Islamic State: Framing its Origin, Ideology and Followers

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Abstract

The origin, ideology and motivations of the followers of IS have and continue to be framed in terms of religion. How religion and the link between religion and violence is viewed remains a source of academic debate, therefore in this thesis I take a look at how scholars and journalists view and frame the role of religion and the relationship between religion and violence concerning the historical development and ideology of IS. The authors' perspectives are analyzed in terms of whether they express a functional or substantive view of religion. Based on the findings from analysis, it can be concluded that both the books and the articles contain primarily functional perspectives, but the articles do include some examples of a substantive view of religion as well. The primarily 'Western' background of both the books and articles lead to a conclusion that the findings can be related to how the secular and religious tend to be separated in the West.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The organization which calls itself the "Islamic State" (IS) and its establishment of the Caliphate under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has repeatedly been a part of the world's news headlines during the past two years.[1] Some of these headlines show that in the media, the actions and beliefs of IS are portrayed and framed primarily in the context of 'religious violence.' This is also due to IS's own propaganda, including graphic and violent videos as well as promotion for followers to join in *jihad.*

The motivations and violent acts committed by the organization are religiously framed, and along with the portrayal of IS in its propaganda and overall media coverage, the main vision that is created is that of an exclusively religious organization that acts based on a religious ideology. Religion definitely plays a role in the establishment of IS and the Caliphate. A developing question is whether there is more behind the development and motivations of IS besides religion. As Karen Armstrong expresses:

> To deal realistically with our situation, we need an informed understanding of the precise and limited role of Islam in the conflict, and to recognize that IS is not an atavistic return to a primitive past, but in some real sense a product of modernity.[2]

As seen in this excerpt, there is a lot to learn and discuss when it comes to understanding the role of religion and a distinction between how aspects of IS are religiously framed and how the actions and ideology of the organization are linked to violence. This link between religion and violence has been a repeated source of academic debate. The goal of this thesis will be to provide some insight into the ongoing debate by analyzing how the case study of IS is discussed by scholars or religion as well as journalists. This will be done by investigating the following research question:

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[1] The "Islamic State" will mostly be referenced to as 'IS' throughout the thesis. However, in order to enhance the legibility of the thesis, quotation marks will not be used with every mention of the abbreviation and it is important to note that this does not reflect a recognition or endorsement to the claim of the Caliphate. The title of the organization will be dealt with more in depth in the section on methodology and delineation of the research. (see page 13)

[2] Armstrong, Karen. "The Deep Roots of the Islamic State." *New Statesman* 143.5327 (2014): 24-31. Web. p31.

How do scholars and journalists view and frame the role of religion and the relationship between religion and violence concerning the historical development and ideology of the "Islamic State"?

Through the research process on which this thesis is based, I investigated how different authors analyze the organization IS based on their views and assumptions on the relationship between religion and violence. As mentioned, the specific case study covered in this thesis is IS and will focus on the accounts about the historical development and ideology of the organization. By studying how different authors of both an academic and journalistic background who have written on the topic view the role of religion with IS and the relationship between religion and violence, the goal is to be able to contribute to the academic debate on this relationship using IS as a case study.

This choice of research question has both academic/scientific as well as social motivations. In terms of the academic and scientific motivations, the research question and process provided an insight into differing views on the link between religion and violence. This research process provides an insight into how different authors view the link between religion and violence in a modern context. The topic remains a source of debate since in the so-called "secular" west, religion is seen as the "the other." A separation can be seen between what is religious and secular; what is religious is considered irrational in contrast to the rationality of secular forms of power, as discussed by William Cavanaugh:

> My hypothesis is that "religion and violence" arguments serve a particular need for their consumers in the West. These arguments are part of a broader Enlightenment narrative that invents a dichotomy between the religious and secular and constructs the former as an irrational and dangerous impulse that must give way in public to rational, secular forms of power.[3]

Taking Cavanaugh's explanation into consideration, it is necessary to be nuanced about the relationship between religion and politics in the modern world. Since perspectives in the West tend to be stereotyped towards this view of separation between secular and religious, it is relevant

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[3] Cavanaugh, William T. "Sins of Omission: What 'Religion and Violence' Arguments Ignore." *DePaul University* (2004) p35.

to take a look at IS as an organization and the way in which different authors view religion and the relationship between religion and violence.

The methodological approach I will use in order to answer the research question consists of a theoretical analysis of qualitative literature sources. These qualitative sources referred to will include literature on the topic of the origin, development and ideology of IS. This will include an analysis of how different authors think about and see the relationship between religion and conflict concerning IS, as well as their perspective on whether and how this is dealt with in the political and public discussion. By using sources written by both Religious Studies scholars and journalists who have done journalistic research on the topic, the goal is to see whether there is a difference in the authors' conception of the role of religion and the link between religion and violence.

The sources used on the topic of the development and ideology of IS can and will be studied and analyzed as primary as well as secondary sources. The primary aspect of the sources will include the analysis of the origin and ideology of IS as interpreted and described by the authors. These personal conceptions can be used to study what the author's view is of the role of religion and the link between religion and violence concerning IS. The secondary aspect of some of these same sources include general background information and descriptive facts on IS and relevant details. This factual information is used for establishing an overview of the developments and the history of the organization that are relevant and supporting for the research. Overall, this means is that there is a two-fold way of studying the sources used: on one hand as primary sources that provide insight into opinions and views of the religious character of IS, and on the other hand as secondary sources that provide relevant details and background information. The qualitative research done based on the use of these sources will be used in order to analyze how different authors perceive to what extent the development and ideology of IS is religiously framed, what the role of religion is in the organization, as well as the relationship between religion and the use of violence. These questions encompass what will be the main theoretical and analytical aspect of the research. Chapter Two includes a description of the methodology and delineation of the research and will provide more detail on the specifics and theoretical aspects of the methodological approach.

The structure of the thesis will be as follows. Firstly, in the next section I will cover some of the basic background information concerning IS as an organization. Furthermore, I will explain some of the terminology used throughout the thesis. Chapter 2 will cover the theoretical framework used to analyze the works by the different authors. This includes a section on the functional and substantive definitions of religion, as well as the theories behind the link between religion and violence. Next, Chapter 3 will include the analysis of relevant literature by different authors. Since there is a lot of literature on the topic and in order to provide some structure to the analysis, it will be divided into different themes that will be covered separately. These themes include the historical development of IS (the Sunni-Shi'a divide and the influence of the Ba'ath regime), the components that make up the ideology of IS (including Wahhabism and *Jihadi* Salafism), and the motivation of the followers. Excerpts from the literature on these topics concerning IS will be analyzed in terms of what definition of religion a specific passage implies and whether and how the authors link violence or conflict to religion. For each topic the relevant authors will be listed at the beginning of the respective topics. After all of the different opinions have been explained and analyzed, an overview of the most relevant authors and their opinions will be compared for each topic. By creating a collection of these analyses, an overview will be made of the findings of the analysis and provide a look at how different authors portray the role of religion and how religion is framed concerning IS. The conclusion of the thesis will summarize the research process and reflect on the findings of the research.

Historical Background

As a start, I will provide a general overview of the historical background of the region and organization. There are two aspects to the historical background; first, the direct roots of the organization itself, which originate from the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Secondly, the historical context is important; several historical occurrences from the past century as well as some that can be traced back to the beginning of Islam, have influenced the development of IS.

Relevant to note at the start of this section is that I referenced to different authors who are not discussed later in the research and analysis. The choice for these authors was based on their extensive work on the specific historical topics discussed. I used these authors in order to portray

the development of IS based on the views of authors that have nothing to do with the specific perspectives analyzed in Chapter 3. This was done in order to keep the relevant background information separate from the opinions and perspectives discussed later on. I attempted to use this criteria for discussing background information as much as possible, however, since IS is still a very recent topic, some of the specifics of the organization in its current state are referenced from the books by Stern and Berger as well as Weiss and Hassan, whose work will be analyzed in Chapter 3 as well. Some of these facts were only available in these books, and therefore they are already mentioned in this section.

Firstly, I will focus on the origin of IS as an organization which started with Abu Musab al Zarqawi in 2003. Al Zarqawi, a Jordanian Sunni radical, sectarian, and member of the militant group *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* achieved notoriety in the early stages of the Iraqi insurgency which included suicide attacks on Shia, Iraqi government institutions, and soldiers who were a part of the US-led Multi-National Force. The invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003 pushed Zarqawi into an alliance with Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda.[4] The US occupation and removal of Saddam Hussein from power seemed a victory at first, but created 'a lightning rod for *Jihadists*', resulting in an increase of terrorism within Iraq.[5] As civil war erupted, Paul Bremer of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq made a decision that further fueled the destabilization of Iraq: he disbanded the military, and fired all members of Saddam Hussein's ruling Ba'ath party. This meant that over 100,000 Sunni Ba'athists were removed from the government and military, which left the affected unemployed, angry, and for some who had been in the military, also armed.[6] With the de-Ba'athification of Iraq, the Shi'a, who had long been suppressed by Ba'athist rule, were lifted into political power, while the Sunni were disenfranchised. This created the grounds for a large sectarian conflict in Iraq.

