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UNDERSTANDING TERROR

A RELIGIOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RISE OF ISIS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A
CALIPHATE

A Thesis Presented

By

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To the Politics Department

Of Scripps College

In partial fulfillment of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

PROFESSOR DAVID ANDREWS

PROFESSOR GASTON ESPINOSA

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For the Victims.

This should never have been written.

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Abstract

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has made waves in the international community, stoking global terror, influencing political discourse, costing hundreds of millions of dollars in security response and reconstruction efforts. More importantly, it has cost hundreds of thousands of lives, whether it be from direct combat or attacks, or from the massive refugee crises it sparked. One wonders, how did a small extremist group make such a massive and disastrous impact? Most research done on ISIS and terrorism studies tend to focus on the political, economic, and social factors that lead to the creation and successes of religious extremist groups. Fewer focus on the religious factor, and the ones that do typically argue that religion is used as an excuse for violence, rather than playing an independent role as a core reason for why extremist groups like ISIS form and function. This thesis explores religion as an overriding factor in explaining the rise of ISIS and its unprecedented establishment of a Caliphate. The analysis shows that the ideological division between Iraq's Sunni and Shia, beginning with the Prophet Mohammed's death, manifested itself as a vicious sectarian cycle in Iraq's modern history and ultimately led to the rise of ISIS. This study also shows that ISIS is a fundamentally *religiously ideological* extremist group, rather than simply a criminal gang parading behind a false veil of religious labeling.

Introduction

Trudy Raymundo and her employee were crouched beneath a table in a conference room. As bullets whizzed past them, and fear paralyzed them, they were hoping that this was some kind of dramatic exercise for active shooter preparedness, “to test our readiness.”¹ As the bodies of their colleagues started to drop around them, Raymundo said that “out of desperation” she continued to hope that they were playing dead and were part of some kind of ruse. Reality began to dawn on her when the shooting kept going, “For me it was just, “Why doesn’t he stop? Why doesn’t he stop? Why won’t he stop shooting.”

About thirty miles away I received an alarming text message from Claremont campus security: “The City of San Bernardino is currently responding to an active shooter scenario...Campus community members are encouraged to avoid this region... we encourage you to report any unusual or suspicious activity immediately.” The shooting in San Bernardino killed fourteen individuals, critically injured 22, destroyed the lives of countless families and friends, and for the students at the Claremont colleges, hit much too close to home.

The story of the shooting became sensationalized as it was discovered that the two perpetrators, Syed Rizan Farwook and his wife Tashfeen Malik, had potential ties to ISIS. Preceding the shooting, Malik had posted a message on Facebook declaring her *bay’ah* (oath of allegiance) to ISIS. The Islamic terrorist group, which had shocked the international community

¹ Cory Siemaszko and Miguel Almaguer, “ ‘Why Won’t He Stop Shooting?’ San Bernardino Terror Attack Survivors Speak,” *NBC News*, December 7, 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/san-bernardino-shooting/san-bernardino-shooting-survivors-speak-n475756>.

less than a month before with the deadly Bataclan attacks, claimed that the San Bernardino shooters were “soldiers of the caliphate.”

The “caliphate” it was referring to was the self-proclaimed state that ISIS established when it captured Iraq’s second largest city, Mosul in June 2014. ISIS’ unprecedented landgrab was the result of years of intra-state turmoil in Iraq. Capturing Mosul and a large swath of territory allowed the group to show it could run an impressive administrative state which enabled them to attract thousands of foreign recruits and globally disperse their propaganda.

Although no direct ties between ISIS and the San Bernardino shootings have ever been proven, it is clear from Malik’s message that the terrorist group did not need to play an operational role, as its influence was sufficient to inspire terrorist activities far from the Middle East. The establishment of the caliphate gave ISIS said influence, as it achieved international recognition, a platform to promote their philosophies, and a powerful image of dangerous capabilities.

One might be tempted to think “why does this concern me? It’s a Middle Eastern problem, right?” The answer is no, it’s a globally created problem with global impacts. For example, Mosul is over 7,000 miles away from the Claremont colleges, and its influence traveled and manifested in a deadly attack only 30 miles away in San Bernardino. Although this thesis will not be focusing on ISIS’ global reach, I wanted to highlight the importance of studying groups like ISIS in the first place. Even though they may seem far away and irrelevant, they have a widespread impact.

With such an international influence, many have tried to understand where ISIS came from. Most studies have found explanations rooted in political, economic, or social turmoil. I will instead be asking the following question: To what extent does *religion* explain the

conditions that allowed for the rise of ISIS and its subsequent creation and operation of its caliphate. Rather than accept the widely shared view that religion is a veil for other core explanations (typically the aforementioned), I will explore the independent role it plays. This thesis will geographically be contained to Iraq, as this is where the group and caliphate emerge.

The first part of this thesis will first present existing theories on the rise of ISIS and religion's role, which will be either proven or refuted throughout the course of the thesis. I will then examine the historical origin of religion in Iraq, then its sectarian role in Hussein's regime, during the American occupation of Iraq, during Prime Minister Maliki's tenure, and finally in ISIS' creation. The second part of this thesis will be a close analysis of religion's role in ISIS' core ideology, state creation, and military strategy.

I. Theory

After 9/11 and Bush's declaration of the unbounded War on Terror, terrorism studies have garnered great interest and attention. Gary LaFree, director of the distinguished National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), said about this change, "I've seen an interest in this topic coming from students and there was just about no interest prior to 9/11." Even though terrorist incidents are now on the decline, concern for terrorism is still significant. A 2018 U.S. News World report states that approximately 35 percent of over 21,000 global respondents prioritized terrorism over other issues, such as income inequality, climate change, gender equality, etc.² So when ISIS captured Mosul on June 10, 2014, it sent shockwaves through a global population that has become on high alert. ISIS' rise to power was unprecedented. No terrorist group, even al-Qaeda, has ever been able to create a state like ISIS. Thus, many explanations and theories have been posited to explain its rise. Here I offer a brief review of several pertinent theories that focus on the role of sectarian conflict and religion as key factors in explaining the rise of ISIS. I will also review a few other established theories (some preceding ISIS and even 9/11) that examine the socio-economic context that allows terrorism to succeed.

Middle Eastern specialist, Vali Nasr published his book, *The Shia Revival*, thirteen years ago with an ominous message: "The Middle East will not be defined by the Arab identity or by any particular form of nation government. Ultimately, the character of the region will be decided

² Sintia Radu, "How Terrorism is Taught Around the World," *U.S. News & World Report*, January 23, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2018-01-23/what-do-countries-teach-about-terrorism>.

in the crucible of Shia revival and the Sunni response to it.”³ Nasr essentially argued that the struggle for power between Islam’s two major sects would be a defining factor for the Middle East’s political landscape. Although many might argue that the Arab identity plays a strong role (i.e. the Israel- Palestine conflict, tensions between the gulf states and Iran, or the strong presence of Pan-Arabism), or that questions of nation government (i.e. the sweeping democratization movement, the Arab Spring) do play a significant role in the region’s political climate, Nasr argues that sectarian tension is the crux for explaining the Middle East’s ‘character.’ While this is perhaps a sweeping explanation for a region that faces a complex multitude of tensions, it is a relevant argument to understand the rise of ISIS and the larger sectarian-rooted conflict in Iraq.

In his article, “*What ISIS Really Wants*” for the Atlantic, journalist Graeme Wood further reinforces that ISIS is at its core a religious group, refuting the belief that ISIS is a criminal group which uses the pretense of religion to encourage its members to engage in violence. He argues that Western ideology is not comfortable accepting this concept, for fear of stepping into Islamophobia territory. However, it is exactly this misunderstanding of different interpretations of a shared religion that has left us unable to understand and thus cease the group’s rise, recruitment, and institutional value that allowed it to stay in power for so long. “There is a temptation to rehearse this observation- that jihadists are modern secular people, with modern political concerns, wearing medieval religious disguise- and make it fit the Islamic State.”⁴ While we may find comfort in the belief that religion cannot be at the root of such a violent organization, Wood goes on to argue that “The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very*

³ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape the future,*” (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 2006), p.22.

⁴ Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic*, (March 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

Islamic... the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam.”⁵ Thus, to understand how this group functions and subsequently from where it may derive its success, we must first accept the religious nature of ISIS.

While I will focus on the role that religion played in explaining the rise and success of ISIS in general and specifically in Mosul, other factors clearly were also important. Other theories have emphasized the role of economic grievances as a key factor. This argument would support the aforementioned view that ISIS is a criminal group, only using religion as a means to an ultimately non-religious end. While these perspectives in my analysis are not the core explanation for the group’s rise and reign, they are worth mentioning as they do play a role in understanding extremism.

The relative deprivation theory is a commonly accepted psycho-sociological explanation for terrorism. This theory claims that individual mobilization of aggression is connected to social, economic, and political circumstances. Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung, argues that “the situation that is most likely to provoke aggressive behavior is one in which individuals find themselves in a state of disequilibrium along various socio-political dimensions of status.”⁶ Several studies support this theory, showing a positive correlation between levels of terrorism and levels of income inequality in various countries.⁷ According to this perspective, individuals can be brought to political violence if they experience not just their own economic grievances, but also perceive their own situation to be unequal compared to the economic state of a different social group.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Galtung, Johan (1964) “A Structural Theory of Aggression,” *Journal of Peace Research*, no.2, (1964): 95-119.

⁷ Jan Oskar Engene (1994) *Europeisk terrorisme. Vold, stat og legitimitet* (Gaithersburg: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1978).

Another common explanation for terrorism is the democratization argument. It is a widespread belief that democracies experience less violence, and while that is often true in inter-state conflicts, it is not always the case in intra-state conflicts. It is not necessarily democracies that are less prone to terrorism, but rather governments that enjoy higher levels of legitimacy. Often, democratic principles--such as popular participation, free elections, and free speech--lead to greater feelings of legitimacy. However, while Iraq is a democracy (in the sense of having free presidential elections and a parliamentary system), it does not and often cannot enforce or protect the aforementioned democratic principles. Democratic institutions which encourage political representation can lead to a situation where majorities can quickly overshadow the minority populations of a country, which can lead to significant groups feeling marginalized. Martha Crenshaw explains that semi-democratic states (like Iraq) are particularly exposed to terrorism: "In situations where paths to the legal expression of opposition are blocked, but where the regime's repression is inefficient, revolutionary terrorism is doubly likely."⁸ Essentially, the relationship between the absence of internal conflict and effective governments is U-shaped, with consolidated liberal democracy at one end and authoritarianism at the other, and with democratic transitional governments in the middle. We will see that the lack of institutions and strong central government in Iraq's transitional democracy allowed for a rise in political violence, which ISIS was quick to capitalize on.

In the following narrative and analysis, I will show how the religious components outlined above played an overriding role in the rise of ISIS (including its success in Mosul) and its subsequent creation of a caliphate. Other factors, notably weak institutions and economic grievances, as I posited above, also played a role in the group's success, but we will see that

⁸ Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 13, no.4 (July 1981), pp.379-399.

these were actually by-products of a sectarian-rooted conflict and thus played a secondary role. *Thus, I argue that religion was the overriding factor in explaining ISIS's rise and success in Iraq.*

To understand this important role of religion in explaining the emergence of ISIS, we need to understand the centuries long division between the Shia and Sunni. For this reason, I begin my analysis with a historical account of the origin of Islam's sectarianism.

However, before we dive in, I would like to make one thing very clear: religion in itself is not inherently violent. In fact, the Shia and the Sunnis have lived together in peace for centuries, and the majority have respectful relationships with one another. I am not arguing that religion, specifically Islam, is based on conflict or violence. Rather, the majority who practice it understand it to be a religion that promotes peace. However, we will be looking at the minority who engage in violent religious extremism, so we will be analyzing religion in a framework of conflict and violence.

