] *Dabiq*, Issue 10, 52 & 62.
[152] *Dabiq*, Issue 12, 44.
[153] Memri, *ISIS Leader Al-Baghdadi Calls on Muslims to Wage Jihad, Says: Becoming a Caliph Is a Heavy Resposibility,* (July 4, 2014), https://www.memri.org/tv/isis-leader-al-baghdadi-calls-muslims-wage-jihad-says-becoming-caliph-heavy-responsibility/transcript (accessed on June 1, 2018).

regime.' Then, the vacuum is filled by managing the state 'to the point of developing into a full-fledged state' while keep expanding into territories of (other) taghut control.[154]

According to McBride, ISIS's claim to have restored the caliphate is important for the following reasons: it symbolically refers 'to a glorious past, it calls for allegiance and cooperation across the Muslim world, and it explicitly rejects Western models of governance and secularism.'[155] Indeed, Dabiq calls for Muslims to perform hijrah from *dārul-kufr* (house of non-believers) to ISIS, *dārul-Islam* (house of believers).[156] This call is repeatedly stated throughout the issues. Also, the need to be part of the caliphate is encouraged and legitimized by calling hijrah 'Allah's cause' and the use of sayings of the prophet Muhammad.[157]An excerpt of the speech of Al-Baghdadi in which the *Khilafah* (caliphate) was announced tells: 'It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers. It is a Khilafah that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi, American, French, German, and Australian. (…) Their blood mixed and became one, under a single flag and goals'.[158] This inclusiveness, according to Dabiq, is something that has never occurred before.[159] However, the following quote illustrates that not everyone is welcome in the caliphate: 'The American Muslim is our beloved brother. And the kāfir [unbeliever] Arab is our despised enemy even if we and he were to have shared the same womb.'[160] Although ISIS presents itself as a state that consists of 'brothers' from many different nationalities that is open for everyone, one had to be a Muslim. The Arab identity only was not sufficient and even not a precondition to joining the caliphate. Therefore, ISIS differs from the Ba'ath and Saddam-regime that instead prioritised the nationalist Arab identity in order to belong to the nation. Therefore, ISIS seemed to focus more on religious identity whereas the Ba'ath prioritised the fluid concept of the Arab ethnic identity.

Pan-Islamic aspirations

The ISIS video message 'The End of Sykes-Picot' contains the statement that the organisation does not recognise the borders installed by the Sykes-Picot agreement. Instead, it wants to get rid of the borders that divided Al-Sham.[161] Also, the first Dabiq issue briefly mentioned 'the demolition of the Sykes-Picot borders thus opening the way between Iraq and Sham, and much

[154] *Dabiq*, Issue 1, 38.
[155] Stern & Berger, *ISIS*, 279.
[156] *Dabiq*, Issue 2, 3.
[157] *Dabiq*, Issue 8, 28-33.
[158] *Dabiq*, Issue 1, 7; Issue 8, 4.
[159] *Dabiq*, Issue 3, 5.
[160] *Dabiq*, Issue 8, 3.
[161] Al-Hayat, *The End of Sykes-Pikot,* http://jihadology.net/?s=sykes (accessed May 14, 2018).

more.'[162] Badie stresses that the sentiment of 'artificial creation of the Middle East' is not unique to ISIS as pan-Arab ideologies already existed for a longer time. However, ISIS deviates from this ideology regarding its aim to eliminate the borders and re-establish a caliphate, impose a puritanical Islamist vision on its population, and use of violence against those who are opposed their worldview.[163] One of the issues outlines the necessity to expand the caliphate into the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, Algeria, the Sinai, and Libya. A striking quote is 'this blessed march will not stop until we drive the last nail in the coffin of the Sykes-Picot conspiracy'.[164] According to Ali Hamdan, PhD candidate in Geography with expertise in the Middle East, the 'fluid political space' the caliphate represents contrasts with the 'bounded territoriality' of Westphalian states. The caliphate as an alternative to the colonial borders was presented as 'God's promise'.[165]