Al Zarqawi seized the opportunity and embarked on increased sectarian violence against Shi'a through violent suicide and terrorist attacks. In 2004, he joined forces with Osama bin Laden, and a new *Jihadist* movement was created: *Tanzim Qaedat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn,* known simply as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). As foreign fighters flocked to Iraq to join AQI, the terrorist organization continued to sow discord through violent sectarian attacks. Even though al

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[4] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print.p17.
[5] Ibid. p18.
[6] Ibid. p19.

Zarqawi had pledged allegiance to bin Laden and al Qaeda, they had some differences of opinion on the violence against Muslim civilians. Zarqawi acted independently from al Qaeda whose leaders did not necessarily agree with the use of extreme savagery as a weapon and the implementation of *takfir*, which is 'the pronouncement of someone as an unbeliever, and therefore no longer a Muslim…among *Jihadists*, such a ruling is understood as a blanket permission to kill the subject or subjects as apostate.'[7] Zarqawi justified his approach with ideological support from a *Jihadi* text by the ideologue Abu Bakr called *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Ummah Will Pass.*[8] This compilation outlines the stages of the *Jihadist* struggle with a strategy that endorses the use and depiction of violence.[9] Ayman al-Zawahiri, who took charge of al Qaeda after the death of bin Laden also tried to reign in the slaughter against Muslim civilians by Zarqawi.

In June 2006, Zarqawi was killed in an air strike. Zawahiri issued a statement in which he eulogized Zarqawi and called for AQI to establish an Islamic State, with the incentive to reduce sectarian violence. Within months, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) was formed under the leadership of Abu Omar al Baghdadi, however, the violence against civilians continued to soar.

The "Sunni Awakening Movement" provided a short period of relief when it succeeded in fighting to secure communities against violence which led to 'a new atmosphere [which] was full of promise.'[10] The movement itself arose due to the increasing violence in the city of Ramadi. As the citizens turned against terrorism due to the effects that it was having on society, and families of victims, Iraqi policemen, and some rival insurgents created a civil resistance movement. When American and Iraqi forces retook Ramadi, a strategy was implemented to build the resistance movement in the adjoining rural tribal districts.[11] As tribal disaffection with ISI grew significantly, there was a large recruitment into the Iraqi police force in 2006 and with counterinsurgency training from the Americans: there were several successes against ISI.

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[7] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print. p22.

[8] Naji, Abu Bakr. "The Management of Savagery, trans." *William McCants,(West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, Combating Terrorism Centre, 2006), section* 9 (2006).

[9] Ibid. "Those who have not boldly entered wars during their lifetimes do not understand the role of violence and coarseness against the infidels in combat and media battles…The reality of this role must be understood by explaining it to the youth who want to fight….If we are not violent in our jihad and if softness seizes us, that will be a major factor in the loss of the element of strength, which is one of the pillars of the Umma of the Message."

[10] Al-Ali, Zaid. *The Struggle for Iraq's Future: How Corruption, Incompetence and Sectarianism Have Undermined Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. Print.

[11] Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*: Regan Arts, 2015. Print. p70.

However, when the new Shi'a Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki cracked down on the Awakening Movement due to his mistrust of Sunni Iraqi's 'Sunni Arabs were left disenfranchised, fearful of their government, and with few options other than supporting insurgency.'[12]

2010 was a turning point for ISI when Abu Omar al Baghdadi was killed and the new leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi took his place and set out to rebuild the organization. Baghdadi allied with several ex-Ba'athist leaders who brought military and organizational skills to the group. Under the new leadership, ISI increased its use of violence in 2010 and 2011. Baghdadi also defied al Qaeda by expanding ISI into Syria, which was engulfed in civil war at the time, and created the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS/ISIL).

Instigated by the start of the Arab Spring in 2010, the people of Syria started protesting against the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad. Baghdadi sent operatives into Syria in order to set up a new *Jihadist* organization. Abu Mohammed al Jawlani soon established himself as the leader of *Jabhat al Nusra*, which was still an independent entity at the time. On April 9, 2013 Baghdadi unexpectedly announced the merger between ISI and al Nusra to become ISIS. However, al Nusra claimed allegiance to Zawahiri and al Qaeda Central. In response, Zawahiri declared the merger between ISI and al Nusra void, causing a deterioration of the relations between ISIS, al Nusra, and al Qaeda Central. Al Baghdadi then started ISIS' own campaign into Syria throughout 2014 and eventually consolidated control of Raqqa and the surrounding area.

On June 29 2014, ISIS declared the reconstitution of the caliphate as a historical Islamic empire. This was aimed at and relevant to all Muslims, but specifically for Salafi *Jihadists* whose 'efforts were all nominally in the service of that goal.'[13] Abu Bakr al Baghdadi was announced as the new "Caliph Ibrahim" of the Islamic State. This summary of the events that have occurred since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 show a general timeline of the origin and development of IS as an organization.

Secondly, in addition to the past fifteen years, there are other historical occurrences that have contributed to the situation in Iraq that formed the setting of the rise of IS, as well as the beliefs and ideology that it thrives on. For example, postcolonial Iraq and Syria experienced the movement of Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism which is a socialist discourse that promotes

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[12] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print.p30.
[13] Ibid. p46.

Arab interests and nationality. Starting in 1963, Ba'ath ideology became dominant due to the Ba'ath parties of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Hafez Assad in Syria. In Iraq, a powerful authoritarian regime was created, which was primarily based on a system of violence. The regime also included extensive surveillance networks, as well as rewards and incentives for those who supported the regime.[14] Since Hussein was a Sunni Muslim himself, Sunni's were dominantly in control, even though they were the minority. This forms the foundations of the sectarian issues as seen with the rise of IS, as Shi'a Muslims and Kurds were oppressed.

This sectarian strife has a historical background as well, which traces back to the foundations of Islam. Even though this is linked to religious history, the split between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims that form the two largest opposing sides of sectarian conflict in Iraq, has a political background. The split originates from a disagreement over who should succeed the prophet Muhammed as caliph. The Sunni believe that the caliph should be chosen by Muslim authorities, while Shi'a believe that the caliph must be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammed.[15] Appendix 1 provides a general and chronological overview of the history of Iraq and portrays a clear depiction of when these different events and conflicts occurred.

This overview of the historical background of IS further shows why it is interesting to look at the role of religion and the link between religion and violence in this context. There are political (sectarian strife, Iraq War) as well as religious influences (religious elements of *takfir* and *jihad*) that have contributed to the state of IS as it is today. As explained previously, the relationship between religion and politics should be viewed with more nuance, especially in the West. Therefore, by taking a look at how different authors view this relationship concerning IS, the goal is to make a contribution to the academic debate on the role religion plays in the development and ideology of IS.

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[14] Sassoon, Joseph. *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2012. Print.
[15] Maréchal, Brigitte, and Sami Zemni. *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*. London: Hurst, 2013. Print.

Terminology

There are several terms and concepts used in this research that can be understood and interpreted in different ways. Therefore, I will explain several of these terms in order to establish a clear definition that will be referenced to throughout the rest of the thesis:

The use of the term "religious framing" refers to the concept of *frames in thought* as explained by James Druckman. Frames in thought refer to 'an individual's (cognitive) understanding of a given situation.'[16] This is a different type of framing than *frames of communication* which are explicitly used by the media. Since the scope of this research will not include the specific influence of the media, the focus will be on the frames in thought and the 'individual's perception of a situation: the frame reveals what an individual sees as relevant to understanding a situation.'[17] In religious terms this involves how people perceive an action or situation as influences by religion. Hans Kippenberg provides more detail on religious framing concerning the link between religion and violence. He argues that 'the link between worldviews and practical paradigms allowing for violence and the deed is mediated by the actor's definition of the situation and their choices in framing it.'[18] This shows that people or the actors are the ones who "frame" a situation: he explains that 'they choose from a variety of transmitted beliefs and practical models and select those which adequately interpret the conditions and provide guidance for actors.'[19] This is relevant because it supports Druckman's definition of religious framing and that it is linked to *frames of thought* and how actors/individuals perceive a situation.