II. Islam's Schism

“I cannot count them.”⁹ Abdullah Hatam, a morgue attendant in Baghdad, chillingly described the bits of human flesh and body parts that were strewn across the Al- Kadhimiya Mosque. On March 2, 2004, two men had calmly walked into the massive crowd of Shia worshippers gathered at the Imam Musa al- Khadam shrine, which is housed within the mosque, and detonated their suicide vests, killing 58 people and wounding over 200.¹⁰ The attack was one of two that day (the second attack occurred in Karbala and killed an estimated 85) and was the deadliest day in Iraq since May 1, 2003, when President Bush had announced an end to major combat operations. The perpetrators were quickly found to be the Sunni insurgency group, al-Qaeda in Iraq. The targets were Shia men, women, and children, who had flocked to shrines in Karbala and Baghdad, to worship on the holiest Shia Muslim day of the year, Ashura. As the worshippers quickly turned mourners searched for their family and friends in the erupting chaos, American tanks arrived on the scene. Angry mobs quickly encircled them, blaming the lack of U.S. security for the deadly attacks. American military, which was present in virtually every other corner of Baghdad, had stayed away from the shrines out of respect for what one general called “cultural differences.”¹¹ Paul Bremer, the administrator for the coalition authority in Iraq stated that the attacks were part of “an effort to provoke sectarian violence among Muslims. We know they chose this day so that they could kill as many innocents as possible.”¹² Americans

⁹ John F. Burns and Jeffrey Gettleman, “Blasts at Shia Ceremonies in Iraq Kill More Than 140,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/02/international/middleeast/blasts-at-Shia-ceremonies-in-iraq-kill-more-than.html>.

¹⁰ Jane Arraf and Brent Sadler, “Deadly attacks rock Baghdad, Karbala,” *CNN*, March 2, 2004 <https://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/03/02/sprj.nirq.main/>.

¹¹ Burns and Gettleman “Blasts at Shia Ceremonies in Iraq Kill More Than 140.”

¹² Jim Garamone , “White House, Coalition Say Attacks Won’t Stop New Iraq,” *U.S. Department of Defense*, March 2, 2004, <https://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=27132>.

quickly grouped these attacks under a sectarian label, which had become a favorite term to use to describe Iraq's rocky and violent religious-political terrain. The Ashura bombings were indeed a sectarian attack (one instigated by one religious sect against another, purely do the differing sectarian identities), part of a campaign of sectarian violence that was sweeping the country. However, the quick American labeling of "sectarian" can only describe a surface level understanding of the Sunni- Shia divide that shaped Iraq. As I will explain later, American political involvement in Iraq was detrimental because of a lack of sectarian understanding, which was instead often written off as "cultural differences." I will attempt not to commit similar errors by looking at the intrinsically religious nature of the sectarian issues in Iraq, rather than solely use it as a political descriptor. Scholar Lesley Hazleton illustrates, "We tend to say impatiently, 'Why can't they all just get along?' But in Iraq... what happened centuries ago is alive and fresh as though it had happened just yesterday."¹³

Understanding the history, beliefs, and customs that define these two sects of Islam will allow us to better discern their roles in Iraq's modern violent political landscape. Thus, to discern the role that religion plays in explaining the rise and success of ISIS, we will start our story not in 2014 when ISIS established its caliphate, but rather in 632 A.D. when Islam began to schism.

The Sunni- Shia conflict began 1,372 years before the horrific Ashura attacks. The schism sprung from a succession dispute following the Prophet Mohammed's death in 632 A.D. Mohammed, who was the founder of, and thus uncontested leader of Islam left no natural heir or clear will detailing his succession. Thus, a leadership dispute began the centuries old divide.

¹³ Alyssa Fetini, "Understanding the Sunni- Shi'ite Divide," *Time*, September 16, 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1924116,00.html>.

However, the original choices for succession are very telling of the characteristics that shape both sects.

Although he left no son, Mohammed's closest male heir seemed to many to be the natural choice. His cousin and son in law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, was chosen by a group of followers who called themselves the *Shiat Ali*,¹⁴ (followers of Ali) shortened to the Shia. The Shia believed that the succession should be hereditary, rather than by consensus. Vali Nasr explains why heredity was so important: "Shias believe that the Prophet possessed special spiritual qualities... that Ali and his descendants had these special spiritual qualities too."¹⁵ Ali was also regarded as a religious authority and revered theologian. According to a hadith,¹⁶ Mohammed said "I'm the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate." Shias thus not only chose Ali as Mohammed's successor because of his hereditary legitimacy, but also because of his moral authority. As Nasr continues to write on Shia leaders, "They could understand and interpret the inner meaning of Islam, as opposed to merely implementing its outward manifestations."¹⁷ Shias' prioritization of spirituality over the actionable aspects of Islam are crucial in understanding the main difference in Muslim sects. Ali was not chosen as the successor but would become the fourth caliph. He would later be assassinated by Sunni extremists, which would be the catalyst for much of the violence that has marked the sectarian divide in Islam. After his death, the Muslim world split in two: the Abbasids and the Umayyads. The Shia fell under the Abbasids, who believed that only Ali's blood descendants could be legitimate leaders.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Nasr, p.39

¹⁶ Report of the words and deeds of Mohammed and other early Muslims; considered an authoritative source of revelation; second only to the Quran (Oxford Islamic Studies)

¹⁷ Nasr, p.39.

Disagreeing with the Shia, another group believed that Mohammed's successor should be chosen based on his merit rather than heredity; a much more political approach. This group argued that Mohammed's successor "would need no exceptional spiritual qualities but would merely have to be an exemplary Muslim."¹⁸ This group called themselves "Ahl-as-Sunnah" meaning people of the tradition. Sunnis now describe it as "the way of the prophet." They believed that Abu Bakr, Mohammed's father in law and close friend was the rightful heir. Ultimately, he won, as all dissenters, including Ali, consented to his legitimate succession as caliph. Abu Bakr was succeeded by Umar, Uthman, and eventually Ali. Sunnis regard the reign of these caliphs, as well as the Umayyad dynasty, as Islam's golden age.

Contrary to the Shia's focus on spirituality, the Sunnis favored tradition and civil order. Nasr writes, "The Sunni conception of authority has centered on a preoccupation with order. Religion does not depend on the quality of political authority but on its ability to help the faith survive and grow."¹⁹ Almost antithetical to the Shia's emphasis on religious authority as political leadership, Sunnis believe that the two are separate and that the latter is meant to promote the former. Nasr justly characterizes the Sunnis prioritization of law and order with the famous saying "Better sixty years of tyranny than a single day of civil strife."²⁰

In terms of population, Sunnis overwhelmingly eclipse the Shia population. According to the Pew research center,²¹ globally, about 87 – 90 percent of Muslims identify as Sunni, compared to only 10-13 percent who identify as Shia.²² One might thus wonder, how much conflict can arise between the two when the Sunnis clearly dominate. The response is that the

¹⁸ Nasr, p. 35.

¹⁹ Nasr, p.39.

²⁰ Nasr, p.36

²¹ Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population," *Pew Research Center*, October 7, 2009.

²² *Ibid.*

Shia are not evenly dispersed, rather they are concentrated in certain geographical locations, where they either form a majority or significant minority of the population. For example, over a third of the world's Shias live in Iran, where they account for almost 95% of the Muslim population,²³ and in which Shiism plays a large role in government. Including Iran, only 5 countries boast a Shia population that comprises over 50% of their Muslim population: Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Bahrain, and most important for our purposes, Iraq. Approximately 65-70 percent of Shias make up Iraq's Muslim population, making them the clear majority. That said, unlike Iran, the Sunnis still make up a formidable minority at 35%. Iraq is considered one of the most important countries for sectarianism. Hazleton describes Iraq as "the cradle of Shi'ism," eluding to key events such as Ali's death which took place in Najaf (just south of Baghdad) and his son Husayn's death which occurred in the aforementioned city of Karbala. "So if there is one place the rift between Shi'ites and Sunnis has always been most volatile, it is Iraq."²⁴

The two most significant outcomes to take away from the inception of this religious schism is that (1) Shias have felt threatened, especially politically, since Ali's assassination by the Sunni extremist and (2) there are inherent ideological differences between the Sunnis and the Shia, which continue to mark Iraq's political and social climates.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Fetini, "Understanding the Sunni- Shi'ite Divide."

III. Saddam's Sectarian Brand

The aforementioned Ashura attacks which took place in Baghdad and Karbala, were not the first time Karbala had been the target of violence. Thirteen years earlier, in 1991, the shrine in Karbala was ravaged by shellings. The shrine was for Husayn, Ali's son, and is one of the most important Shia monuments. Standing on a tank outside Husayn's tomb, a man shouted "Your name is Hussein and so is mine. Let us see who is stronger now."²⁵ That man was Kamal Hussein Majid, one of Saddam Hussein's confidantes, and who he had sent to Karbala to violently suppress a Shia uprising. This event, known as the 1991 Karbala massacre, was one of many in a vicious anti-Shia campaign during Saddam Hussein's regime.

A staunch nationalist, Hussein adopted the Ba'ath party in Iraq. Ba'athism was a political ideology and party that was sweeping through the Arab world as a post-colonial nationalist movement. It was "authoritarian, somewhat mystical, vaguely socialistic, but determinedly pan-Arabist."²⁶ The founder of Ba'athism, Michel Aflaq, believed that Arab nations would decline if they did not unify, and unification was threatened by the following ailments, "feudalism, sectarianism, regionalism, and intellectual reactionism."²⁷ Even though Ba'athism was meant to be secular, in order to foster unification and address the aforementioned 'ailments', Ba'athism took on its unique interpretation of Islam. According to Aflaq (who was interestingly Christian), "Islam ... was an Arab movement, and its meaning was to renew Arabism and to complete it. The language in which it came down [to Muhammad] was Arabic, its view and understanding

²⁵ Paul Lewis, "Karabala Journal; Who Hit the Mosques? Not us, Baghdad Says," *The New York Times*, August 13, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/08/13/world/karbala-journal-who-hit-the-mosques-not-us-baghdad-says.html>.

²⁶ William R. Polk, "Understanding Iraq" (New York: Harper Perennial: 2005), 109.

²⁷ Paul Salem (1994). *Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World*. Syracuse University, p.61-62.

were of the Arab mind.”²⁸ To Ba’athists, Pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism went hand in hand. Islam’s role in Hussein’s regime was thus a tool in Arab unification. Rather than destroy Iraq’s religious institutions (as Islamists had strongly opposed what they viewed as a secular regime), Hussein wished to “hollow them out, and then repurpose them as instruments of the regime’s power.”²⁹ In the Sunni areas of Iraq, the Ba’athists were quite successful. As mentioned earlier, Nasr described Sunnism thought as one in which “religion does not depend on the quality of political authority but on its ability to help the faith survive and grow.” Thus to Iraq’s Sunnis, Hussein’s Ba’athism was promoting Islam, by fastening it to his strong nationalist dogma. However, Ba’athism encountered much more resistance in Iraq’s Shia areas. Shias adhere more to political quietism, and as previously mentioned, they believe that a political authority should also be deeply religious, which Saddam simply was not. Rather, Saddam viewed Islam as a means to an Arab unification end, rather than as a way of constructing civil life.

Although Shias accounted for the majority of Iraq’s Muslims, they were marginalized and targeted under Saddam’s Hussein’s brutal reign. A Sunni himself, Hussein grew up in a climate distrustful of Shias, often regarding them as non-Iraqi and non-Arab as many of them spoke Persian and had connections to Iran.³⁰ To him, Shias posed an active threat to the Ba’athism’ pan-Arabist credo he believed was necessary to avoid Arab demise. Many believe that Hussein’s distrust of Iran led to his distrust of Shia, but Nasr argues that Shia suspicion has been in play much longer and is not specific to Iraq, “Arab nationalism holds an inherent bias against the Shia. Shias whose mother tongue is Arabic are not by that fact equal members of the Arab nation. The pull of sectarianism is too strong, and they are among the distrusted quasi-

²⁸ Samuel Helfont, “The Legacy of Saddam’s Islam,” *The Caravan* no.1820, *The Hoover Institution*, December 4, 2018, <https://www.hoover.org/research/legacy-saddams-islam>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Polk, 119-120.

outsiders, the ‘Arabs of the Second Class’.”³¹ Nasr attributes this second-class status to the very beginning of the Sunni-Shia divide. He argues that since the Umayyad and Abbasid empires, Sunnis were favored politically and that this elitism has transpired and grown into the modern strong “pull of sectarianism”. According to historian William Polk, “Sunni Muslims like Saddam and the men around him simply could not believe that the Shias, who had been generally excluded from participation in the Iraqi state since its inception, could be loyal citizens.”³² As we know, this Shia exclusion predated the inception of the Iraqi State, and originated when Ali and his followers were sidelined. This demonstrates that the events that transpired over a thousand years prior still played a relevant role in shaping Iraq’s modern political history.