While both ISIS and the Ba'ath seemed to share their aversion to foreign influences, ISIS distanced itself from 'the pan-Arabism of the Ba'athist regimes.' It was 'beneath the feet of the Arab mujahidin of the Khilafah' since non-Arabs also fought for the cause of Allah and answered the call of jihad.[166] Therefore, ISIS and the Ba'ath appear to be each other's opposites. ISIS presents itself as pan-Islamic by striving to unite Muslims of all nationalities but was anti-Shia. The Ba'ath, on the other hand, strived for an Arabic unity in which belonging to Arab identity, intermingled with Islam, was of main importance. As argued in the first chapter, all Muslim groups and Christians could be part of pan-Arabism.

ISIS' governance

With ISIS' approach of the caliphate, it actively built a 'proto-state'.[167] By October 2014, ISIS was in control of a territory reaching from North of Aleppo to South of Baghdad and included the cities of Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. An estimated six million people on either Syrian or Iraqi territory lived under ISIS' rule.[168] It was an independent organisation that controlled territory, provided services, had an army and imposed strict Islamic rule. According to Caris and Reynolds, research analysts at the Institute for the Study of War, the establishment of governance structures was one of the most important reasons ISIS attempted to take control over towns and established its envisioned caliphate.[169] Its military forces were primarily dominated by Iraqis, while foreigners

[162] *Dabiq*, Issue 1, 13.
[163] Badie, *After Saddam*, 138.
[164] *Dabiq,* Issue 5, 32. In: Badie, *After Saddam*, 138.
[165] Hamdan, "Breaker of Barriers?," 608.
[166] *Dabiq,* Issue 11, 20.
[167] Ahmad, *Jihad & Co*, 166.
[168] Barrett, *The Islamic State*, 8.
[169] Stern & Berger, *ISIS*, 279; C. Caris & S. Reynolds, "ISIS Governance in Syria" *Middle East Security Report for the Institute for the Study of War*, 22 (2014): 9.

controlled many of the civil institutions. ISIS' governance was also structured in a way that the death of its caliph would have the least negative impact on the organisation.[170] The latter seems to reveal a difference when comparing it with the Saddam-regime, as Saddam made himself indispensable by creating a personality cult and a tribal network of trustees.

Caris and Reynolds state that ISIS' governance system was divided into two categories: administration and Muslim services. Administration concerned the sharia institutes, elementary education, law enforcement, courts, recruitment and tribal relations. Services like water, electricity and humanitarian aid fell under the so-called 'Department of Muslim Services'.[171] Within its media outlets, ISIS also put a strong emphasis on (civil) society. Their goal to create a Muslim society with all needed facilities such as banks, schools, health care, social services is displayed in Dabiq many times.[172] The level of governance was influenced by ISIS' level of control, the size, and strategic importance of the concerning area. For example, rural areas like Latakia in Syria tended to have a more temporary and low-level governance since it focused more on the provision of humanitarian aid and a limited implementation of religious outreach programs. Although Latakia was important for ISIS, it was not strategically vital to the military campaign and also was not highly populated. The more sophisticated governance was applicable in centrally-located and urban areas like Aleppo and Raqqa.[173] In the territories that ISIS controlled, it ruled by using a structure of *wilayat* (provinces), a term also used during the Ottoman rule. This entailed a contiguous territory defended by ISIS or merely an area in which ISIS was active. The *wilayat* were divided in *qata'a(t)*, meaning sectors. In 2014, this system became more formalised as ISIS expanded its governance activities at that time, especially in Syria.[174]

The self-proclaimed caliphate had revenue from diverse sources ranging from taxes on businesses and individuals to looting. When ISIS kept on expanding territory, it was able to establish a stronger state-like apparatus that could raise taxes from its citizens concerning their incomes for example. Any remaining Christians or Jews were obliged to pay added taxes called *jizja* (unbelievers tax). Furthermore, ISIS implemented *zakat*, Islamic charity, which was a mandatory donation of 2,5 per cent of a person's total wealth. This created a huge source of revenue for ISIS. Another large source of income was drawn from oil smuggling since a well-