As can be seen in the introduction and in the writing thus far, I have used the name "Islamic State" or "IS" to describe the organization. It did not originate under this name, but I have chosen to use this label since it is the most recent name that the organization uses itself, and as Loretta Napoleoni expresses: 'the term Islamic State carries a much more realistic message to the world than does ISIS or ISIL. This message conveys the group's determination to succeed at

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[16] Druckman, James. "The Implications of Framing Effects for Citizen Competence." *Political Behavior* 23.3 (2002): 225-255. p228.
[17] Ibid. p228.
[18] Kippenberg, Hans G. "Searching for the Link between Religion and Violence by Means of the Thomas-Theorem." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22.2 (2010): 97-115. p98.
[19] Ibid. p98.

building the twenty-first-century version of the Caliphate.'[20] The group started as an organization called *Tawhid al Jihad* (meaning Monotheism and God) under leadership of Abu Mussab al Zarqawi. The name was later changed to Islamist State in Iraq (ISI), which merged with Al Qaeda in Iraq. When al-Baghdadi became the new leader, it reverted to the Islamic State in Iraq. After a merger with a section of *Jabhat al Nusra*, the organization renamed itself the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (al Sham) (ISIS/ISIL).[21] Just before the declaration of the Caliphate in June 2014 the organization became known as the "Islamic State." It is important to note that the use of the label "Islamic State" or "IS" in the thesis without quotation marks does not reflect a recognition or endorsement to the claim of the Caliphate. The term is utilized so plainly since it is currently the label under which the organization operates and refrainment from the repeated use of quotation marks was done for the legibility of the thesis, as the term is mentioned frequently.

Furthermore, the concept of *jihad* plays a large role in the ideology of the Islamic State. *Jihad* as a religious doctrine would be translated as 'striving in the cause of God.'[22] It has two aspects: great *jihad*, which concerns the struggle to overcome carnal desires and evil inclinations, and small *jihad*, which involves the armed defense of Islam. Chapter 3 will include a section on *jihad* where more details will be provided.

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[20] Napoleoni, Loretta. *The Islamist Phoenix: The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*: Seven Stories, 2014. Print. xi.
[21] Ibid. ix.
[22] Ibid. p120.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

As was mentioned in the introduction, the methodological approach for this thesis consists of a qualitative analysis of textual data. The goal of the thesis was to study and reflect on the relationship between religion and violence as interpreted and presented by different authors. The authors referred to include anthropologists and journalists who have written about the origin, development and ideology of IS in the current time frame. The goal is to look at the authors' different perspectives on religion, as well as how they perceive the link between religion and violence concerning IS. By analyzing explicit or implicit views on the definition of religion as well that the authors write about or presuppose links between religion and violence, I will be able to reflect on how the views of academic scholars and journalists compare. This will provide an overview of how IS is framed religiously and how this corresponds with different authors' view of religion in general.

The authors referred to include authors with experience in the fields of terrorism and religion, research analysts and journalists. For example, some of the main authors whose work is covered for the research include Michael Weiss (a columnist for *Foreign Policy, The Daily Beast,* and *NOW Lebanon),* and Hassan Hassan (an analyst at the Delma Institute in Abu Dhabi): authors of *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*[23]. Furthermore, Jessica Stern (a policy consultant on terrorism) and J.M. Berger (a non-resident fellow of the Brookings Institution) who are the authors of *ISIS: The State of Terror.*[24] Finally, Loretta Napoleoni, and Italian journalist and political analyst, and author of *The Islamist Phoenix: Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*.[25] The background information and choice for these authors will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

In addition to these most recent works on the development and ideology of IS, other sources include articles on the same topic. Since there are increasingly more articles on IS being written and published currently, I made a selection. The articles I chose all deal with or are a reply to an intensely debated article written by Graeme Wood in *The Atlantic*: "What ISIS Really

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[23] Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*: Regan Arts, 2015. Print.
[24] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print.
[25] Napoleoni, Loretta. *The Islamist Phoenix: The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*: Seven Stories, 2014. Print.

Wants."[26] The main argument in this article is that IS is 'Islamic. *Very* Islamic.'[27] A selection of articles by journalists and scholars that include a response to the arguments made in Wood's article as well as dealing with the topic of the role of Islam in the development and ideology of IS were used as well for an analysis. In addition to the analysis of different excerpts from these articles to view the different views of the role of religion, a comparison will be made of the different perceptions and reflect on how these authors from different professional backgrounds view the role of religion and the link between religion and violence.

Additionally, there are several other relevant articles on the topic of IS included in the thesis that cover some of the other topics relevant to the historical development and ideology of IS. For example, this includes an explanation and look at the developments and influence of Wahhabism in the ideology of IS today. These topics and articles will be analyzed in the same fashion as the other sources, including an analysis and description of the way in which the authors view the role of religion.

Functional and Substantive Definitions of Religion

The analysis of the literature is mainly based on the authors' perspective on the role of religion and the link between religion and violence. In order to provide some more detail as to what this entails, I will describe and look at some of the analytical tools that will be used throughout the thesis. Firstly, the role of religion in general, can be analyzed in terms of whether the author's perspective is based on a *functional* or a *substantive* definition of religion. There is no one simple or universal definition of the word religion, and there are many different ways in which it can be interpreted and applied. For the purpose of this thesis the definition of religion used will be based on the functional and substantive characteristics of the use and interpretation of religion by different authors. The following section will include an overview of what these two types of definitions entail, as well as some examples of definitions of religion in terms of functional and substantive characteristics.

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[26] Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, (2015).
[27] Ibid.

A functional definition of religion is based on what religion does and how it operates 'in terms of its place in the social/psychological system.'[28] This means whether religion plays a role in something and has a function: such as in society, social life, etc. Functional definitions are very common and can be categorized as sociological or psychological in nature. Psychological functional definitions are based on the way religions plays a role in the mental and emotional lives of believers while sociological functional definitions deal with the way religion influences society. The functionalist perspective of religion does not explain the way the world works, but rather provides believers with a means to survive in the world with symbolic rituals, beliefs and practices. As Emile Durkheim stated, 'religion is a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.'[29] This is a functional definition of religion because Durkheim places focus on the social beliefs and practices that come with religion which relates directly to what religion does. In his work he placed emphasis on the sacred instead of the supernatural in religion, meaning that anything sacred can take on a religious character and does not necessarily have to be based on something supernatural. Robert Bellah also attempted to capture the nature of religion from a functionalist perspective: he said that 'religion is a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate condition of his existence.'[30] In addition, Clifford Geertz provided a more complex definition of religion as:

> A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[31]

This definition attempts to be a little more specific in order to prevent including everything into its definition and shows Geertz's view of religion as part of culture. Overall, these definitions all define religion in terms of what it does and the function it has for individuals, society, or both.

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[28] Berger, Peter L. "Some Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion."*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13.2 (1974): 125. p126.

[29] Durkheim, Émile, and Robert N. Bellah. *Émile Durkheim on Morality and Society, Selected Writings*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1973. Print.

[30] Bellah, Robert N. "Religious evolution." *American sociological review* (1964): 358-374. p358.

[31] Geertz, Clifford. "Religion as a Cultural System." *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion.* New York: Praeger. (1966) p4.

Examples of what a functional definition includes are 'meaning complexes such as nationalism, or revolutionary faiths,…or any number of new "life-styles" with their appropriate cognitive and normative legislations.'[32] These examples listed by Berger reflect that different objects, symbols, or movements can be considered sacred and take on a religious character that plays a role in social and/or psychological aspects of life.

Furthermore, Erich Fromm said that he understood religion as 'any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.'[33] This shows another example of a view that exemplifies how religious can influence and play a role in a social setting, group, or system.

However, as briefly touched upon with the definition provided by Geertz, a problem with a functional definition of religion is that it can be too inclusive and therefore can prevent from distinguishing between religion and other phenomena. As Berger states, the risk with a functional definition is that the 'religious phenomenon is "flattened out."'[34] This shows that these definitions can be applied to almost any system of belief, religious or not, and therefore it is important to apply the definition in terms of social or psychological functions that 'can be understood without reference to transcendence.'[35] Despite this drawback, functional definitions do provide certain insights and ideas when used to understand and describe religion.

Now, a substantive definition entails defining religion 'in terms of its believed contents.'[36] This includes meanings that refer to 'transcendent entities in the conventional sense' such as God and supernatural beings and things. Substantive definitions can also be referred to as *essential* definitions.[37] It is the same definition that examines the content and "essence" that characterizes a religion. This essence or content is common to all religious systems and not any non-religious ones. An early definition of a substantive view of religions comes from E.B. Tylor who defined it

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[32] Berger, Peter L. "Some Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion."*Journal for the Scientific Study of* Religion 13.2 (1974): 125. p128.

[33] Fromm, Erich. *Psychoanalysis and Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

[34] Berger, Peter L. "Some Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion."*Journal for the Scientific Study of* Religion 13.2 (1974): 125. p129. "The greyness is the secularized view of reality in which many manifestations of transcendence are, strictly speaking, meaningless, and therefore can only be dealt with in terms of social or psychological functions that can be understood without reference to transcendence."

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid. p125.