Hussein started to crack down on Shia protests and gatherings: closing their schools, arresting and executing clerics, driving thousands into exile to Iran.³³ At one point, he attempted to regain sway with the Shia community by rebuilding Shia mosques (that he had previously destroyed), making Ali’s birthday a national holiday, and even proclaiming himself a descendent of Ali. At this point he was too late, as they had seen their loved ones and leaders persecuted or killed, driving some to even practice taqiyah (the practice of dissimulation: concealing one’s religious identity to maintain physical security). To Hussein, this rejection of his efforts was further proof that the Shia were his enemy. Thus a vicious cycle was created: the more Hussein was suspicious of Shias, the more they distanced themselves from him, leading him to view them as even more suspicious.

³¹ Nasr, 92.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

Hussein's particular brand of sectarianism had less to do with his own ideological differences but rather was more of an ethno-nationalist conflict, between what he deemed Arab (Sunni) and what he viewed as non-Arab/ Persian (the Shia). Hussein adhered to the Ba'athist interpretation of Islam, which framed it as a means of promulgating Arab nationalism. Shia ideology rejected this political use of religion by a non-religious figure, which, to Hussein, was akin to a rejection of Arab identity and automatically made him distrust the Shia (and vice-versa). Further, the war between Shia Iran and Iraq made Hussein even more distrustful of his country's Shia. This led to a violent sectarian campaign which forced many Iraqi Shias to find refuge in neighboring Iran, which only reinforced Hussein's distrust and belief that Shias were a) not Arab and b) a threat to Arab unification.

Here we can recall Nasr's argument, "The Middle East will not be defined by the Arab identity or any particular form of national government. Ultimately, the character of the region will be decided by the crucible of Shia revival and the Sunni response to it." While Nasr is right about sectarianism being the most significant element in defining the Middle East, his differentiation between questions of Arab identity/ national government and sectarianism clearly does not hold true in the Hussein case. Rather, Saddam's sectarian views were compounded with his mode of government which was rooted in an Arab nationalist obsession. After the American Occupation led to the end of his regime and eventually his execution, Hussein's particularly brutal brand of sectarianism left Iraq's majority Shia in a state of retributive aggravation, which would eventually lead to the setting for the emergence of ISIS.

IV. American Influence

“This is one of the most fractious places you could have picked.”³⁴ Former military strategist of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Col. Thomas X. Hammes, couldn’t have better described Iraq.

After the American invasion of Iraq led to the toppling of Hussein’s regime, the Bush administration decided to instill a transitional government, hoping to secure a democratization process in Iraq. The Coalition Provisional Authority was established in 2003 and was led by a multinational force, headed by the United States. The Authority’s mission was “to restore conditions of security and stability, to create conditions in which the Iraqi people can freely determine their own political future and facilitating economic recovery, sustainable reconstruction and development.”³⁵ Almost two decades later, Iraq still hasn’t realized any of those goals, in large part due to the very organization that outlined them.

De-Ba’athification

The CPA pursued a de-Baathification process, which ultimately resulted in disastrous long-term sectarian consequences. The de-Baathification strategy is credited to Ambassador Paul Bremer, who was chosen as the head of the CPA. Bremer, who spoke no Arabic and had no history/background with the Middle East, was a clearly unqualified choice to secure what was the most fractured state in an already complex political ecosystem that makes up the Middle

³⁴ Frontline, “Losing Iraq”, *PBS*, July 29, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/losing-iraq/>.

³⁵ Elaine L. Halchin, “The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA): Origin Characteristics, and Institutional Authorities,” *CRS Report for Congress*, June 6, 2005.

East. Yet, the Bush administration still elected to send him, and after a two-week crash course on Middle Eastern politics, he arrived in Iraq.³⁶ As he flew in, Bremer noted the first image he had of the country he was now head of, “The thing that was striking to us was the fact that a lot of the buildings were on fire.”³⁷ Symbolic of the political situation he was about to face, the fires had been burning for over a month, as there was no functioning fire department. His first day in office, Bremer issued the first CPA order, which formally ended Baath domination of the government and integrated the Kurdish and Shia rivals. Many in the CPA felt that the order was too extreme and risked marginalizing a considerable sector of the population. A CIA officer warned Bremer, “If you do this (issue Order Number One) you’re going to drive 30,000 to 50,000 Ba’athists underground by nightfall. And the number’s closer to 50,000 than it is to 30,000.”³⁸ Rather than heed the advice, Bremer issued Order Number Two, which dissolved the Iraqi national army. This decision would essentially be one of the main contributing factors to ISIS’s powerful military operations, as now 300,000 unemployed armed men with military training would carry resentment toward both the American government, and the subsequent American-endorsed Iraqi leader. Thus, with the toppling of the Hussein regime, began another era of sectarian division which would quickly give rise to a Sunni insurgency and a subsequent civil war.

Nouri al-Maliki

The future Iraqi leader in question would be Nouri al-Maliki, a relatively novice and unknown politician at the time. Maliki, who was part of the Shia Dawa party (which had been

³⁶ Frontline, *Losing Iraq*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

illegal under Hussein), had spent most of his Iraqi political career in exile in Iran and Syria, where his focus was the toppling of Hussein's regime. Before Hussein, Maliki had spent his childhood in Junaja, a small town south of Karbala, in Iraq's Shia heartland. He grew up obsessively reading the poetry written by his grandfather, who had been a leading opponent of British colonial rule. Maliki's nephew describes the writings as being "about the love one feels for the homeland, about nationalism... and the refusal to succumb to the occupiers."³⁹ One of Maliki's favorite sayings from his grandfather was "the oppressed must leap like lions and work hard for the sake of Islam." His patriotism was not found in politics, but more so in religion. A childhood friend of Maliki noted "He was serious and virtuous. He had high morals. He used to teach at the village mosque." As a young man, he joined the Dawa political movement, aimed at creating a political party which would promote Islamic values and ethics. This largely Shia movement threatened the secular Ba'athist party, and it was soon outlawed. One day, a Ba'athist policeman came to Junaja looking for the 29 year old Maliki. When Maliki heard this, he fled to neighboring Jordan, and later Syria then Iran, where he would live until U.S. forces toppled Hussein. Almost immediately after his departure, Hussein began his violent crack-down of the country's Shias. Sixty-seven members of Maliki's family were among the thousands of Shia victims that Hussein's forces killed. Maliki's nationalist and religious upbringing along with his personal loss at the hands of Hussein's brand of sectarianism, most likely influenced his own sectarian policies.

When he returned to Iraq, he became the country's Dawa party leader. The ultimate antithesis to Hussein, he was viewed by many as a new Iraqi hero. His personal story also

³⁹ Alice Fordham, "Iraqis Recall Al-Maliki's Lead In Return To Shia Dominance," *NPR*, April 29, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/04/29/307913551/ahead-of-iraqi-election-maliki-remembered-as-a-rebel-who-fought-saddam>.

reflected a reality of loss that many Iraqis were still reeling from. Thus, he was viewed as the ideal Iraqi leadership candidate to Americans, who were still emphatically pursuing their de-Baathification strategy. Yet, years in exile and his recent election to Dawa leadership meant that he was a political novice. In fact, his experience was so lacking that when he became prime minister, Bush organized weekly video conferences, in which he essentially tutored Maliki on how to run a country. The country that this new naïve prime minister was to inherit, was one of significant division and violence, with a recently dissolved military and government. It was essentially a state-less state, the most fractious place one could be, and one that an insurgent took full advantage of.

V. The First Insurgency

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

The insurgent in question was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was an unusual candidate to be the founder of one of the most successful Islamic fundamentalist organizations. Born in Zarqa, Jordan, Ahmad Fadhil Nazzal (like many jihadists, his nom de guerre “Zarqawi” came from his birthplace) was known to his neighbors as a “hot-headed street thug” as well as the “green man,” due to his sleeves of tattoos. He was known for being an alcoholic and avid drug user, belonging to local gangs, and living off a career of petty crimes. The latter would land him in jail where he would undergo a deep religious transformation. He memorized a whopping 6,236 verses of the Quran and in an extreme show of devotion, Zarqawi used a smuggled in razor to peel off his tattooed skin. After his release from prison he eventually ended up in a training camp in northern Iraq where he eventually caught the attention of Osama bin Laden. Former CIA analyst, Nada Bakos explains, “Zarqawi is the new start-up, and bin Laden wants to invest. He wants Zarqawi to use the Al-Qaeda brand.”⁴⁰ Zarqawi’s profile got a large boost thanks to the Americans. Desperate for a justification to enter Iraq, former Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed the UN stating that “Iraq harbors a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an associate and collaborator of Osama bin Laden.”⁴¹ The claim that Hussein was harboring Zarqawi or had any link to him turned out to be completely baseless, but it had already

⁴⁰ Jason M. Breslow, “Who Was the Founder of ISIS?” *Frontline PBS*, May 17, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/who-was-the-founder-of-isis/>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

been used as a justification in the “War on Terror” for the U.S. to enter Iraq. In his speech, Powell mentioned Zarqawi’s name a total of 21 times, which for a relatively low-level insurgent was a major ego boost. Bakos said, “Now he’s [Zarqawi] showing bin Laden and Al Qaeda who he really is...He’s become this iconic person without ever really doing anything.” Ironically, the man who would become the United States’ number one enemy, was in a way given a leadership role by the Americans.

AQI

About three months after Hussein’s ousting, a bomb went off outside the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, killing seventeen. This was how Zarqawi formally entered the Iraq War. This was how Americans met their number one enemy (who they had ironically emboldened). This was how the Sunni insurgency started.

Al-Zarqawi saw Iraq’s mounting chaos and obvious power vacuum as a perfect opportunity for his insurgency group to grow. The group started its insurgency with the bombing of the Jordanian embassy but quickly evolved into a mass bombing campaign. Soon after the initial bombing, the group pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden’s successful al-Qaeda terrorist group. Ayman al-Zawahiri (bin Laden’s second in command and a co-founder of al-Qaeda), sent a letter to al-Zarqawi. In this letter al-Zarqawi perfectly captured the political and social state of Iraq, “In general Iraq is a political mosaic, an ethnic mixture, and scattered confessional and sectarian disparities that only a central authority and an overpowering ruler have been able to lead, beginning with Ziyad Ibn Abihi (tr. note: 7th century A.D.) and ending with Saddam. The future faces difficult choices. It is a land of great hardships and difficulties for everyone, whether

he is serious or not.”⁴² Interestingly, Zawahiri referenced a political figure from the Umayyad dynasty, once again proving how much relevance the history of the sectarian divide still has. Al-Zawahiri understood what the Americans did not- that a strong central government was necessary for this diverse population, and thus capitalized on this American ignorance. This is how the Sunni insurgency in Iraq started, with this new enemy a local product of a foreign created power vacuum, already strategically ahead of the U.S. military as it understood that its greatest weapon would be Iraqi society. For more information on AQI’s military strategy please see Appendix A.

AQI also found recruitment to be a byproduct of the insurgency. With unemployment rates rising due to the violence and lack of political infrastructure, AQI was able to entice several civilians to join their jihad with the promise of protection and cash : “‘I was out of work and needed the money,’ said Abu Nawall, the nom de guerre of an unemployed metal worker who was paid as much as \$1,300 a month as an insurgent... ‘How else could I support my family?’”⁴³

Most importantly, however, AQI capitalized on the de-Baathification fallout. As previously stated, over 300,000 men lost their jobs when Bremer de-professionalized the Iraqi Army. Well-trained, armed, unemployed, and upset at the Americans and Maliki, these men were the ideal recruiting pool for Zarqawi’s insurgency.

War on the Shia

In a 2005 speech, Zarqawi declared a specific war: “This is a call to all the Sunnis in Iraq: Awaken from your slumber, and arise from your apathy. You have slept for a long time. The

⁴² “Zarqawi Letter,” *U.S. Department of State*, February, 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.html>.

⁴³ Amit R. Paley, “Iraqis Joining Insurgency Less for Cause Than Cash,” *The Washington Post*, November 20, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/19/AR2007111902022.html>.

wheels of war to annihilate the Sunnis have not and will not halt... Since the government of the descendant of Ibn Al-'Alqami... has declared a total war against the Sunnis... the organization (ISIS) has decided to declare a total war against the Rafidite Shi'ites throughout Iraq, wherever they may be."⁴⁴ Ibn al-Alqami was the last ruler of the Abbasid Caliphate and was a devout Shia. Zarqawi refers to Iraq's Shias as his descendants, once again proving that the historical events that led to the schism are still very fresh and influential in the rise of ISIS.