[170] Stern & Berger, *ISIS*, 51.
[171] C. Caris & S. Reynolds, "ISIS Governance in Syria" *Middle East Security Report for the Institute for the Study of War*, 22 (2014): 9, 14-5.
[172] Stern & Berger, *ISIS*, 73.
[173] Caris & Reynolds, "ISIS Governance in Syria," 14.
[174] Ibid., 14-5.

established underground network of Iraqi smugglers already existed since the 1990's due to the UN-sanctions on the Saddam-regime.[175]

The implementation of governance structures had military advantages to it by securing safe havens and staging grounds to carry out an attack. Military dominance was one of the important ways in which ISIS legitimised itself.[176] When ISIS expanded, it both absorbed (Sunni) local communities and repressed tribes that held power in the concerning territories. When people resisted, they were collectively punished. This led for example of hundreds of deaths from the Shueitat tribe in Syria. Also, campaigns of genocidal violence targeted minority groups such as the Shia's.[177] Furthermore, there was no room for political pluralism and variety of thoughts under ISIS. Instead, freedom of thought was criminalised, and any Muslim who did not accept ISIS's interpretation of the Islam was considered an apostate that deserved death.[178] On a daily basis, children were indoctrinated with the ideas of ISIS. From the age of six, children went to school and received not only regular subjects such as English, Arabic and mathematics but also on the ISIS doctrine. The latter included the correct interpretation and implementation of the jihad, and children were assigned a specific role in the caliphate based on their gender. For example, young girls were taught how to support their future husband in the jihad while boys were prepped for the battlefield and received training in how to use fire weapons.[179] The use of repression by using violent campaigns and indoctrination in order to have grip on its people seemed to overlap with the Saddam-regime. However, the topics of indoctrination obviously differ. ISIS indoctrinated their people with a radical interpretation of Islam while Saddam, among others, created a historical myth surrounding Iraq and imposed his personality cult.

Concluding remarks

When looking at ISIS' ideology, the Ba'ath is framed as an ideology that contradicts ISIS. The Ba'ath opposes the essence of Salafism, tawhid, and is called apostate. Except for the shared animosity towards foreign influences, the Saddam-regime and ISIS do not seem to have much in common. Saddam, like Aflaq, advocated pan-Arabism with a focus on the Arab identity in which all religious groups could partake whereas ISIS stood for pan-Islamism with only Sunni's but welcomed all nationalities. Also, nationalism for the Saddam-regime was important as an attempt to create nationhood while ISIS frames itself as anti-nationalist. Thus, the Saddam-regime was a secular regime while ISIS implemented sharia law. While both the Saddam-regime and ISIS glorify

[175] Barrett, *The Islamic State*, 10; Ahmad, *Jihad & Co*, 166-8.
[176] Caris & Reynolds, "ISIS Governance in Syria," 14.
[177] Ahmad, *Jihad & Co*, 166.
[178] Gerges, *ISIS. A History*, 27.
[179] AIVD, "Leven bij ISIS, de mythe ontrafeld" (January 12, 2016), 9-10.

history, they seem to have different interpretations. Saddam emphasised the special role of Iraq throughout history in which both Sunni's and Shia's played important roles. ISIS instead, being a Salafi-jihadi organisation, highlighted the period of early Islam: the generation of the first Muslims that provided the four true caliphs of Sunni Islam.