[37] Ibid. p128.

simply as 'the belief in supernatural beings.'[38] This shows religion to be something special that has a symbolic and supernatural meaning to people. The definition of religion as stated by Herbert Spencer supports this as well: he said that 'religion is the recognition that all things are manifestations of a Power which transcends our knowledge.'[39] These two definitions share the idea of content or essence that people can hang on to and believe in. It is this content that makes a substantive view as religion as a type of philosophy to live by that exists separately from our social or psychological lives.

The greatest drawback to substantive definitions is that they are too universal: they are general enough to apply to multiple religions. In addition, not all religious systems necessarily include spiritual beings and not all people who believe in spiritual being necessarily adhere to a specific religious system. In a way the disadvantages of a substantive definition of religion include that it ignores some of the critical aspects of religion that are covered by functional definitions and vice versa. Functional definitions are too inclusive, while substantive definitions cannot be universal. In order to provide a simple overview of the characteristics of both definitions, I developed the following table which portrays the main bullet points discussed for each definition (Table 1).

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[38] Tylor, Edward Burnett. *Primitive culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom*. Vol. 2. Murray, 1871.
[39] Spencer, Herbert. *First principles*. Vol. 1. Williams & Norgate, 1904.

Table 1: Characteristics of Functional and Substantive Definitions of Religion

Characteristic	Functional	Substantive
What it is based on	What religion does and how it operates in terms of its place in the social/psychological system	What the content and essence of religion is
What it includes	*Psychological*: the way religion plays a role in the mental and emotional lives of believers *Sociological*: the way religion influences society	Religion as a type of philosophy to live by that exists separately from our social or psychological lives
What it relies on	Symbolic rituals, beliefs and practices The sacred instead of the supernatural	The belief in supernatural and transcendental
Examples	Nationalism, revolutionary faith, social symbols or movements	God, gods, supernatural beings and things
Drawbacks	Too inclusive: they prevent from distinguishing between religion and other phenomena	Too universal: they are general enough to apply to multiple religions

The table is very clear-cut, but unfortunately this cannot always be the case. Table 1 is useful since it provides an overview of some of the main points of the different views of religion, but it is important to note that there are more details that can be taken into consideration when labelling an example as portraying a certain view of religion. What is meant by this is that instead of being this clear-cut, the different types of definitions and views can complement each other. This entails that it is almost impossible to have a clear binary distinction between the two definitions and label a certain view of religion as completely functional or substantive. The perspectives can overlap and complement each other in one specific example.

Additionally, there can also be positive and negative appreciations of both definitions. For example, a functional definition of religion can also be viewed as 'functionalistic', and very anti-religion. In addition, substantive definitions can also be depreciating towards religion when for example people who 'believe' are conceived to be naïve and irrational. These differing appreciations of both definitions calls for a need to be critical when defining examples and evaluating whether or not the authors are dismissive about religion. Furthermore, it is also

important to look at whether or not authors have a positive or negative appreciation of a definition. For example, when an author portrays his view of the role of religion as a substantive one, is this with a positive or negative appreciation. How does he/she view the role of religion, and what type of view of a substantive or functional definition do they use? Essentially, some discourses will include differing arguments, and there is no clear cut division on how authors define and view the role of religion. However, it is relevant to look at whether or not authors reference to the intrinsic characteristics of religion or the function of religion – how religion could stand for something else. Throughout my research process, specifically, the simplified criteria in Table 1 formed the criteria when reading the relevant books and articles and selecting excerpts for analysis. While reading I focused on finding excerpts where the author was talking about the role of religion, and specifically, where the author was sharing his/her own view perspective on the role of religion. Based on these perspectives I looked at which elements from the Table 1 fit best with the author's opinion and description in order to define whether or not the author shared a functional or substantive view of religion.

The Link between Religion and Violence

In addition to analyzing the role of religion with IS in terms of a functionalist or substantive point of view, the relationship between religion and violence and the theoretical standpoints used by different authors is the second aspect covered in this thesis. Before some of the theoretical standpoints on this link are discussed, there are some definitions that need to be clarified. It is necessary to make a distinction between the terms "violence" and "conflict" when discussing the link between these terms and religion. Some authors refer to the link between religion and violence, while others refer to the link between religion and conflict. The question is what the difference between these two terms is in the context of the link to religion, and the use of the terms for within this research.

Firstly, violence can be structural or cultural. As explained by Jack Eller, structural violence 'refers to less direct, more pervasive, and sometimes even unintentional…harm caused

by the very arrangements and institutions of society.'[40] An example of structural violence are conditions that negatively influence life expectancy. When this structural violence is tolerated or endorsed by a society it becomes cultural violence. Eller further explains that violence is relative, and the issue concerning violence is the 'legitimacy of the behavior that caused the damage.'[41] This means that once acts involve harm that is not socially approved of, and crosses a certain line, it becomes labelled as violence.

This means that when action and the negative effect of these actions are avoidable and socially disapproved of, it becomes violence. Even though these definitions are very broad, they do provide an insight into the nature of violence, and that the intention of doing harm as well as the having the ability to prevent harm, but not applying it, can be considered violence. The work by John Galtung on defining violence adds to this as well: he states that 'violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realization.'[42] This means that violence can be defined as the avoidable cause that prevents a human being from reaching his full physical or psychological potential.

Secondly, we must establish what 'conflict' means. Conrad Brunk defines it as:

What results from the existence, real or imagined, of incompatible interests, goals, beliefs, or activities. It is a situation in which one party's interests cannot be fully realized without their impinging upon the realization of some other party's interests – or situation in which one of them thinks that the interests are incompatible.[43]

The incompatibility of interests therefore is what leads to conflict. These interests can include a number of different things and can be related to different types of actors such as individuals, groups, or even states. It is important to mention the fact that even though an incompatibility of interests can lead to conflict, this does not necessarily mean that it will. Actors do have a choice whether to engage in conflict or not, just as actors have a choice in engaging in violence with an intention. As conflict develops, the possibility of the use of violence due to conflict rises as well. As explained by Lincoln, he regards conflict as:

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[40] Eller, Jack David. *Cruel Creeds, Virtuous Violence: Religious Violence across Culture and History*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010. Print. p14.

[41] Ibid. p14.

[42] Galtung, J. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6.3 (1969): 167-91.

[43] Brunk, Conrad G. "Shaping a Vision: The Nature of Peace Studies." in Fisk, Larry and Schellenberg, John (eds.) *Patterns of Conflict, Paths to Peace.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press (2000) 11-34.

> The situation that arises when rival interests can no longer be contained by the structures and processes ordinarily competent to do so. As a result, after an indeterminate period of confusion and crisis, normal competition moves into phases that are more open, bitter, confrontational, costly, and frequently, violent.[44]

Lincoln's view shows that when conflict arises, there are certain social structures and processes that fall away, causing the opportunity for harmful and violent consequences. Conflicts can be framed in terms of religion, as is the case with IS. The fact that IS as an organization uses violence only reinforces the framing of IS as part of a religious conflict.

For the purpose of clarity, consistency, and flow of the thesis, I reference to the link between religion and violence throughout the research, rather than to religion and conflict. The reasons for this include that many of the authors refer primarily to violence as well, and seeing the scope of the research, I will focus primarily on how violence as used by IS is perceived to be inherent to religion and how the different authors view this based on a functional or substantive view of religion.

The link between religion and violence has been a widely debated topic in and outside academia. Mark Juergensmeyer mention in his book *Terror in the Mind of God:*

> Religion is not innocent. But it does not ordinarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances – political, social, and ideological – when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride and movements for political change.[45]

As this quote shows, violence is not intrinsically linked to religion. Therefore, it is important to look at what violence essentially is, how conflicts are framed, and how this is related and linked to religion. It all depends on what definition of religion and violence people refer to and use. This is why it is necessary to look at what (substantive or functional) definition of religion the different authors refer to in their works and reflect upon what this means for their view of the relationship between religion and violence for the Islamic State. The basic characteristics of the two types of definitions of religion have been discussed, and can also be applied to the link between religion and violence.

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[44] Lincoln, Bruce. *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2003. Print. p74.

[45] Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. Vol. 13. Univ of California Press, 2003. p10.