Zarqawi's primary strategy was to instigate a civil war between the country's Sunnis and Shia. In a letter to bin Laden, Zarqawi explicitly outlined his strategy, "If we succeed in dragging them [the Shia] into the arena of sectarian war, it will become possible to awaken the inattentive Sunnis."⁴⁵ Zarqawi's first act of war on the Shia was the bombing of the Mosque of Imam Ali, which houses Ali ibn Talib's body and is considered one of the holiest Shia sites. Over one hundred people were killed, including Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, a prominent Shia leader.⁴⁶ This first attack quickly earned him the nickname, "The Sheikh of the Slaughterers."

Zarqawi's offensive on the Shia was more than just a military strategy. Rather, it stemmed from a much deeper hatred he harbored toward them. To him, the Shia (along with the Americans) were the servants of the Antichrist.⁴⁷ In a letter to bin Laden he described the Shia as, "the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom."⁴⁸ This poignant language demonstrates the deep distrust that

⁴⁴ Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, "Leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq Al-Zarqawi Declares 'Total War' on Shi'ites, States that the Sunni Women of Tel'afar Had 'Their Wombs Filled with the Sperm of the Crusaders,'" *Bryn Mawr*, September 16, 2005. <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/4810/ZAR20050914P.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Breslow "Who was the Founder of ISIS?"

⁴⁶ Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016) 50.

⁴⁷ William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: the History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin's Press 10.

⁴⁸ Hassan and Weiss, 51.

Zarqawi has for the Shia, calling them snakes and crafty. This language also depicts the Shia in a very ominous light- their “penetrating venom” is offensive language, rather than a passive description. Not only are the Shia intrinsically immoral but also an active threat to what AQI deems true Islam. Zarqawi, and the subsequent Islamic State, believed that “innovation and to innovate on the Koran is to deny its initial perfection.”⁴⁹ To him, this “innovation” manifests itself in common Shia practices that aren’t based in the Quran or Hadiths,⁵⁰ such as worshipping at the graves of imams or self-flagellation. Thus, to Zarqawi, the Shia are apostates, viewed as one of the worse offenses as they are purportedly acting against Islam and Mohammed, while practicing in their names.

However, whatever his justifications were for waging war against the Shia, his extremely violent attacks against them were too savage to swallow even for Al-Qaeda. In a letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi, the former warns the latter against using excessive violence towards the Shia:

“Many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia. The sharpness of this questioning increases when the attacks are on one of their mosques, and it increases more when the attacks are on the mausoleum of Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib, may God honor him. My opinion is this matter won’t be acceptable to the Muslim populace, however much you try to explain it, and aversion to this will continue.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants.”

⁵⁰ Report of the words and deeds of Mohammed and other early Muslims; considered an authoritative source of revelation; second only to the Quran (Oxford Islamic Studies)

⁵¹ “Zawahiri’s Letter to Zarqawi,” *Combating Terrorism Center*, July 9, 2005, <https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-original-language-2/> (8).

The attack of the aforementioned mosque marked the beginning of AQI's sectarian war, announcing a strategy of such extreme brutality against Iraq's Shia that the leadership of the already notoriously violent Al-Qaeda, cautioned against excess. Rather than heed Zawahiri's advice of constraint, (this disregard for Al-Qaeda's authority eventually led to the dissolution of the ties between the two groups) Zarqawi went on to bomb another important Shia shrine, the Golden Dome in Samarra. According to former CIA case officer Patrick Skinner, this act was the catalyst for the ensuing explosion of violence, "And immediately, it was within 12 hours that everything in Iraq changed... It went from horrible to unbelievably horrible."⁵² Thus began Iraq's Civil War, as "a Sunni response to the Shia revival" (Nasr).

The insurgency ended (for more information about the military strategy used please refer to Appendix B) when the American military ultimately put the nail in the coffin when they killed Zarqawi in a drone strike in 2006. Al-Qaeda confirmed his death when they released the statement, "We want to give you the joyous news of the martyrdom of the mujahid sheikh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."⁵³ Zarqawi died at the age of 39 with a 25 million dollar bounty on his head and a martyrdom.

American Ambassador, Zalmay Khalizad described the critical role Zarqawi played in Iraq's sectarian strife, "Zarqawi was the godfather of sectarian killing in Iraq. He led a civil war within Islam and a global war of civilizations."⁵⁴ However, Khalizad was quick to caution that sectarian violence continued to pose a threat, "Zarqawi's death will not end the violence in Iraq, but it is an important step in the right direction."

⁵² Frontline, "The Secret History of ISIS," *PBS*, May 17, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/the-secret-history-of-isis/>.

⁵³ John F. Burns, "U.S. Strike Hits Insurgent at Safehouse," *The New York Times*, June 8, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/middleeast/08cnd-iraq.html>.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi died three weeks after Maliki was elected Prime Minister, leaving him the aftermath of Iraq's first modern sectarian war. From the green man to the Sheikh of slaughterers, to the godfather of sectarian killing, Zarqawi also left an impressive legacy of terror, and a blueprint for his successor, which would be ISIS.

Maliki's Sectarian Response

After Ambassador Khalizad cautioned that Zarqawi's death would not be the death of violence, he optimistically advised a solution "I call on Iraq's various communities to take responsibility for sectarian violence to an end, and for all Iraqis to unite."⁵⁵ However, Maliki would soon rear his own brand of sectarianism.

President Obama had run a campaign that strongly advocated against the American-Iraq war, so when he assumed office, he made it one of his top priorities to bring American troops home. As soon as Obama was elected, Maliki realized that there would be much less American oversight. He began de-professionalizing the Iraqi army, removing any Sunni commanders and replacing them with Shia political loyalists, focusing on creating a loyal army, rather than an effective one. Iraqi's weakened army would eventually lead to ISIS's easy occupation of Mosul. Any check on his actions ended when shortly after his election and replacement of Bush, President Obama made the call to remove all American troops from Iraq (against the Pentagon's advice). By the end of 2011, the U.S. troops left Iraq, along with 10,000 State Department employees.⁵⁶ Iraq was now autonomous, and Maliki was left to govern without any limitations imposed by foreign supervision. One day after the American troops left, Maliki issued an arrest

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Frontline, *Losing Iraq*.

warrant for his rival, the Sunni Vice President, Tariq al Hashimi, accusing him of running death squads and assassinating political enemies, charges he denied. Al-Hashimi was sentenced to death but was smuggled to safety in Turkey. After clearly being tortured, al Hashemi's bodyguards admitted to carrying out various terrorist attacks. Al-Hashemi maintained his innocence. According to David Petraeus, this was the turning point of political persecution of Sunnis, "It was a catalyst for a renewed sense among the Sunni Arab population that they once again didn't have a seat at the table in their country and that their leaders were targeted by the government. And that had a very, very harmful effect."⁵⁷ Maliki went on to launch a campaign of persecution of Sunni politicians; Sunni leaders were detained, and the offices of the Sunni finance minister were raided. In 2012, Maliki's persecution campaign turned from targeting politicians, to including civilians. Thousands of Sunnis were arrested on "suspicion of subversion" and were held for months without fair trial. Many did not make it to jail and were targeted by Shia militias. Bodies of executed Sunnis were turning up daily, with no criminal investigations whatsoever.⁵⁸ This lack of security and lawlessness would eventually explain why many Iraqi Sunnis would turn to ISIS for protection. Dexter Filkins, author of *The Forever War*, attempted to explain Maliki's sectarian campaign in an interview with Frontline, "The thing to understand about Maliki is, is that when he looks at Iraq's Sunni minority, he sees, you know al Qaeda. He sees the Ba'athists. He sees military coups. He sees plots against him. He sees a population which despises him and wants to come back to power."⁵⁹ Maliki's paranoia-fueled political and civilian persecution launched mass anti-government protests in Sunni provinces,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Frontline, *The Rise of ISIS*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

one of which was the Nineveh province, where Mosul is located, and which was where ISIS would soon establish its caliphate.

Beginning with the succession dispute following Mohammed's death, to Hussein's ethno-nationalist inspired distrust of Iraq's Shia, to Maliki's retributive anti Sunni policies, and ending with Zarqawi's religious insurgency vilifying the Shia, a cycle of sectarianism has profoundly marked Iraq's political landscape. Rather than argue that sectarian conflict is simply politicized religion, it is clear that it is a religious ideological conflict that has influenced the country's politics.

Both the Relative Deprivation theory and Crenshaw's democratization theory, which are not religious in nature, are more than applicable to Iraq's modern conflicts. To reiterate the former theory, Galtung argues that "the situation that is most likely to provoke aggressive behavior is one in which individuals find themselves in a state of disequilibrium along various socio-political dimensions of status." Sunnis were forced to face high levels of unemployment as a result of de-Baathification policies, and watch their Shia counterparts thrive in government jobs, often times having taken the positions they had previously held. This marginalization led to strong feelings of resentment towards Maliki's Shia government. Zarqawi was thus able to capitalize on this disgruntlement and further rouse sectarian fractures by claiming that Shias were a threat to Sunnis. Crenshaw's transitional democracy theory which maintains "In situations where paths to the legal expression of opposition are blocked, but where the regime's

repression is inefficient, revolutionary terrorism is doubly likely,”⁶⁰ is evidenced by Maliki’s combination of a lack of free political expression for Sunnis as well as the weak government institutions that furthered the relative deprivation theory (economic grievances).

Both of these non-religious theories can explain Iraq’s fractious state. However, their indicators of economic inequalities, weak institutions, and lack of political expression are all by-products of sectarian policies, which is an inherently religious phenomenon. This further lends credence to Nasr’s argument that a sectarian conflict, seen in “the Shia revival and the Sunni response to it” would be the defining factor for Middle Eastern politics. The combination of all these sectarian by-products were thus deeply rooted in long-standing religious differences and would set the ideal stage for the rise of ISIS.

⁶⁰ Crenshaw, p.116.

VI. The Second Insurgency: Fall of Mosul

Mosul, a city of over three million inhabitants (less than 700,000 after ISIS' control)⁶¹ was Iraq's second largest city. Over 80% of the city was estimated to be Sunni Arab, thereby rendering it one of Maliki's biggest perceived threats. It was thus subjected to many of his sectarian policies, and so anti-government protests soon broke out. Violence erupted in 2013 when the Iraqi army attempted to shut down protests in Mosul's Ahrar square. On January 7th, 2013, four protestors were wounded when army vehicles ran protestors over. The next day, the army fired on the protestors, wounding four more.⁶² These protests intensified when a Sunni Mosul man set himself on fire in January 2013. Although he was quickly put out by fellow protestors and only suffered minor burns, Ghanim al-Abid, one of the Mosul protest organizers said, "He reached such a state of despair he set himself on fire."⁶³ His act reflected the 2011 self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the young Tunisian whose tragic act set forth the Arab Spring, a movement of anti-government protests across the region. The Mosul protestor's self-immolation attempt showcases an atmosphere of deep desperation, resulting from Maliki's sectarian policies. Thus, Mosul became the ideal place for a Sunni insurgency to stake its claim.

Mosul officially fell to ISIS June 10th, 2014, after a six day battle with the Iraqi Army. Many were astonished by how quickly a seemingly unknown militant group was able to defeat the country's armed forces. The official fighting was triggered on June 4th, 2014 when federal police went to arrest an Islamic State military commander; rather than cooperating he blew

⁶¹ Hannah Lynch, "Mosul Factsheet: brief guide to the city and the liberation offensive," *Rudaw* October 17, 2016, <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/1610201610>.

⁶² Sam Wyer "Political Update: Mapping The Iraq Protests," *The Institute for the Study of War*, January 11, 2013, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/political-update-mapping-iraq-protests>.

⁶³ Sufyan Mashhadani, "Iraq protester sets himself ablaze in anti-government rally," *Reuters*, January 20, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-protests-idUSBRE90J0IC20130120>.

himself up.⁶⁴ Two days later, a convoy of pick-up trucks, carrying armed ISIS fighters from Syria shot their way past manned checkpoints, into Mosul. Three days later, the terrorist group pushed the Iraqi army out, and would assume control over Iraq's second largest city for the next three years.