The seeming ideological differences between the Saddam-regime and ISIS do not provide a definite answer. Therefore, the interplay of ex-Ba'athists being motivated by the possibility to regain power via ISIS' platform and probable proneness for radicalisation in the post-2003 context cannot be overlooked. The recruitment of ex-Ba'athists into ISIS and its predecessors points to a mutually beneficial relationship. In Baghdadi's quest to make ISI/ISIS successful, the (probable) secular background of the ex-Ba'athists appeared surmountable. The latter brought their military and governance expertise, and their useful connections. On his turn, Baghdadi enabled them high-rank positions in ISIS' organisation, by which ex-Ba'athist could retain power as they had during the Saddam-regime. Logically, the findings of this chapter point to similarities between the Saddam-regime and ISIS in their use of oppression and indoctrination to control their people. In this case, influence also might be the right word, since the same people were involved in both the Saddam-regime and ISIS. However, the seeming ease by which the (secular) ex-Ba'athist could join ISIS remains an unsolved question. It perhaps points to a discrepancy in the extent to which ISIS itself always truly adhered to their radical Islamic doctrine or perhaps motivated by other drivers. On the other hand, there is a possibility that the ex-Ba'athists radicalised since 2003 because of the emerging sectarian divides with the al-Maliki-regime or even earlier during the increasingly instrumentalised Islamic policies of the Saddam-regime.

Conclusion

This thesis was set out with the following research question: to what extent can the Ba'athist ideology and Ba'athist Saddam-regime be considered forerunners of the ISIS-doctrine? First and foremost, due to constraints of time and resources, it is difficult to answer this question with certainty. In this thesis, it became clear that one could do a single research project on the pan-Arabic or religious component alone. Therefore, this thesis remains explorative although, based on the findings of this research, some observations can be made.

The first chapter analysed the Ba'athist ideology, formulated by Aflaq, that emerged during the 1940's. While the slogan of the Ba'ath was 'Unity, Freedom and Socialism', it focused primarily on unity. Ba'athism called for the unification of the Arab world, the revival of the Arab spirit, and the freedom from non-Arab interference and control. Furthermore, it was revolutionary, secular and nationalistic in nature. However, Ba'athism did not attempt to remove the Islam from the public sphere. It rather argued that Islam was part of the national culture with which all people, even if they were Christian, could identify. Being an Arab was also not presented as a fixed identity but instead was something one could assimilate to. The secular aspect was entailed in the Ba'athist conviction that the Islam was part of the Arab heritage rather than a way to organise political affairs. Aflaq's ideas found traction, especially among youngsters, by preaching and teaching. Interestingly, until 1966, members of the Iraqi Ba'ath consisted of Sunni's but mainly of Shia's. Altogether, this analysis formed to basis to examine to what extent these ideas were reflected and turned into political repertoires during the Saddam-regime.

Since both Saddam's personality cult and the Ba'ath ideology played an important role in his regime, scholars refer to 'Husseini Ba'athism'. The second chapter illustrated that Saddam's policies were influenced by internal and external events, and often driven by utilitarian and tactical considerations. With regard to the pan-Arabic aspect, although it was still regarded as an ideal, the Saddam-regime prioritised Iraq. This was partly influenced by the failure of the UAR in 1961 that exposed the difficulties in realising a pan-Arabic unity. Saddam considered it to be Iraqi's historical destiny to lead the Arab world together with its revolutionary role in the pan-Arab mission. Furthermore, Saddam cultivated a national mythology in order to merge the sectarian-religious differences in Iraq. The Ba'athist idea of the Arab identity therefore seemed a useful tool for Saddam to create nationhood among the Iraqi's. Furthermore, in the wars against Iran and Kuwait, the pan-Arabic idea was more likely to be used for tactical purposes in a quest for supportive countries.

Concerning the religious policies, an increase of instrumentalisation of the Islam manifested throughout Saddam's rule. Although influenced by his Sunni background, Saddam

advocated religion in line with the Ba'athist conception of religion. From the beginning until the end, Saddam wanted to avoid the empowerment of religious leaders and disliked Islamists and other radical Islamic currents. In order to control the religious landscape, Saddam enforced the Ba'athist take on religion that represented secular nationalism as Aflaq had formulated it. However, because of tactical considerations during the wars, the Iraqi president increasingly showed himself as a pious Muslim by using more Islamic rhetoric and repertoires. However, he never subordinated Arabism to religion. That would also have endangered Saddam's efforts to create oneness among the Iraqi people. Throughout the Saddam-regime, violent campaigns were used to suppress the Iraqi people when they revolted against the regime, displayed sectarian loyalties or promoted radical Islam. Although especially the Kurds and Shia were targeted, Saddam, regardless of his Sunni identity, also suppressed Sunni's if needed. Regardless of the decrease in pan-Arabic rhetoric, the Saddam-regime showed to be influenced by the Ba'ath ideology of Aflaq concerning the elements of glorification of history, the revolutionary character for Iraq, Saddam's interpretation of Islam and his use of secular nationalism in order to keep his country together.