Firstly, from a functional perspective: religiously framed conflicts are always about something else since religion is seen primarily as having a function in psychological and social matters. This means that the focus is placed on the underlying reasons of psychological and social matters instead of the influence of religion itself. Jack Eller provides an example of a functional view of religion and its link to violence. He states that 'religion is not a necessary or sufficient component in violence…every single form of religious violence – from war to terrorism to persecution to martyrdom and self-injury to crime and abuse – has its nonreligious correlate.'[46] From this excerpt it can be interpreted that violence can, but does not necessarily have a religious component. The existence and influence of non-religious correlates can be related to an all-inclusive functional view of religion that is not solely focused on the supernatural. Hans Kippenberg also provides an example of a more functional view:

> We are told that religion in itself is peaceful: only when manipulated can it turn into a source of violence. My paper begins with the opposite assumption. It takes wide-spread public opinion seriously, and presumes that there is a link between religion and violence. But it argues that it is not the existence of that link, but the type of it, that is at stake. This approach moves that analytical focus from religious worldviews and practical paradigms to the meaning attributed by believers to a violent act.[47]

This excerpt shows his approach with a focus on not simply the essence of religious worldviews, but that there is also an influence from the actor's definition of the situation and the way in which they frame the situation. Furthermore, William Cavanaugh also shares a functionalist view of the link between religion and violence as he emphasizes that the uncertainty about the link between religion and violence is about the nature of religion and how it is defined in different ways:

> My hypothesis is that "religion and violence" arguments serve a particular need for their consumers in the West. These arguments are part of a broader Enlightenment narrative that invents a dichotomy between the religious and secular and constructs the former as an irrational and dangerous impulse that must give way in public to rational, secular forms of power.[48]

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[46] Eller, Jack David. *Cruel Creeds, Virtuous Violence: Religious Violence across Culture and History*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010. Print. p15.

[47] Kippenberg, Hans G. "Searching for the Link between Religion and Violence by Means of the Thomas-Theorem." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22.2 (2010): 97-115. p98.

[48] Cavanaugh, William T. "Sins of Omission: What 'Religion and Violence' Arguments Ignore." *DePaul University* (2004) p35.

His hypothesis shows that the link between religion and violence is not necessarily just about religion and that the secular actually plays a large role in the way religion and violence are defined and framed. This corresponds with a functionalist view since the focus lies not on religion specifically sparking violence, but also the influence and effect of the secular and political.

Secondly, through a substantive view of religion, religious conflict or violence can be sparked by religious influence since this view relies on the essence of religion focused on the belief in the supernatural, transcendental, the relationship between good and evil, and the belief in eternal life over death. Looking back at the quote by Mark Juergensmeyer above, his view on religion and violence can be seen as a substantive one. This is due to the fact that Juergensmeyer mentions that religion is not "innocent" and therefore references to the idea that there is something in religion that can spark violence. He does recognize that this requires a certain set of circumstances that are influenced by other social and psychological factors in addition to ideological ones.

In addition to the role of religion and the link between religion and violence, I will also be taking a look at the specificities of the individuals and followers that form the organization. The religious background, as well as the history of the geographical region plays an important role in the motivations of followers of IS. Therefore, it is relevant to look at how the different authors whose work is analyzed in the research view the motivations and identity of the followers, specifically. This will be in addition to the general analysis of the role of religion and will provide a specific insight into the motivations of the followers and how influences that originate from years of turmoil, corruption, violence and sectarianism have affected the identity of the individuals that have chosen to follow IS.

Chapter 3: Analysis

This chapter contains the bulk of the analysis and covers how different author talk about religious and political factors that explain and relate to the ideology, actions, and attraction of followers of IS. The structure of the chapter is as follows, firstly the backgrounds and overall perspectives of the different authors on religion and religion and violence in general will be explained. Secondly, two topics within the historical background of IS will be looked at more in depth, introducing the way in which the theoretical concepts are applied to the literature used for analysis. Thirdly, there are three different topics on which the perspectives of authors will be described and analyzed. These topics include the ideology of IS, the role of Islam, and the motivation of the followers. For each topic the relevant authors will be listed, their views compared, and a summary of the findings will be provided.

Perspectives of Leading Authors

The authors whose work was used primarily for the analysis were already introduced shortly in the previous chapter. However, it is also necessary to explain the choice for these authors and look at the backgrounds as well as some of their specific opinions and perspectives. This will provide a general idea of how these authors think about religion and perceive the link between religion and violence, which is useful to know when looking at their perspectives on IS, specifically.

The authors of the different books that are referenced to in the research were selected based primarily on the still limited availability of literature on IS. Since it is still an up and coming topic, there were not a lot of books available yet when I started the research process. This made the selection of books very straight-forward. Based on the available literature, I chose to reference the books that included relevant information on the origin, ideology and followers of IS. The authors of these books will be discussed in more detail in this section as well.

Furthermore, I chose the article by Graeme Wood in *The Atlantic* because at the start of my research process, the article was being discussed in several different media outlets. Instead of

the limited choice of books on the topic of IS, there was a very wide selection and availability of articles discussing IS in the media. Making a choice for which specific articles to use was therefore a challenge. I chose to use *The Atlantic* discussion as a delineation for the choice of articles because it was an elaborate discussion that specifically dealt with the role of religion concerning IS, and thereby provided different aspects and opinions to analyze and compare. The selection of the articles that include a response to the article by Wood in *The Atlantic* were selected based on the amount of content that portrayed a specific view of religion. There are other responses to the article that I looked at, however, I made a selection based on articles that contained clear and specific examples of an author reflecting on their view of religion concerning IS. Concerning this choice, it is necessary to note that the analysis and conclusions made in this thesis are based solely on the specific selection of articles I made, and therefore there is a possibility that a different selection of articles could also have a different outcome.

In general, the choice for the use of several journalists, concerning both the authors of the books as well as the articles, is based on the fact that at the time of research, the development and rise of IS was and is still a relatively new topic. Besides the few available books that I used, the remaining available sources included primarily journalistic articles written in the past two years.

Moving on to the specific authors; Michael Weiss is an American columnist for *Foreign Policy, The Daily Beast,* and *NOW Lebanon,* as well as a fellow at the Institute of Modern Russia where he is editor-in-chief of *The Interpreter.* He considers his contribution to *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* to be personal.[49] As a journalist he has reported from the suburbs of Aleppo, areas that are now ruled by strict *Sharia* law under IS. His audience therefore consists of readers, primarily in the West, whom he wants to inform about how IS quickly developed and rose to power, and what the reasons behind the organization are. In an interview he sheds some light on the specifics of how religious IS really is: He does not deny the Islamic component of IS, since they do tap into and base their ideology on Islamic components, sermons and traditions. However, looking at the members of the organization in a historical context, a portion of the men that support and stand behind al-Baghdadi are former Ba'athists. These men have gone from being the secularists in Iraq, to being Salafist *Jihadis*. Weiss questions whether these men

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[49]Weiss, Michael. "Author Michael Weiss Discusses "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror"" Interview by Paul Harris. *Ktrs.com*. (2015).

seriously believe in their new found faith, or whether they simply see themselves as the protectors of the Sunni supremacy and have joined IS in order to reinstate this supremacy after their dismissal after the US invasion in 2003. Weiss explains that Salafi *Jihadism* is being used as a powerful narrative, and yes, Islamic fundamentalism does play a role, but the overall mission is to put the Sunni back in power.[50] Overall, his general opinion on the role of religion in IS as he explained here shows a tendency towards a functional approach and definition of religion. He recognizes that religion plays a role in society under IS, but that there are motivations and goals besides religion that influence the organization as well.

The following author I would like to introduce is Hassan Hassan, who is the co-author of *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror.* Hassan Hassan has a similar view as Weiss. Hassan is a Syrian analyst at the Delma Intstitute (a research center in Abu Dhabi), as well as a columnist for *The National* newspaper. To him the book on IS that he wrote with Weiss is also personal since he is a native Syrian from the border town of Albu Kamal where *Jihadi*st now frequently cross the border to and from Iraq.[51] His approach to the role of religion concerning IS is comparable to that of Weiss, and it can be observed as an overall functional one. Hassan explains in an article in "The Guardian" that 'what the group does is to match its practices with the 'practical' history of Islam, even though many rightly view these practices as contradictory to Islamic teachings.'[52] He argues that even though religion is used to justify acts, they are not truly condoned by the essence of Islamic teachings.

Next, Jessica Stern should be introduced, author of *ISIS: The State of Terror*. Stern is a fellow at the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, a member of the Hoover Institution Task Force on National Security and Law and is considered to be one of the leading experts on terrorism in the US. The book, written with J.M. Berger, provides an inside look on the development of IS. The authors attempt to dissect the model for violent extremism that IS has applied in Syria and Iraq. They compare IS to Al Qaeda, and also provide a perspective on how world leaders should respond to the actions of IS. Stern as an author

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[50] Weiss, Michael. "Author Michael Weiss Discusses "ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror"" Interview by Paul Harris. *Ktrs.com*. (2015).
[51] Ibid. Introduction.
[52] Hassan, Hassan. "Isis Has Reached New Depths of Depravity. But There Is a Brutal Logic behind It." *The Guardian*. (2015).

specifically, has written other works on terrorism and religious violence that provide some insight into her perspectives on religion and religion and violence. A good example is her book *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill.*[53] For this book she interviewed extremist members of three different religions; Christians, Jews and Muslims. Based on her research she concludes that terrorist organizations are formed by opportunistic leaders who use religion as justification as well as motivation. This perspective can be viewed as a functional view of religion since she argues that religion is used as a motivation and justification for believers and followers, however, the actual underlying reasons behind the violence are of a different, non-necessarily religious, nature.