Mosul's amazingly quick fall to ISIS was a massive embarrassment not only for the Iraqi government, but also for the American one. After all, Americans had poured billions of dollars into the Iraq project. Several investigations have since been conducted, to explore how this incredibly quick fall could even occur (for more information on these investigations please refer to Appendix C). In addition to anti-governmental sentiments felt by Mosul's Sunni majority (a direct result of Maliki's sectarian policies) most reports have found that the Iraqi army's (a result of Bremer's second order to deprofessionalize the Iraqi army resulted in weak security forces) sheer lack of preparedness and skill was to blame for this insanely rapid takeover of the city. ISIS's original goal was somewhat modest compared to its resulting achievements. Originally, the group hoped to seize control of only a couple of neighborhoods in the city, and only for a few hours, with the hope of making a statement that Baghdad couldn't ignore.⁶⁵ Instead, the group encountered a weak army and was thus able to capture the entire city in three days. An independent Arab publication remarked, "Mosul has proved that the Iraqi army is a failed institution in the heart of a failed state."⁶⁶

Although ISIS's rise to power and the fall of Mosul seemed to happen almost overnight, years of poor leadership and a weak military as a result of sectarian policies, allowed this

⁶⁴ Ned Parker, Isabel Coles and Raheem Salman, "Special Report: How Mosul fell- An Iraqi general disputes Baghdad's story," *Reuters*, October 14, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-gharawi-special-report-idUSKCN0I30Z820141014>.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Bender, "One Paragraph Explains How ISIS Managed To Seize Iraq's Second-Largest City," *Business Insider*, October 14, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-isis-managed-to-take-mosul-2014-10>

⁶⁶ "مهدي الغراوي، القائد القاتل كيش فداء المالكي في العراق" October 16, 2014, *Noon Post*, <http://www.noonpost.org/content/4005>.

relatively unknown terrorist organization to quickly become the most internationally feared group. The Fall of Mosul is the ideal case to support Crenshaw's argument that transitional democratic states are the most susceptible for terrorism. Iraq's army (which had international funding and training by the most advanced military in the world) is a perfect example of how weak institutions can allow insurgencies to rise. To reiterate Crenshaw, "In situations where paths to the legal expression of opposition is blocked, but regime's repression is inefficient, revolutionary terrorism is doubly likely." We saw earlier that Maliki's sectarianism blocked legal expression of opposition. The second ingredient in the recipe, weak regime repression, is clearly evident in the incompetence of the Iraqi Army which allowed ISIS to even surprise itself in its shockingly easy capture of Mosul. The American's de-Baathification policies also encouraged sectarian policies, which led to the first insurgency. However, Zarqawi's AQI was not able to succeed for long due to the presence of the American military, which was able to effectively repress the insurgency. But when US troops left, allowing Malaki to embark on his sectarian offensive, resentment increased in the Sunni majority while Malaki's military forces were ineffectual, allowing for the rise of ISIS.

At its peak, ISIS controlled territory the size of Britain, with a population of about twelve million people under its self-proclaimed state. Mosul was by far its largest city, and its most important conquest. It makes one wonder if ISIS would have even made the news, had only a few decisions not been influenced by sectarianism.

VII. ISIS: The Caliphate

Although the battle for Mosul only lasted six days, ISIS would go on to control Iraq's second largest city for the next three years, one month, and eleven days. For our purposes, we will no longer treat Mosul as just a military conquest/ Iraqi city but rather as the location where ISIS was temporarily able to realize its ambition of establishing their Islamic state. This "state" would create and maintain extremely well structured and effective financial, legal, and political systems through a complex system combining brutality (fear) and bureaucracy (order), which were rooted in a religious ideological sense of duty (legitimacy).

The Religious Justifications for a Caliphate

Two months before he died, Zarqawi had released a video in which he shockingly announced that he would create an Islamic State: "We bring good tidings to the nation: The establishment of the Shura Council of Mujahideen in Iraq, which, Allah willing, will be the nucleus for the establishment of an Islamic state in which the word of Allah will reign supreme." The declaration was unprecedented, as even Al-Qaeda saw the establishment of a caliphate as a long ways off. However, Zarqawi's impatience would materialize about eight years after his death.

Following Zarqawi's death AQI underwent a couple leadership transitions and some rebranding to eventually become the notorious Islamic State. Abu Bakr Baghdadi, also known as

the “ghost sheikh” due to his rare public appearances would go on to inherit the group, take over Mosul, and proclaim a caliphate. The latter he did in one of his rare but most important appearances, speaking from the pulpit in Mosul’s Great Mosque of al-Nuri saying, “Rush, O Muslims to your state. Yes, it is your state. Rush, because...Iraq is not for the Iraqis. The earth is Allah’s. {Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah. He causes to inherit it whom He wills of His servants. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous} [Al-A’rāf: 128].”⁶⁷ Baghdadi told his followers that their primary identity was as a Muslim; their loyalties were no longer to their nationalities but to their God. Baghdadi goes on to challenge the legitimacy of other leaderships: “from corruption is to be ruled by man-made laws.”⁶⁸ Thus, even despite Maliki’s loss of legitimacy with Sunnis due to his sectarian policies, he was still not considered a legitimate leader, and all those who followed his “man-made laws” were susceptible to corruption. In his “Give Good News to the Believers” speech, Baghdadi broke down the entire global order: borders were illegitimate, as were governments and their leaders. All that mattered was God, the ummah,⁶⁹ and now the Caliphate to serve both. Oxford Islamic Studies defines the Caliph’s function as “the enforcement of law, defense and expansion of the realm of Islam, distribution of funds (booty and alms), and general supervision of government.” Baghdadi took on these responsibilities, while also attempting to unify the Muslim population under communal obligation: “this is a duty upon the Muslims- a duty that has been lost for centuries... The Muslims sin by losing it, and they must always seek to establish it.”⁷⁰ Thus, the call to join ISIS was religious at its core. Musa Cerantonio, a ISIS recruiter explained, “The caliphate is not just a

⁶⁷ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, “Announcement of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham: Give Good News to the Believers,” *Bryn Mawr*, April 9, 2013, <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/16497/ABB20130409.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Muslim community... the essential unity and theoretical equality of Muslims from diverse and geographical settings (Oxford Islamic Studies).

⁷⁰ Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants.”

political entity but also a vehicle for salvation.”⁷¹ Baghdadi had effectively framed the formation of a caliphate as not simply state-formation, but rather a religious necessity and individual duty. As we can recall from the original Schism section, Nasr explained that to Sunnis “Religion does not depend on the quality of political authority but on its ability to help the faith survive and grow.” A state was essential to the survival and growth of Islam. Thus spurred on by religious duty, recruits flocked to join this new state, tearing up and burning their passports: shedding an old life of corruption for a new one of salvation.

The Divine Right to Kill

“One person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter.” Although it seems impossible to understand how someone could view bombing a sports stadium, driving a truck through a crowd, or a beheading as tools to achieving “freedom” it is important to understand how ISIS rationalized and utilized violence. The Quran allows for violence only as an act of self-defense: “fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors (*The Cow 24:190*).” ISIS fundamentally believes that it is being aggressed; the way of life that God dictated is being threatened by apostates (such as the Shia) and that it is thus in a sectarian war. Furthermore, according to Islamist Choudary the beheadings and crucifixions that we view as inhumane are actually strangely meant to avoid long-term violence, “the state has an obligation to terrorize its enemies- a holy order to scare the shit out of them with beheadings and crucifixions and enslavement of women and children, because doing so hastens victory and avoids prolonged conflict.”⁷² To ISIS, this holy war was

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

not waged by them but rather on them and it is their duty to respond by any means necessary, as it is their duty to establish and expand a caliphate. For ISIS's recruits this is an opportunity to prove loyalty to Allah, thereby securing a place in heaven and being absolved of previous sins and assigning meaning to one's life.

Choudary summarizes the justification of offensive jihad by stating, "Without a caliphate, offensive jihad is an inapplicable concept. But the waging of war to expand the caliphate is an essential duty of the caliph."⁷³ Thus, in order for a Caliphate to exist/ expand, the use of violence is necessary.

Nasr remarked that "The Sunni conception of authority has centered on a preoccupation with order." ISIS was able to accomplish this order by implementing a balance of brutality and bureaucracy, both encased in a religious framework.

Bureaucracy

After Mosul was recovered from ISIS, the New York Times published a report investigating what allowed this young, relatively unknown terrorist organization to stay in power in Mosul for so long. Entitled "The ISIS Files"⁷⁴, the report is the result of five trips to Iraq, contributions from six New York time journalists, and thousands of uncovered internal documents belonging to the former Islamic State. What these uncovered documents showed was a highly efficient bureaucratic state, which was very different from the image of chaotic brutality that the Islamic extremist group advertised. According to the Times report, the self-proclaimed

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Rukmini Callimachi, "The ISIS Files," *The New York Times*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/04/world/middleeast/isis-documents-mosul-iraq.html>.

state provided a variety of services; it collected garbage (a problem that is currently plaguing the city), it ran its own D.M.V., it issued birth and marriage certificates (printed on official ISIS stationary), it ensured that the city's plumbing and sewage system worked, it ensure access to electricity, it even built highways ("The Caliphate Way", constructed under ISIS, connected two different parts of the city and improved traffic). Residents started to see a change in their city: for once, things were running efficiently. Muhammad Nasser Hamoud, a former public servant employed with the Iraqi Directorate of Agriculture, said that he had noticed something that filled him with shame: "The streets were visibly cleaner than they had been when the Iraqi government was in charge." Since ISIS felt it was their religious duty to establish an autonomous state (aka Caliphate), it thus concentrated on creating such a high functioning bureaucracy.

ISIS was able to run these government services in large part because of its religious taxes as well as its persecution of Shia (which was largely unchanged since Zarqawi's first proclamation of a sectarian war). Its most lucrative tax (for more information on ISIS' taxation system please refer to Appendix D) was the religious tax known as *zakat*.⁷⁵ Although it is meant to be a volunteered tax, ISIS made it mandatory. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, the *zakat* tax alone generated for ISIS a revenue of about 900 million U.S. dollars a year.⁷⁶ A specific ministry was created for the collection of this tax: the Ministry of Zakat and Charities. *Zakat* is primarily intended as a charity tax, and although ISIS did help out

⁷⁵ Required almsgiving that is one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims with financial means are required to give 2.5 percent of their net worth annually as *zakat*. To practicing Muslims, *zakat* connotes the path to purity, comprehension of material responsibility, and an enhanced sense of spirituality. *Zakat* is used for the needy, for propagation of the faith, to free slaves, to relieve debtors, to help travelers, and for the administration of *zakat*, as well as other efforts approved by religious authorities. (Oxford Islamic Studies)

⁷⁶ Agnès Levallois, "The financing of the 'Islamic State' in Iraq and Syria," *European Parliament Community on Foreign Affairs*, September 11, 2017, doi:10.2861/193643.

some needy families (only Sunni families, of course), the Ministry acted more as the Internal Revenue Service.⁷⁷

In order to finance the city and their jihadist activities, the group confiscated assets belonging to all non-Sunni residents and distributed them to their Sunni counterparts. One of the documents that the New York Times journalists uncovered was a manual distributed to government workers explaining how to seize property from the minority and religious groups that it had either expelled or slaughtered.⁷⁸⁷⁹ The 27-page manual was entitled “The Caliphate on the Path of Prophecy” and stated “Confiscation will be applied to the property of every single Shia, apostate, Christian, Nusayri and Yazidi based on a lawful order issued directly by the Ministry of Judiciary.”⁸⁰ It is important to remember that this confiscation of property was considered justified, as the Sunni extremist group did not view Shias as true Muslims; rather, they were considered to be apostates, as Zarqawi had stated when he made his declaration of war against the Shias. ISIS considered that they had won Zarqawi’s war and thus they created a Ministry of War Spoils. This ministry collected and recorded “war spoils” which included not only deeds to land but everyday household items as well, such as washing machines, kettles, TVs, etc., all taken from Shias and other non-Sunni Arabs. A large part of ISIS’s appeal was its promise of taking care of its own. It offered free housing for foreign recruits, and provided anything they would need, thanks to the war spoils. French Kahina el-Hadra (the wife of Samy

⁷⁷ Callimachi, “The ISIS Files.”

⁷⁸ Fazel Hawramy and Emma Graham-Harrison, “Family survived under ISIS for two years by pretending to be Sunni,” *The Guardian*, December 27, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/27/family-survived-isis-pretending-to-be-sunni-mosul>.

⁷⁹ Alissa J. Rubin, “ISIS Forces Last Iraqi Christians to Flee Mosul,” *The New York Times*, July 18, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/19/world/middleeast/isis-forces-last-iraqi-christians-to-flee-mosul.html>.