The third and last chapter discussed the ideology, political repertoires and Ba'athist network of ISIS. There seems to be an influence, or at least overlap, between the political repertoires carried out by ISIS and the Saddam-regime when looking at the indoctrination and the repression of people. The ex-Ba'athists played a significant role in the organisational structure of ISIS. With their (tribal) networks, military expertise and experiences in running a state, they were of excellent use for Baghdadi. In return, ISIS ostensibly offered the ex-Ba'athist the opportunity to be part of the leadership or another high position. This relation seemed to be based on practical and power-seeking considerations. This is remarkable for a Salafi-jihadi organisation that proclaimed to have re-established a caliphate. Also, when looking at ISIS ideology, this thesis indicates that there is not much overlap with the ideas of the Ba'ath Saddam-regime, of which was stated that it was strongly influenced by Aflaq's Ba'ath. ISIS divided the world into two groups: the believers and non-believers. Therefore, it distinguished people based on their religion while the Saddam-regime prioritised the Arab identity. Instead of pan-Arabism, ISIS promoted a version of pan-Islamism for Sunni Muslims of all nationalities. Instead, the Saddam-regime suppressed the people who promoted radical Islamic interpretations as the threatened the nationhood. Also, ISIS itself accused the Ba'ath of contradicting the Salafi essence of monotheism. As aforementioned, the Saddam-regime was not a caliphate and did not implement sharia law like ISIS. The only idea that overlaps is ISIS' and the Ba'athists shared aversion of foreign influence. However, the ability of (secular) ex-Ba'athist to join ISIS still raises the question whether ISIS made an exception for people with demonstrable capabilities of use or if these ex-Ba'athists radicalised over a decade.

To conclude this research, it thus can be said that the Ba'ath ideology, formulated by Aflaq, was of strong influence in the Saddam-regime but did not overspill to ISIS' ideology. One could only speak of overlap, or influence, with regard to the political repertoires of repression and indoctrination when comparing the Saddam-regime with ISIS. With these findings, an insight is given in a disputed field concerning the extent to which Ba'athists elements were implemented in the Saddam-regime and how ex-Ba'athists got involved in ISIS. Furthermore, it helps to understand the organisational structure of ISIS and its successes. This research is also of academic relevance by adding more scope through its examination of the Ba'ath foundation onwards instead of taking the Saddam-regime as the starting point. Therefore, it introduced a new historical angle.

Still, there is a lot to do research on. As the socialist aspect of the Ba'ath has not been discussed in this thesis, the Ba'athist ideology has not yet been fully examined. This same research can be conducted but then with a focus on the economic aspects. Furthermore, regardless of the brief section in chapter 3, ISIS' predecessors like JTJ, MSC, could be examined to fill the gap in time between the fall of the Saddam-regime and ISIS. By doing that, it reveals the development of ISIS' final ideology over years instead of a decade. This also enables to closely examine the ex-Ba'athist network that perhaps then provides a definitive answer on why they joined ISIS. Furthermore, the interplay of possible other socioeconomic motives for joining ISIS, like the need for security or the need for income, would be a welcome addition in unravelling the question why ex-Ba'athists, and perhaps others, joined ISIS. With the current demise of ISIS, internal documents will most likely be captured that could give more insight into the interest and share ex-Ba'athists had in the organization. Therefore, it is hoped that with this thesis a fruitful foundation for further research on this topic is provided.

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Appendix 1: a map of the distribution of ethnic and religious groups in Iraq

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Appendix: a map of the distribution of ethnic and religious groups in Iraq