J.M. Berger is Stern's co-author on *ISIS: The State of Terror.* He is a researcher, analyst and consultant on extremism, as well as a non-resident fellow with the Brookings Institution. Berger shares Stern's overall opinion on the role of religion in extremist groups. In an article responding to Graeme Wood's opinion, he explains that religion is of 'primal importance in the narrative created by an extremist's group's adherents, but a group's extremism does not naturally proceed from its claimed religious basis.'[54] This shows his argument that religion is used by the leaders and followers of the organization as a form of motivation and justification, but that the extremism itself not justified by religion specifically.

Loretta Napoleoni is the final book author discussed in the thesis. She is the author of *The Islamist Phoenix: The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East.* She is an Italian journalist and political analyst that has completed other works with a focus on the economics and funding behind terrorist groups. In her book, she describes how IS is waging a traditional war of conquest with the goal of creating a modern version of the original Caliphate. She focuses on the fact that IS is very good at understanding and using modern day Middle Eastern politics to its advantage, and that what 'accounts for its enormous successes, is its modernity and pragmatism.'[55] She explains that even though the focus of the organization seems to be that of a strict religious regime based on the writings of the Prophet, globalization and modern technology

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[53] Stern, Jessica. *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. New York: Ecco, 2003. Print.
[54] Berger, J.M. "Enough about Islam: Why Religion Is Not the Most Useful Way to Understand ISIS." *Brookings*. (2015).
[55] Napoleoni, Loretta. *The Islamist Phoenix: The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*: Seven Stories, 2014. Print. Introduction.

have facilitated the organization's growth and success. Her view, with a focus on underlying political and economic motivations can be compared to a functional view of religion as seen with the other books, since there are important factors besides religion that play a role in the organization.

Finally, in addition to the books covered in the research, a discussion based on the article "What ISIS Really Wants" by Graeme Wood is also an important source for my analysis. The article led to much discussion in different journals, blogs, and think tanks such as ThinkProgress, the Sociology of Islam mailing list, and the Intercept. Wood is a Canadian journalist and contributing editor to *The Atlantic.* Concerning his views on religion, in an interview after the publication of his article, Wood's argument is that attention needs to be paid to what extremists say and that the influence of beliefs should not be dismissed because of the secular views of Western democracies.[56] This is a significant point since it relates directly to the goal of the thesis to take a nuanced look at the relationship between religion and politics since this does become overshadowed by secularism in the West, which relates back to the argument by Cavanaugh explained in the introduction. Linking back to the theoretical concepts, Wood's view of the role of religion can be interpreted as a substantive one since he focuses more on the influence of the essence of religion itself in the actions and motivations of IS. This view can be seen in the following excerpt from his article: '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.'[57] This excerpt shows that from Wood's point of view, original interpretations of Islam drive the organization, showing the reliance on the essence of religion as an influence on the development and ideology of IS.

Overall, having discussed some of the views and background information of each author, it is relevant to note that in general the books referenced to in the thesis have been written by the authors in a way that can be viewed as having an overall functional view of religion and religion and violence. In contrast, the article and views by Graeme Wood, which will be covered in more detail, leans more towards a substantive view of religion. This difference will be discussed

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[56] "The True Believers." *The True Believers : Sam Harris and Graeme Wood Discuss the Islamic State : Sam Harris*. (2015).
[57] Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, (2015).

throughout the analysis in order to see whether this trend is seen within specific examples from the literature as well and how they compare.

Historical Development

This first section will reflect on two topics discussed in the historical background in Chapter 1 in more depth. These specific topics include the origins and development of the Sunni-Shia divide, as well as the influence of the Ba'ath regime in the development of IS. The goal of this first section is to shed more light on these specific historical topics using not only general sources, but also reflect on some of the different opinions of the authors and journalists focused on for the analysis. It will include a start of the analysis that will be worked out more in depth in the rest of the thesis. This shows the transition from the proposed goal of the thesis to how the theoretical concepts and analysis are actually applied to the research. Different authors from scientific forums and sources are referenced in this section as well to introduce the different themes and provide the necessary background information. I chose to use different authors than the ones referenced to for analysis in order to keep the historical background facts separated from the opinions of the authors that will be analyzed in Chapter 3.

The Sunni-Shia Divide

As explained, the split between the Sunni and Shia in the religious history of Islam forms the foundations of a large sectarian conflict that still creates friction today. IS is an organization that identifies strongly with Sunni Muslims and thereby regards Shia as *takfir*. This sectarian conflict originated from the split over the decision for as to who would become the new Caliph, and has since developed into a political conflict that still thrives today. As explained by Rainer Brunner: 'the tensions between Sunnis and Shiites are not the only reason for political conflict and civil war: it is indisputable that the religious identity of the respective actors plays an extremely

important role.'[58] This excerpt shows that even though the strife between the two groups is viewed as a political conflict, religion still plays a role as well in the identity of the two groups. It should be noted that this excerpt serves only to provide relevant background information on the topic. The following paragraph will be taking a look at some of the views of different journalists and authors on the topic in order to see how they view the role of religion when it comes to the effects of the Sunni-Shia split in the development and existence of IS. The relevant authors include Loretta Napoleoni, Stern and Berger, and Weiss and Hassan.

Firstly, Loretta Napoleoni provides some insight to the roots of the sectarian conflict in her book *The Islamist Phoenix*:

> The root causes of what we are witnessing today trace back to the extraordinary political event that Salafists regard as the ultimate betrayal: the acceptance by Arab statesmen of Israel as a political power on Muslim soil, in the ancient history of the caliphate.[59]

Also:

> In power struggles within Islam, the accusation of apostasy is common. The first instigated by a takfir was fought soon after the death of the Prophet, during the reign of Caliph Abu Bakr (632-34), and is the genesis of the schism between Sunnis and Shias.[60]

These excerpts show a focus on the political circumstances in Islamic history that still have an impact and influence on the use of violence by IS that we see today. IS commits violent acts justified by its extreme sectarian views. Napoleoni focuses on the political aspects of IS and what it is trying to achieve. It is for this reason that her view of religion can be linked to a functional definition of religion where religion is defined by the functions it may have for a society. By focusing on the political aspects of IS as a state and linking the violence it uses to religious *Sharia* law, Napoleoni places an emphasis on how IS uses *Sharia* law as a function to control and organize society while being able to exert control through violence:

> Using the stick of violence and Sharia law along with the carrot of propagandistic social media and a variety of popular social programs aimed at improving the living conditions of the Sunni population trapped inside the Caliphate, IS shows deep pragmatism.[61]

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[58] Maréchal, Brigitte, and Sami Zemni. *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*. London: Hurst, 2013. Print. p27.
[59] Napoleoni, Loretta. *The Islamist Phoenix: The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*: Seven Stories, 2014. Print. p83.
[60] Ibid. p86.
[61] Ibid. xx.

She argues that the view of religion not as necessarily the cause of conflict, but as a tool that is used to exert control within the conflict. Her use of the 'stick and carrot' idiom here also shows a tendency towards a functional approach to the role of religion as she describes it as being used for control through rewards and/or punishment in order to induce behavior. Napoleoni reflects on the role of religion in the conflict further in her book. She describes the advancement of radicalization in the region and how this was wrongly interpreted by the rest of the world at the time:

> In 2003, Coalition forces had failed to appreciate the significance of a war between Sunnis and Shias – a serious oversight….A close look at how Islamic radicalization had advanced in Iraq during the economic sanctions would have offered useful clues to the fact that a major civil and sectarian war was brewing, with the potential to destabilize the entire Muslim world.[62]

According to Napoleoni, the sectarian conflict, even though it has existed for a long period of time, was fueled during the Iraq War and led to increased radicalization between the groups. She states that 'the West and the world conveniently dismissed the radicalization of Iraq and Syria as a product of religious fanaticism.'[63] Her statement shows that she thinks that the radicalization and the extent of the sectarian conflict was not taken seriously enough at the time of the beginning of the US invasion of Iraq.

This shows that Napoleoni reflects on this with what seems to be a functional view of religion, since she places emphasis on the economic and social influences that affected the sectarian conflict. Furthermore, she dismisses the fact the 'West and the rest of the world' simply labeled the increased radicalization as being the result of religious influences, which would be a substantive view of religion. She further supports her view by stating that 'it is surreal that Western powers believed that what is taking place in the Middle East is a war of religion motivated by a feud started in seventh-century Arabia.' She recognizes that the sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia has had an impact on the radicalization of different groups in Iraq, but that this conflict has been sparked primarily due to the political and economic circumstances instead of religious ones: 'the true motivations are political and economic and their roots are found in the power struggle to control the entire region.' The control of the "entire region"

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[62] Napoleoni, Loretta. *The Islamist Phoenix: The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*: Seven Stories, 2014. Print. p93
[63] Ibid. p94

references to the building of a Caliphate. This shows once again that Napoleoni's statements have the tendency to fall in line with a functionalist view of religion. She emphasizes the role of political, social and economic factors in the conflict above the role of religion.