⁸⁰ Callimachi, “The ISIS Files.”

Amimour⁸¹ one of the perpetrators of the 2015 Bataclan terrorist attacks, which resulted in the deaths of 130 persons⁸²) wrote in an email to her secondary school teacher, “I’m in Mosul and it’s really the top here. I have an apartment that is fully furnished. I pay no rent nor even electricity or water lol. It’s the good life!!! I didn’t buy so much as a single fork.”⁸³⁸⁴ For foreign recruits who came from modest backgrounds, this was an especially attractive offer. For local Sunnis, confiscation of Shia property seemed justified, as they felt that they had endured similar persecution under Maliki. Informants would even phone in the addresses of their Shia neighbors, with the hope that they would receive some of their property. Mr. Hamoud said that on busy days Sunni farmers would line up outside his office, “resentful of their treatment at the hands of a Shia-led Iraqi government.” These retributive actions emphasize the damage caused by Maliki’s sectarian policies, which ISIS was clearly able to capitalize on.

In addition to the Ministry of Zakat and Charities, and the Ministry of War Spoils, ISIS also created a Ministry for Hisba. The latter would be the feared morality police that would enforce the “Prophetic Methodology.” ISIS believed that the key to a successful Caliphate was a strict interpretation of Sharia law. Every aspect of the penal system was thus judged by religious experts. A list of Taz’ir penalties (Appendix 1) outlined punishments ranging from civil ones such as “advise man to attend mosque” for an offender caught outside mosque during prayer

⁸¹ Doan Bui, “‘Il vise bien Samy.’ Quand le kamikaze du Bataclan se préparait au djihad,” *L’Obs*, January 15, 2016, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/societe/20160115.OBS2873/il-vise-bien-samy-quand-le-kamikaze-du-bataclan-se-preparait-au-djihad.html>.

⁸² AFP, “Principaux attentats en Europe depuis 2015,” *Le Point*, August 17, 2017,

http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/principaux-attentats-en-europe-depuis-2015--17-08-2017-2150667_24.php.

⁸³ Callimachi, “The ISIS Files.”

⁸⁴ A kafir is an unbeliever. First applied to Meccans who refused submission to Islam, the term implies an active rejection of divine revelation. All unbelievers are thought to face eternal damnation in the afterlife. Although there is disagreement about whether Jews and Christians are unbelievers, they have generally received tolerant treatment from Muslim governments. Islamic fundamentalists in the twentieth century applied the term to other Muslims who did not adhere to their strict interpretations of the *Quran*.

(<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1229>)

time to 20-30 public floggings for a man caught plucking his eyebrows. Every individual accused of committing an infraction, would have to appear before a religious specialist (ISIS's equivalent of a trial by judge) who would assess each case. First time, lower level offenders were forced to sign a form, filled out by the specialist. For example, a man who was caught trimming his beard (men were ordered to grow their beards) had to sign a form stating "I, the undersigned, pledge not to cut or trim my beard again. If I do that again, I will be subject to all kinds of punishments that the Hisba Center may take against me."⁸⁵ This system of law and order, which was rooted in an [extreme following] of Sharia, was welcomed by many who had also dealt with a rise in crime as a result of Maliki's weak institutions (one of which was law enforcement).

Brutality

The aforementioned punishments given by the Hisba center would be much more severe and violent. For repeat and more serious offenders, punishments and executions were publicized. However, even for minor infractions the civil form-filling was not the typical punishment. For example, Mr. Hamoud's daughter was caught in public without covering her eyes. A hisba officer punched her eye so hard that it left her with permanent impaired vision. Most importantly, brutality was used as a means to facilitate the bureaucratic efficiency. For example, all public servants were threatened with punishment or death if they did not resume their roles: one supervisor tried to plead his way out of the situation by citing a bad back. The militants told him to show up to work or they'd break his back themselves.⁸⁶ This intimidation, however barbaric, was very efficient.

⁸⁵ Callimachi, "The ISIS Files."

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The group thus created a law and order system which balanced both brutality and bureaucracy and was rooted in religion (sharia). To accomplish this, the existence of the caliphate was absolutely imperative. According to Islamist Choudary, “Before the caliphate, maybe 85 percent of the Sharia was absent from our lives... These laws are in abeyance (suspension) until we have khilafa (caliphate).”⁸⁷ In order to implement that Sharia, a Caliphate is necessary. Fawaz A. Gerges, author of “ISIS: A History” summarizes the danger of this brutal bureaucratic system, “We dismiss the Islamic State as savage. It is savage. We dismiss it as barbaric. But at the same time these people realized the need to maintain institutions. The Islamic State’s capacity to govern is really as dangerous as their combatants.”⁸⁸

Every aspect of the Islamic State was rooted in religious ideology. Beginning with the motivation to pursue the creation of the caliphate, ISIS believed that the establishment of a caliphate was a religious duty meant to serve “God and the Ummah” (Baghdadi). The necessity for a caliphate is also reflected in the Sunni belief that political authority was meant to “help the faith survive and grow”(Nasr). Baghdadi went further to proclaim that every other existing form of government was sinful, and that the caliphate was the only legitimate state. Thus, violence as a means of attaining the caliphate is justified as a) a defense mechanism in a sectarian war and b) extreme violence is necessary to hasten the arrival of a caliphate by avoiding prolonged war.

Part of the establishment of a successful caliphate required a highly functioning bureaucratic state. Its ability to provide administrative services efficiently gave ISIS legitimacy

⁸⁷ Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants.”

⁸⁸ Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016).

among many of Mosul's residents who had previously been deprived of such services due to Maliki's weak institutions and sectarian policies. The success of the bureaucracy depended on financing, which came from the zakat tax and spoils from a "sectarian war", which were both rooted in religious justifications. Lastly, ISIS adopted a Machiavellian approach to enforce law and order, which ensured the operation of the bureaucracy. This brutality was in itself justified as a means of supporting the most divine objective: the caliphate's survival.

Most of us tend to view religion as a positive and peaceful institution. Thus we find it very uncomfortable when religion and violence mix, which makes popular statements like "ISIS is not actually a religious group" OR "terrorists use religion as a coverup for violence" very tempting. However, as we've seen, ISIS' ideologies are based in very real core Islamic tenets.

Referring back to Wood's argument, which I outlined in the theory section, "The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very* Islamic... the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam." Practices like zakat, the reverence of Islam's 'golden age' caliphates, the Qur'anic defense justification of lesser (offensive) jihad, are all core principles of Islam and shared by virtually every Muslim. ISIS is a fringe extremist group, and its interpretations of these tenets have led to unconscionable violence. However, Woods' argument that the Islamic State is inherently *Islamic* is key to explaining not only its rise, but most importantly its motivations and capacities for creating a caliphate, which had a regional and global impact.

The Fall of the Capital

Although ISIS's rise to power and subsequent take over and command of Mosul was impressive for such a young terrorist organization, it was ultimately non-sustainable. Constant bombings and airstrikes began to take a financial toll, and eventually the group started to lose its appeal. International airstrikes and bombing campaigns targeting agricultural and oil fields in ISIS controlled territories forced the group to rely more heavily on zakat tax and extortion and it was difficult for them to continue financing their fighters. Since ISIS had been engaged in war since its rise to power and due to its heavy use of martyrs, a steady influx of fighters was vital to counter the constant casualties it faced. According to a report published by the European External Policy Department,⁸⁹ this decline in financing had led to ISIS's shift in focus from state-building to military campaigns. Since the religious duty it had promoted was the institution of a caliphate, the distancing from state-building led to a decrease in their legitimacy. Additionally, ISIS's effective administrative skills were incredibly important to its legitimacy factor for many of Mosul's residents. With its financial security threatened, ISIS's recruitment appeal greatly decreased and thus its attention shifted from state building to military campaigns, thereby challenging the main legitimacy it had with Mosul residents. With the deterioration of its financial and administrative appeal, residents could no longer tolerate the brutality of its violent and strict rule. When military offenses commenced, the group had to contend with several uprisings from within the city. In October 2016 a group of young men stormed a ISIS headquarters, killing two fighters and raising the Iraqi flag declaring "Mosul is Free."⁹⁰ This was only one event in a series of uprisings.⁹¹ The group ultimately lost control to coalition forces as it was outnumbered, and its resources depleted (for more information on the 2nd Battle of Mosul

⁸⁹ Agnès Levallois, "The financing of the 'Islamic State' in Iraq and Syria,"

⁹⁰ Amir Abdallah, "Rebellious youths storm ISIS headquarters in Mosul, raise Iraqi flag," *Iraqi News*, October 18, 2016, <https://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/rebellious-youths-storm-isis-headquarters-mosul/>.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

please refer to Appendix E). However, it left a significant mark on Middle Eastern history, and would forever change the game for Islamic extremism: breaking the caliphate ceiling.

CONCLUSION

Key Findings

I began this thesis by posing the question, To what extent does *religion* explain the conditions that allowed for the rise of ISIS and its subsequent creation and operation of its caliphate? The principle findings of this thesis are (1) that sectarian conflict stemming from a centuries long Shia-Sunni divide allowed for the rise of ISIS and (2) that religious ideology is the principle motivator for ISIS' objective of establishing a caliphate, and their subsequent modus operandi.

Sectarian Conflict: Following the prophet Muhammad's death a succession dispute arose out of a rift in ideology which led to the creation of Islam's two major sects: the Sunni and the Shia. The Shia believed that the successor "could understand and interpret the inner meaning of Islam, as opposed to merely implementing its outward manifestations" (Nasr). They chose Ali who first lost to a Sunni candidate and then was ultimately assassinated by a Sunni extremist. Ever since this first event, Shias have felt politically sidelined and abused by Sunnis. The Sunni's main tenet is that "religion does not depend on the quality of political authority but on its ability to help the faith survive and grow." This central credence that political authority is intended to support the faith rather than interpret it was manifested in ISIS' quest for a caliphate and in Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist ideology, which presented the pan-Arabist and pan-Islamist cause as mutually supportive. Hussein thus became distrustful of the Shias, who rejected this principle, and persecuted them deeming the Shias as Persians and a threat to Arabs. When the Americans toppled Hussein, they acted out of ignorance on sectarian issues, by implementing de-ba'athification policies and promoting the election of Shia Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

These decisions marginalized Iraq's Sunni community, created weak institutions, and instituted a leader who implemented a retributive brand of sectarianism, persecuting Iraq's Sunnis. A cycle of sectarian violence, stemming from the original succession dispute and ideological schism, manifested in Hussein's oppression of Shia, then Maliki's retributive persecution of Sunnis, then Zarqawi's declaration of war on Shia. This cycle created a fractured society and weak institutions and thus a landscape ripe for ISIS' rise.

Religious Ideology: ISIS' motivation to create a caliphate stemmed from a religious duty they felt to create a state to serve God and the Ummah (the Muslim community). Because their main objective was state-building, they focused on creating an effective bureaucratic system, which allowed them to enjoy further legitimacy from many of Mosul's residents who had previously dealt with poor government services as a result of Iraq's weak institutions. Every aspect of the bureaucratic system was based on religious ideology. The legal system was based in Sharia law and judges were religious authorities. The state's finances primarily came from a taxation system that included the religious tax (za'kat). The persecution of Shia and other non-Sunni groups allowed the state to also financially benefit from these groups' possessions, which the State called "war spoils." These war spoils and the creation of a caliphate would not have been possible had the group not found a religious justification for engaging in violence, which the Qur'an allowed only if used in defense. The group thus fundamentally believed that they were in a sectarian war, with Maliki's government as the main aggressor. Every aspect of the caliphate, from the necessity for its creation, to the justification of violence to obtain it, to its state-building was rooted in a religious principle.

Other factors also played a role in understanding the rise and success of ISIS. However, I argued that two explanations--resource scarcity (as posited by relative deprivation theory) and lack of strong institutions in a transition to democracy (as posited by Crenshaw)--were *byproducts* of the religion argument insofar as sectarian policies undermined the provision of government services and weakened institutions (including the Iraqi military). Thus, economic issues and political considerations were in fact subsumed under the overriding religious issues, lending support to my main finding.

Implications

The conflict surrounding the rise and fall of ISIS has led to a dire situation in Iraq. To stop the cycle of violence and the urge for one group in power to persecute the other, we need to address the sectarian conflict.

The population of Iraq is the main victim in this conflict. According to the United Nations' internally displaced persons monitor,⁹² there are currently 2,648,000 internally displaced persons in all of Iraq due to the violence and conflict that have been ravaging the country for years. The Internal Displacement Monitor Centre (IDMC) describes Iraq's displacement situation as "one of the most severe and volatile in the world."⁹³ A report published by the UNHCR states that there are over eleven million people in Iraq who are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, making up 30 percent of the country's population.⁹⁴

⁹² "Iraq," *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/iraq>

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian Response Plan Advance Executive Summary, (Iraq, 2017), *Reliefweb*, December 16, 2016, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IRQ_Advance_Exec_Summary_HRP_2017_FINAL.pdf (p.8-11).

Nineveh (Mosul's province) has by far the greatest "in need" population, where about 3.29 million people require assistance, whether it be food, shelter, access to medical aid, and so on. Before ISIS occupied the city, Mosul's population was estimated at three millions. Now it has been reduced to between 700, 000 and one million.⁹⁵ Thousands of people have lost their entire livelihoods, their loved ones, and their homes. Parts of the city are completely uninhabitable, with cleaning efforts taking ages. The government's resources are stretched thin, having to contend with conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction throughout the country.

Against this backdrop, the sectarian conflict continues, now with the emergence of Shia militia, which were legalized as an initial military strategy to reclaim Mosul. After helping to liberate Mosul, these militias are now attacking Sunni communities, claiming that they are looking for ISIS affiliates. One Sunni family recounted how Shia militias gathered all men under 70 in their Sunni majority town for "security vetting", including their five sons. When the family went to the house where they had been taken, they found 50 of the men, including their own sons, executed. They swear that their sons had no affiliation with ISIS. The government has had little control over these militias, who have been accused of several human rights violations.⁹⁶ There is a risk that if these Shia militias continue to target Sunni communities, it could lead to either the return of ISIS, or a similar Sunni insurgency. Ayad Allawi, one of Iraq's Vice Presidents, describes this potential threat: "They (the militias) became too strong, politically, at least for now, than the army and the police. It's possible we will see even a worse ISIS in the future. More serious replacements will appear, and more dangerous and more cunning and more

⁹⁵ Lynch, "Mosul Factsheet: brief guide to the city and the liberation offensive."

⁹⁶ Staff, "Irak. L'armement des unites de mobilisation populaire (résumé et recommandations)," *Amnesty International*, https://amnestyfr.cdn.prismic.io/amnestyfr%2Fefc562fc-eb9e-421d-bb86-b473cea5c709_mde1453862017french.pdf.

destructive. And this will not only limit itself to this part of the world, it will travel and spread over into the whole globe.”⁹⁷ The government must learn from its past mistakes: sectarianism can have disastrous consequence: If it wants to maintain national security, it must make a greater effort to exert control over the Shia militias.

So what can be done? The first step is rebuilding the city of Mosul. According to Krishnadev Calamur, a reporter for *The Atlantic*, reconstruction investments will need to reach Mosul and other Sunni dominated cities or else sectarian issues will continue: “As Iraq’s Shia-dominated government tries to rebuild, it will want to ensure that these Sunni-majority areas receive a fair share of reconstruction funds. Ultimately, that might be the only recipe for a united Iraq.”⁹⁸

The government, with the aid of the international community, must focus on reconstructing residences and shops and providing basic services. Without habitable houses, Mosul residents will remain in their camps. Rather than just donate funds, international companies can invest by contracting local residents to rebuild the city. This way there is a level of oversight that will ensure that the money won’t end up in the pockets of corrupt officials. Once reconstruction and basic services are provided, the economy will hopefully restart on its own with return of residents. Although this effort seems expensive, it will be much more costly long term if there is a continued pattern of insurgency and conflict. If Sunnis feel that they are being provided for by their government, extremist groups will lose a substantial part of their legitimacy.

⁹⁷ Frontline, *Iraq Uncovered*, PBS, March 21, 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/iraq-uncovered/>.

⁹⁸ Krishnadev Calamur, “The Fuzzy Math of Funding Iraq’s Reconstruction,” *The Atlantic*, February 17, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/iraq-conference/553325/>.

In addition to providing physical reconstruction aid, the government must provide security. It must prove itself by protecting its citizens from Shia militias. The first step must be to revitalize Iraq's security forces and police; punish corruption; ensure proper training, and establish loyalty to the military, not to individuals (if a commander deserts, his entire division should not follow suite); and most importantly, replace sectarianism with unification by building a diverse military that includes Sunnis. Only if Iraqi forces are stronger than the Shia militias will the Iraqi government have the authority and legitimacy to back the prosecution of human rights abuses. The Iraqi government must prove that they do not tolerate paramilitary groups—especially those that engage in sectarian violence. This effort will most certainly require further international oversight: the coalition forces will have to bolster its training program.

The popular saying “know thy enemy” comes to mind. ISIS has for the most part been defeated. It has lost almost all its territory and its leader, when al-Baghdadi was killed in a U.S. airstrike. However, though the group may be defeated militarily, history shows that this kind of defeat is temporary. AQI was technically defeated when U.S. airstrikes also killed Zarqawi. Yet the religious ideologies and the underlying Sunni disgruntlement were not defeated, as Zarqawi's beliefs rose from the ashes to create ISIS. These terrorist groups will continue to rise again and again, under new leaderships and new names, as no amount of drone strikes can destroy the pervasiveness of ideology.

Thus, understanding and addressing core ideological motivations and sectarian issues is pivotal if we want to learn how to permanently stop the rise of Islamic extremism.

Appendix

Appendix A: AQI Insurgency- Guerilla Warfare

AQI understood that to have any chance of defeating the world's military giant, it would have to employ a strategy that the U.S. military has never been comfortable with: guerilla warfare. A statement posted after the fall of Baghdad, on al-Qaeda's website, alneda.com (now deactivated) reads "the Americans were defeated in Vietnam... The successful attempts of dealing defeat to invader using guerilla warfare were many... these attempts have proven that the most effective method for the materially weak against the strong is guerilla warfare."⁹⁹ Guerilla warfare thus meant that AQI would use its local knowledge as a weapon against the US and would use the streets of the cities its members were familiar with to draw the US into a battle it had no idea how to fight. It hid weapons in mosques, schools and civilian homes and it blended into Iraqi society, as its insurgents were largely indistinguishable from their civilian counterparts. AQI had successfully brought in society to war, with Zarqawi explicitly stating, "The servants of Allah...are permitted to use any and all means necessary to strike the active unbeliever combatants...The goal must be pursued even if the means to accomplish it affect both the intended active fighters and unintended passive ones such as women, children and any other passive category specified by our jurisprudence. This permissibility extends to situations in which Muslims may get killed if they happen to be with or near the intended enemy, and if it is not possible to avoid hitting them or separate them from the intended Kafirs."¹⁰⁰ This statement

⁹⁹ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 292.

¹⁰⁰ Hoffman, 240.

essentially excused the deaths of civilians if they happened to be in the warzone- which they inevitably were since the guerilla nature of his combat meant that the warzone happened to be their homes, their offices, their schools, their mosques, their favorite restaurants.

Appendix B. American Military Response to AQI

Bush decided to send in 20,000 more American troops to quell the insurgency, a decision which was called “the surge.” The man in charge of this operation would be none other than General David Petraeus, a counterinsurgency expert with a Ph.D. from Princeton.¹⁰¹ Petraeus opted not to rely solely on the American military, as counterinsurgency strategy required local understanding and collaboration. He also chose not to employ the fragmented and corrupt Iraqi army which now consisted largely of Shia soldiers bent on retribution. Rather, he employed local Sunni tribes, with the objective of countering the insurgency using local knowledge as well as appeasing the growing sectarian conflict, by giving Sunnis a legitimate role to play in Iraq’s new military campaign. He affectionately called these Sunni paramilitary groups, “the Sons of Iraq.” The Sons of Iraq was comprised of 103,000 Sunni members and cost the U.S. government about 400 million dollars, in addition to a promise made by Petraeus for Sunni political involvement. At first, they seemed well worth their price. According to Petraeus, there was “a dramatic reduction in violence, and ultimately, over the course of the surge, the level of violence was down by some 90 percent or so.”¹⁰² These security forces were created locally, and were comprised of sheikhs, tribal leaders, and other powerful brokers entering into paid contracts with coalition forces. They would give lists of potential recruits, who were then vetted by U.S. and

¹⁰¹ Washington Speakers Bureau, “Gen. David H. Petraeus (US Army, Retired),” *Washingtonspeakers.com*, <http://www.washingtonspeakers.com/speakers/biography.cfm?SpeakerID=6748>, 2018.

¹⁰² Frontline, *Losing Iraq*.

Iraqi officials. About 80 percent of these recruits were Sunni and 19 percent were Shia.¹⁰³ The recruits were self-armed and were trained by the American military. To ensure the ongoing success of this paramilitary tactic, President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki signed an agreement that would keep American troops in Iraq till at least 2011. However, Maliki's Shia government's distrust of this majority Sunni paramilitary group was already apparent. According to a March 2008 pentagon report to Congress, ongoing challenges included "the potential for infiltration by insurgents; the possibility of distortions in the local economy if salaries are not carefully managed; and the need for a comprehensive plan to transition Sons of Iraq to sustainable forms of employment in the [Iraqi Security Forces] or in the private sector."¹⁰⁴ This was thus a very fragile paramilitary group- one that could turn dangerous if the salaries stopped or if they weren't properly integrated into the Iraqi military or government. The former condition relied on continued American involvement and the latter relied on Maliki's Shia government ignoring a history of sectarian violence and opening its arms to a Sunni army. Ultimately, only 8,200¹⁰⁵ (about 8%) of the sons have been integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces, and the only reason this occurred was because of American pressure. Thus, when President Obama assumed the American presidency and pulled out of Bush's previous agreement with Maliki to maintain an American presence in Iraq, things had quickly gone south.

Appendix C: 1st Battle of Mosul

¹⁰³ Greg Bruno, "The Role of the 'Sons of Iraq' in Improving Security," *Council of Foreign Relations*, April 28, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/28/AR2008042801120.html>.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

A special report investigation how Mosul fell, was conducted by Ned Parker, Isabel Coles, and Raheem Salman for Reuters Agency.¹⁰⁶ Mosul's first line of defense was the sixth brigade of the Third Iraqi Army division. On paper, the brigade consisted of 2,500 men, in reality it was only comprised of 500. At this time, ISIS's original hundreds of fighters had reached almost 2,000, as they were met by sympathetic Sunni Mosul residents, angry at the government and realizing that peaceful protests weren't helping their situation. As ISIS gained territory, it seized the army's weapons. However, this wouldn't have made a difference, as they were already better armed than the Iraqi Special Forces (ISF). The head of the fourth battalion, charged with the defense of the western side of the Tamozi 17 neighborhood, Colonel Dhiyab Ahmed al-Assis al-Obeidi, reported "In my entire battalion we have one machine gun. In each pickup they (ISIS militants) had one."¹⁰⁷ Another problem was ghost soldiers. Thanks to a heavy corruption culture, enlisted men on the books would pay their officers half their salaries in return for being able to not show up without reprimand. There were supposed to be about 25,000 soldiers and police in the city, in reality there were at best 10,000. Mahdi al-Gharrawi, the operational commander for Nineveh province (where Mosul is located), quickly assessed Mosul's dire situation and requested reinforcement from Baghdad. Keeping with its original pattern of neglect towards the region, Baghdad simply responded that the Iraqi Special Forces could handle any scenario. Instead of sending more men or arms, Maliki sent in a change of command. General Abboud Qanbar, the deputy chief of staff at the defense ministry and Lieutenant Ali Ghaidan Majid, commander of Iraqi ground forces formally took control of the Mosul command on June 7th. Qanbar was a member of Maliki's tribe, while Ghaidan was¹⁰⁸ a longtime colleague of

¹⁰⁶ Coles, Parker and Salman, "Special Report: How Mosul fell- An Iraqi general disputes Baghdad's story."