Secondly, Stern and Berger also deal with the Sunni-Shia divide in their book and the relationship it has with IS. They reflect on the effect of the removal of Vice President Hashimi, which cost the Iraqi government the support of Sunni Awakening tribes, as well as the removal of prominent Sunnis from the government by President Maliki: 'Sunni Arabs were left disenfranchised, fearful of their government and with few other options than supporting the insurgency.'[64] This shows that Stern and Berger also recognize the political impact on the radicalization of the Sunni population in Iraq. Being exiled from the government, they had nowhere else to turn besides the insurgency, which was therefore due to political rather than religious reasons. This relates directly to the development of IS since 'the sectarian clashes in Iraq provided an opening for ISI to regroup, the violence in Syria gave Baghdadi a pretext to expand.'[65] According to the authors, the violence in this case originates solely from the opportunities created due to the political sectarian clashes. Stern and Berger therefore do not directly relate this to religion, which again conveys a relatively functional perspective of the role of religion.

Weiss and Hassan provide another relevant insight by explaining that:

Most important, ISIS presents itself to an embattled Sunni minority in Iraq, and an even more persecuted and victimized Sunni majority in Syria, as the sect's last line of defense against a host of enemies – the "infidel" United States…. Even here, as with all conspiracy theories, ISIS relies on kernels of truth and awkward geopolitical realities to depict a satanic global enterprise ranged against it.'[66]

The view of Weiss and Hassan corresponds with the other authors on the issue discussed in this section; they place an emphasis on the role of politics – and the fact that IS uses the geopolitical situation to their advantage. To them, this implies that politics is a large factor in not only the sectarian conflict, but is also used by IS as a tool in order to fuel their own insurgency.

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[64] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print.p30.
[65] Ibid. p41.
[66] Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*: Regan Arts, 2015. Print. Introduction xvi.

Concerning the topic on the Sunni-Shia divide, all of the authors discussed portrayed a functional view of religion when discussing the sectarian conflict. This can be related to the fact that the sectarian conflict, dating back to the beginnings of Islam, is considered to be a political conflict as was introduced in the background information in the first chapter and discussed in the previous subsection in this chapter.

The Influences of the Ba'ath Regime

As explained in the section on the historical background of the emergence of IS, under Saddam Hussein Iraq was ruled by the Ba'ath party. This party emphasized an Arab nationalist ideology that was implemented in Iraq in 1951. Under Saddam Hussein the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party governed Iraq from 1968 until 2003, when the Coalition Provisional Authority banned the party during the US invasion of Iraq. There are several authors who have looked at the impact of the Ba'ath party on not just the region and the effect on sectarian conflict, but also how this led to the development of IS. The relevant authors include Weiss and Hassan and Stern and Berger. This section will therefore include a look at some excerpts from these two different books on the topic, including an analysis of their view of the impact of religion.

Firstly, Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan view Ba'athism as an exponent of Sunni political power in their book. They explain that 'the anti-American insurgency in Iraq drew its strength from Sunni revanchism. One way to view Ba'athism historically is as one among many exponents of Sunni political power.'[67] What is relevant in that statement is that the authors reference 'political power' specifically. As also seen in the following excerpt, IS used the fall of the Ba'ath party to gather followers who were disenfranchised from the government:

> 'ISIS is also a spectral holdover of an even earlier foe than al-Qaeda. Most of its top decision-makers served either in Saddam Hussein's military or security services. In a sense, then, "secular" Baathism has returned to Iraq under the guise of Islamic fundamentalism.'

The fact that Ba'athism has returned as a 'guise' for Islamic fundamentalism shows that according to the authors, fundamentalism is not the root cause of the issue here, and that once

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[67] Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*: Regan Arts, 2015. Print.p122.

again, emphasis is placed on the impact of political strive. As seen in the previous subsection on the Sunni-Shi'a divide, this view by the authors can be linked to a functional view of religion since emphasis is placed on the political and not religion as the essential cause and motivation of conflict and radicalization.

Furthermore, Weiss and Hassan explain that what was misunderstood by Western powers was the impact the disbanding of the Ba'athist party would have on the Sunni population:

> What Saddam, al-Assad, al-Zarqawi, and bin Laden all understood, and what the United States had to discover at great cost in fortune and blood, was that the gravest threat posed to a democratic government in Baghdad was not necessarily *Jihadi*sm or even disenfranchised Baathism: it was Sunni revanchism.[68]

They argue that the impact of the disbanding of the party and later the expulsion of all Sunni in the government led to serious Sunni discontent.

Secondly, Stern and Berger also discuss the disenfranchisement of the Ba'ath party and thereby many Sunni:

> More than 100,000 Sunni Ba'athist were removed from the government and military, leaving them unemployed, angry, and for the military personnel, armed…The U.S. invasion and subsequent efforts to institute a democratic system in Iraq had elevated the long-suppressed Shi'a into political power, while de-Ba'athification had simultaneously disenfranchised thousands of Sunnis.[69]

This excerpt provides further insight into the effect of the de-Ba'athification and shows that the view of Stern and Berger falls in line with that of Weiss and Hassan. What is noteworthy is that in both books, concerning the Sunni-Shi'a conflict as well as the influences of the Ba'ath regime, the authors focus on the political impact of the events, and religion is not explicitly mentioned as playing a specific role in the development of IS concerning these two topics.

Similarly to the section on the Sunni-Shia divide, both sets of authors provided a functional view of religion concerning the topic of Ba'athism. The same reason can be used to explain this, which is that Ba'athism is related to a political group that emphasizes an Arab nationalist ideology. Therefore, even though there are cultural influences from Islam, the topic is primarily a political one. The fact that all authors on both topic of the sectarian conflict as well as Ba'athism reflect upon it with a relatively functional perspective can affirm the focus on political

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[68] Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*: Regan Arts, 2015. Print. p25.
[69] Ibid. p29.

instead of religious elements for both topics. The analysis of these topics that are related to the development of IS therefore show that, based on the perspectives of the authors discussed, politics have had a significant impact on the origin and development of the organization.

This section which covered some of the historical developments concerning IS in a little more detail shows a starting point of the analysis. several authors and excerpts were discussed, this shows the way in which the theoretical concepts will be applied in the rest of the chapter as well. The next section will be on the ideology of IS and is therefore an important part of the analysis for this thesis. As discussed in the introduction, the research is interesting to look at because of the usually secular view of the west towards the relationship between religion and politics, and that politics instead of religion are the underlying causes for the origin and ideology of IS. Looking at the ideology of IS and what the perspectives of the different authors are on the topic will allow for analysis of how they view the role of religion and how the different perspectives compare.

The Ideology of IS

This section will analyze a collection of excerpts from literature on IS by different authors that fall under the category of ideology. The first question raised here, is how do the authors discuss the ideology of IS? Before we can answer this question, we must define what the concept of 'ideology' refers to. Roger Scruton, a political philosopher defined ideology as 'any systematic and all-embracing political doctrine, which claims to give a complete and universally applicable theory of man and society, and to derive there from a program of political action.'[70] In his definition, ideology as a term is often linked to the political. In the case of IS however, the religious also plays a role in the political ideology that the organization lives by. For example, IS implements religious *sharia* law to control and govern its territory, and has claimed a religious caliphate as the form of Islamic government. Therefore, the ideology of IS as covered in this thesis includes not just its political, but also its religious doctrines that it operates under. Now that

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[70] Scruton, Roger. *The Palgrave Macmillan dictionary of political thought*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. p399.

the definition of ideology has been established, the chapter will cover several topics discussed by different authors that are a part of the ideology of IS. The first topic will go back in history and deal with the historical impact of Wahhabism on IS ideology today and is also directly linked to the movement in Islamic political thought known as *Jihadi* Salafism. It is from this movement that the main doctrines of IS come forth, therefore, it is relevant to analyze different authors' view on the extent that the ideology and history of the organization explain its violent character. This topic will also include the Islamic concepts of *jihad* and *takfir* since they play a role in the ideology of IS.