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Maliki's; keeping in line with the theme of corruption and favoritism. On June 8th, the Nineveh governor, Atheel Nujaifi asked general al-Gharrawi why he had not yet counter-attacked. The response; "there are not enough forces". Perhaps the most unnerving aspect of the whole situation, was that there was actually a chance to change that. The president of Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani had offered to send in Kurdish Peshmarga fighters to help defend Mosul. Prime Minister Maliki rejected the offer not once, but twice. United Nations and U.S. diplomats even attempted to convince Maliki to accept the help. However, suspicious of the Kurd's motives, Maliki insisted that there were more than enough Iraqi Special Forces, a statement that was being constantly refuted by those on the ground in Mosul. Another poor decision that may have greatly contributed to the fall of Mosul was Ghaidan and Qabani's decision to fire a commander who was in charge of 6,000 men. Although many of these 6,000 had already deserted their posts, the decision to fire a divisional commander in the midst of conflict was a poor one, especially in a military climate where soldiers are more loyal to their commanders than to the army. General Babakir Zebari, the chief of Staff for armed forces in Baghdad chastised the decision, explaining, "In crisis, you can't replace the commander." Although Mosul's fate was partly decided when ISIS militants easily stormed past the city's security checkpoints, it was sealed on June 9th, with an arguably poor decision made again by Ghaidan and Qanbar. The two men decided to move their troops to the better secured eastern Mosul. The city is split down the middle by the Tigris river, creating a well-defined western and eastern division. They stripped Gharawi of 46 men and 14 pickup trucks and Humvees, which was the majority of his already small security detail. According to Gharrawi this retreating convoy made it seem like the Iraqi security forces were deserting. Soldiers concluded that their leaders were fleeing, and thus actually deserted their posts, in both eastern and western Mosul. Gharrawi chastises the decision,

saying “This is the straw that broke the camel’s back. This was the biggest mistake.”¹⁰⁹ That night, Ghaidan and Qanbar left Mosul for good and retreated to Kurdistan. General Zebari also cites this poor leadership as the losing strategy, stating, “Of course once the commander leaves the soldier behind, why would you want to fight? The senior commander is the brains of the operation. Once he runs, the whole body is paralyzed.”¹¹⁰ Despite the clear mistakes made by the two commanders, Baghdad decided to protect them and place the blame on Gharrawi. Maliki even promoted Qanbar. Gharawi was officially dismissed from his position for “failure to fulfill professional and military duties.”¹¹¹ An independent Arabic publication has defended the general stating, “Gharawi is a scapegoat and victim of agreements and alliances that keep Iraq’s political and military elite in position, while Ghaidan and Qanbar (al-Maliki’s trusted) have been referred to retirement.”¹¹² The source further accuses the government of favoritism and explains the dangers of such decisions, “The decision to punish him (Gharrawi) and ignore the role of high ranking officials makes it clear not only how difficult it is to rebuild the armed forces, but also shows why the country faces the danger of disintegration, while Mosul has proved that the Iraqi army is a failed institution in the heart of a failed state.”

The fall of Mosul to ISIS can be attributed to two main determinants. The first being a persisting environment of persecution of Iraq’s Sunnis, under Maliki’s sectarian leadership. This marginalization and systematic persecution led to an isolated community with deep anti-government sentiments and a sense of hopelessness. Maliki’s access to power and ensuing sectarian and violent treatment towards the country’s Sunnis was, without a doubt, the result of American involvement and poor decision making. The lack of American awareness surrounding

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² مهدي الغراوي، القائد القاتل كيش فداء المالكي في العراق

the absolute necessity for a peaceful transition in the face of recovery from an equally brutal sectarian regime under Saddam Hussein allowed for the rise of a character such as Maliki. A man who harbors deep resentment for Sunnis and Baathists, and a man who had virtually no political experience. President Obama's further decision to quickly remove all American troops and supervision over Maliki further exacerbated the situation, as the American trained Sunni paramilitary group, the "Sons of Iraq" were then persecuted by Maliki and eventually pushed towards ISIS. The poor decisions made by this foreign entity would greatly contribute to the Maliki's sectarian leadership and would push thousands of Iraqi Sunnis into ISIS's arms. The Maliki's removal of Sunni political representation, coupled with the Iraqi army's decision to shut down peaceful protestors with violence would lead several Mosul residents to feel out of options, setting the perfect scene for ISIS to come in and offer one last resort. The second determinant was a series of poor military decisions and overall lack of preparedness and an underestimation of the severity of the threat that ISIS posed. The lack of resources and arsenal is relatively more understandable, as the Iraqi military was already stretched thin, given the sheer amount of conflict and violence plaguing the nation. Importantly, this violence was primarily sectarian driven, and could have thus been avoided had there either been more American oversight, or had Maliki decided to undertake another leadership approach. Yet, for the specific analysis of the battle of Mosul, the lack of resources can be excused. The ensuing decisions taken by Maliki and his administration can be blamed for the fall of the city. Maliki's first decision to refuse Kurdish aid, a lucky solution to the aforementioned lack of resources, further proves his distrustful, divisive and sectarian leadership style, and his clear disregard/sacrifice for effective solutions, if it means collaborating with those he does not trust. Maliki would rather sacrifice the security of his country before working with those who slightly threaten the legitimacy of his leadership. The

next in a series of poor decisions was Maliki's decision to send in General Abboud Qanbar and Lieutenant Ali Ghaidan Majid to take command of the defense of Mosul. This decision was clearly made out of favoritism, once again demonstrating Maliki's pattern of corrupt and poor leadership. The following decision made by these two men to retreat to Eastern Mosul and remove virtually all resources from the Western part of the city would prove to be the most disastrous decision. In a military environment where desertion is common practice, and soldiers are dependent on the direction of their commanders, this decision made it seem as if the highest commanders were abandoning their posts. Out of confusion and fear, thousands of soldiers deserted their posts, thus destabilizing the already weak structure of the military. In just one night, the two commanders found themselves essentially without an army, due to this decision, and they were forced to leave Mosul entirely.

Appendix D. ISIS' Taxation System

Thanks to ISIS' meticulous record-keeping, it is possible to understand how they were able to finance their activities and attract foreign members. Contrary to popular opinion, the majority of their revenue did not come from the oil fields in their territory. The majority of ISIS's revenue came from taxation. In addition to the religious tax, ISIS heavily taxed of agricultural products and properties. The "ISIS Files" describes this lucrative process by giving the following example of the taxation process of the supply chain of flour:

"Before a single seed of grain, for example, was sown the group collected rent for the fields it had confiscated. Then, when the crops were ready to be threshed, it collected a harvest tax. It did not stop there. The trucks that transported the grain paid highway tolls. The grain was stored in silos, which the militants controlled, and they made money when the grain was sold to

mills, which they also controlled. The mills ground the grain into flour, which the group sold to traders. Then the bags of flour were loaded onto trucks, which traversed the caliphate, paying more tolls. It was sold to supermarkets and shops, which were also taxed. So were the consumers who bought the finished product.”

The report showed that, thanks to this heavily controlled taxation process, the group was able to bring in a revenue of 1.9 million dollars in a single 24-hour period from the sale of barley and wheat. ISIS even taxed damaged crops- at one point taking in 14,000 dollars from wheat scorched by a bombing. A study conducted by the Centre d’analyse du terrorisme (CAT) shows that the group made as much as \$800 million in annual tax revenue.¹¹³

Appendix E: 2nd Battle of Mosul

The liberation of the city was the result of a collaboration of several actors. The Iraqi-led security coalition was comprised of about 54,000 Iraqi security forces (ISF), 16,000 popular mobilization forces (PMF) and 40,000 Peshmerga fighters (appendix 2).¹¹⁴ The popular mobilization forces is essentially a coalition of some 40 Shia militia groups.¹¹⁵ The Peshmerga fighters are the military forces of the federal region Iraqi Kurdistan. In addition, a U.S.-led international coalition, the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) has provided logistical and air support, troops, military personnel, and intelligence. This combined joint task force has the explicit task of defeating ISIS.¹¹⁶ For the specific mission of defeating ISIS in Iraq the task force created a training program called the Capacity Building

¹¹³ “Le financement de l’Etat Islamique en 2015, Synthèse,” Centre d’analyse du terrorisme, 2015, <http://cat-int.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Financement-EI-2015-Synthese.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Tim Hume, “Battle for Mosul: How ISIS is Fighting to Keep its Iraqi Stronghold,” October 25, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/24/middleeast/iraq-mosul-isis-tactics/>.

¹¹⁵ “Irak. L’armement des unites de mobilisation populaire (résumé et recommandations).”

¹¹⁶ “Operation Inherent Resolve: Targeted Operations to Defeat ISIS,” *Department of Defense*, <https://www.defense.gov/OIR/>.

Mission Iraq. Since its start in 2014, the program has trained over 65,000 Iraqi Security Forces.¹¹⁷ The coalition set up a base 60 kilometers south of Mosul at the Qayyarah Airfield West (Q-West)¹¹⁸, where 560 U.S. troops from the 101st Airborne division¹¹⁹ and 200 French soldiers were deployed.¹²⁰ Additionally, the U.S. deployed HIMARS rocket launchers M777 Howitzers and the French deployed four CEASAR howitzers to the airbase.¹²¹ The French deployed a further 150 troops to train Peshmerga forces in Erbil (86 km east of Mosul).¹²² A further 80 Australian special forces soldiers and 210 Canadian Special Operations Forces Command were deployed to assist Peshmerga forces. All in all the international coalition contributed about 2,500 troops. Thanks to this mass international and national collaboration, the coalition forces outnumbered ISIS fighters ten to one.¹²³ The *Mosul Eye*, a clandestine blog reporting from within the city, estimated the number of ISIS fighters to be between 8,000 and 9,000 and according to blog's founder, Rasha al-Aqeedi, "Half of them are highly trained, and the rest are either teen-agers or not well trained. About ten per cent of the fighters are foreign (Arabs and non-Arabs). The rest are Iraqis. Most are from Nineveh's townships and districts."¹²⁴ However, though they were greatly outnumbered, ISIS fighters would not back down easily. The

¹¹⁷ U.S. Central Command News Release, "Counter-ISIS military coalition concludes operational planning conference," *Department of Defense*, May 1, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150613004022/http://www.centcom.mil/en/news/articles/counter-isis-military-coalition-concludes-operational-planning-conference>.

¹¹⁸ Samuel Forey, "Bataille de Mossoul: reportage à Qayyarah, dans le QG de la coalition," *Le Figaro*, October 16, 2016, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2016/10/16/01003-20161016ARTFIG00175-qayyarah-dernier-verrou-strategique-avant-mossoul.php>.

¹¹⁹ Richard Sisk, "101st Soldiers Deploying to Bolster Fight Against ISIS in Iraq," *Military Advantage*, August 8, 2016, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/08/08/101st-soldiers-deploying-to-bolster-fight-against-isis-in-iraq.html>.

¹²⁰ Philippe Chapleau, "Les quatre Caesar de Qayyarah ont déjà donné la voix," *Ouest-France*, September 29, 2016, <http://lignesdedefense.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2016/09/29/les-caesar-de-qayyarak-ont-tonne-les-20-27-et-29-septembre-16885.html>.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Samuel Forey, "Bataille de Mossoul: reportage à Qayyarah, dans le QG de la coalition."

¹²³ Ben Watson, "What the Largest Battle of the Decade Says About the Future of War," *Defense One*, 2017, <https://www.defenseone.com/feature/mosul-largest-battle-decade-future-of-war/>.

¹²⁴ Robin Wright, "The Secret Eye Inside Mosul," *The New Yorker*, October 27, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-secret-eye-inside-mosul>.

group would hold a strong line of defense for the ensuing nine months, which resulted in at least 1,200 casualties for the Iraqi Security Forces¹²⁵ and the physical destruction of much of the city.¹²⁶ The Deputy Commanding Director of CJTF-OIR compared the violence of the last battles for the liberation of Mosul to battles fought in World War II, “ One has to go back to the Second World War, to find a (a battle) that compares to the battle of Mosul.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Associated Press, “2 American Soldiers Killed in Iraq, U.S. Military Says,” *NBC News*, August 13, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/2-american-soldiers-killed-iraq-u-s-military-says-n792256>.

¹²⁶ Associated Press, “Mosul struggles to rebuild in wake of ISIS destruction,” *New York Post*, December 28, 2017, <https://nypost.com/2017/12/28/mosul-struggles-to-rebuild-in-wake-of-isis-destruction/>.

¹²⁷ “Il faut revenir à la Seconde guerre mondiale pour trouver une bataille semblable à celle de Mossoul,” *L'Orient Le Jour*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1061390/il-faut-revenir-a-la-seconde-guerre-mondiale-pour-trouver-une-bataille-semblable-a-celle-de-mossoul.html>.

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