Wahhabism

Wahhabism is a form of Islam founded in the 18th century in Saudi Arabia as a revival and reform movement by the scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The foundations of the movements called for *tawhid*, or belief in God's unity, as well as the unity of the *umma,* or Muslim community.[71] This included a return to the fundamentals of Islam through the use of *da'wa* (calling people to proper observance of Islam) as well as education in a non-violent manner that was to take place over time. It is relevant to note that the original Wahhabist movement was not intended to be interpreted as a call to *jihad* as holy war or engaging in forced conversions.[72] While ibn Abd al-Wahhab travelled and preached Wahhabism and *tawhid*, in 1744 he found an ally in Muhammad Ibn Saud, the local leader of al-Dir'iyah. This alliance led to the foundation of the first Saudi state in which Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was responsible for religious matters and Muhammad Ibn Saud for the political and military issues.[73] Despite the adoption of Wahhabism by Muhammad Ibn Saud, over time it became clear that Ibn Saud had a different interpretation of the religion and he used religious *jihad* as holy war as a tool for conquest. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not agree with this approach and withdrew from the alliance, choosing to devote himself to prayer and spiritual matters.[74]

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[71] DeLong-Bas, Natana J. *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2004. p11-12.
[72] Ibid. p12.
[73] Ayoob, Mohammed, and Hasan Kosebalaban. *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009. Print. p34-35.
[74] Ibid. p35.

The split between the two leaders eventually led to the development of two different forms of Wahhabism. Ibn Saud enforced Wahhabi Islam with violence in order to enhance his political position, while Ibn Abd al-Wahhab encouraged education and study as a means of spreading the faith. After the death of Ibn Abd al-Wahhad, Wahhabism became increasingly violent and *takfir* was used to justify the use of violence and slaughter of populations that resisted. *Takfiri* ideology involves 'the practice of declaring any Muslim not in agreement with Wahhabi teachings to be a *kafir*, or infidel, who is subject to *jihad* as holy war.'[75] This where how these religious concepts originate from Wahhabism. Furthermore, now that the general background information on Wahhabism has been explained, the following paragraphs will link Wahhabism to IS and describe how different authors write about this link.

The foundations of Wahhabist ideology link to IS today since the organization relies on fundamentalist Islam and uses the practice of *takfir* as well. As Alastair Crooke states, the Wahhabis under Ibn Saud claimed *jihad* while conquering territories and communities. Their strategy resembles that of IS by bringing the people they conquer into submission.[76] Crooke shows a very direct link here by comparing the *jihad* by the Wahhabis to that of the members of IS today. This is a very simple and straightforward link between IS and Wahhabism. Alistair Crooke is a British diplomat who has an expertise in the Middle East. He discussed Wahhabism and its link to IS in his article "You Can't Understand ISIS If You Don't Know the History of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia."

Furthermore, Crooke discusses another relevant historical aspect of Wahhabism that has been linked to IS today: the creation of the "Ikhwan", or "Brotherhood" by Saudi chieftain Abd al-Aziz ibn Ab al-Rahman al-Saud in the beginning of the twentieth century.[77] The members of the Ikhwan were devoted to the fundamentals of Wahhabi Islam and the writings of Abd al-Wahhab while also building a military elite trained to fight infidels. Due to the literal interpretations of the Wahhabi ideology, 'their religious fervor often developed into zealotry and then into unrestrained fanaticism that translated into acts of terror against the innocent.'[78] In their

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[75] DeLong-Bas, Natana J. *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2004. p12.

[76] Crooke, Alastair. "You Can't Understand ISIS If You Don't Know the History of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia." *Huffington Post* (2014): 56-70.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid. p66.

conquests the Ikwhan succeeded in capturing Mecca and Medina, which is a strategy that Alastair Crooke compares to that of IS today. Furthermore, al-Saud also made s*haria*, or Islamic Law, supreme, which is also a part of IS ideology today.

However, when al-Saud tempered his ambitions in order to achieve a diplomatic standing, there were members of the Ikwhan who revolted against the modernization that al Aziz was allowing. The rebellion was put down in the 1930s after a civil war. After the defeat of the Ikwhan, Wahhabism returned to a conservative religious movement and abandoned militant and revolutionary *jihad*.[79] This religious movement, however, continued to accept the practice of *takfir* and created roots for a rejection of all other faiths and even other forms of Islam. The use of the practice is used and enforced by IS today as well, which exemplifies why IS said to have its roots in Wahhabism.

Karen Armstrong, a British author known for her work on comparative religion, discusses the influence of Wahhabism on IS in her article "The Deep Roots of the Islamic State." In the article she talks about how the influences from Wahhabism have influenced Muslims today and impacted their role in IS in both a functional and substantive manner:

> A whole generation of Muslims, therefore, has grown up with a maverick form of Islam that has given them a negative view of other faiths and an intolerantly sectarian understanding of their own.[80]

Armstrong's view of the role of religion leans towards a substantive one since she describes Islam as having an influence on people's understanding which relates to a substantive view of religion as a type of philosophy to live by. As seen further on in her article, she also states that the impact of Wahhabism is not the sole influence. She explains that even though, like the Ikwhan, IS does not conform with the conservative Wahhabism of modern Saudi Arabia[81]:

> A substantial number are probably secularists who resent the status quo in Iraq: Ba'athists from Saddam Hussein's regime and former soldiers of his disbanded army…In all likelihood, few of the young recruits are motivated either by Wahhabism or by more traditional Muslim ideals.[82]

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[79] Armstrong, Karen. "The Deep Roots of the Islamic State." *New Statesman* 143.5327 (2014): 24-31. Web. p28.
[80] Ibid. p28.
[81] Ibid. p28.
[82] Ibid. p28.

This excerpt explaining that the number of followers motivated by Wahhabism is likely limited show that in this instance Armstrong explains religion more according to a functional definition of religion. This is due to the fact that she places more emphasis on the impact of the social system on followers. As seen in some of the examples listed in the chapter on methodology and theoretical approach, statements on revolutionary faith and social movements are representative of a functional view of religion. This relates to the example in the excerpt above which shows the link to how religion operates in the social system (the resentment towards the status quo between Sunni and Shi'a after the fall of the regime) instead of being motivated by religion as a type of philosophy through Wahhabism ideals.

It is noteworthy that these two different excerpts exemplify a different definition of religion, and this is how Armstrong also explains in both a substantive and functionalist manner. She states that there is a group of Muslims who depend on and live by a form of sectarian *takfiri* Islam which is a substantive view, and then in the second excerpts she discusses those who are not motivated specifically by Wahhabist Islam, but by social and political factors which is a functional view. These two excerpts therefore form a good example of the differences in view of the role of religion. It shows that there is not just one way in which to look at the ideology of IS.

Jihadi-Salafism

The *Jihadi*st nature of IS traces back to the Sunni movement of Salafism: a fundamentalist and ultra-conservative religious movement. In a general division, there are three types of classifications of Salafis: purist Salafism, political reformist Salafism, and *Jihadi* Salafism. The purists emphasize non-violent methods of propagation and purification. The political reformists focus on the political aspects such as social justice and religious law. Finally, *Jihadi* Salafists have a very militant position and argue that 'the current context calls for violence and revolution' and concentrates on 'the struggle (*jihad*) and activism as self-fulfillment (even if it means martyrdom).[83] It is this last form of Salafism that is seen reflected today in the ideology of IS. This modern form of *Jihadi* Salafism has the central goal of the purification of Islam from the

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[83] Maréchal, Brigitte, and Sami Zemni. *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*. London: Hurst, 2013. Print p63.

'contamination of corruption and stagnation produced by Western colonization.'[84] Furthermore, *Jihadi* Salafis rely on the sacred texts in their most literal form which they combine with *jihad* and the implementation of *sharia* law.

In their book *ISIS: The State of Terror*, Stern and Berger discuss the role that Zarqawi played in setting up Al Qaeda in Iraq and the foundations of IS today. They explain that Zarqawi forged many relationships during his time in AQI, and that many of these relationships were with *Jihadists*. One individual specifically, was Sheikh Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi, a *Jihadi* Salafist. His ideology was 'based on the principle that any government that does not rule through a strict interpretation of Shariah is an infidel regime that must be violently opposed.'[85] This quote shows that the *Jihadi* Salafism that influenced the development and foundations of IS strongly relies on strict interpretation of *sharia* law and allows for the use of violence in order to achieve this. As Stern and Berger explain:

> Maqdisi would become Zarqawi's spiritual father and close friend…Zarqawi would emerge as the man who would test Maqdisi's theories "in real time and in a real war."'[86]

This excerpt shows that the authors view that religion played a role in Zarqawi's development and practice of his ideology since he saw Maqdisi and the theories he taught in a spiritual manner.

The *Jihadi* aspect of this form of Salafism plays a large role in the ideology and actions of IS. As explained earlier, *jihad* concerns striving for the cause of God. The book, *The Management of Savagery* by Al Naji contains a long account of strategy for *jihad* that is used by the members of IS. It is a book used by IS as its own strategy for *Jihadists*. This compilation outlined the stages of the *Jihadist* struggle as follows: firstly, 'disruption and exhaustion' where enemy forces attack and disrupt the population. Secondly, the 'management of savagery' which involves a phase of violent resistance with the intention of sending a clear message to both enemies and allies. Thirdly, the stage of 'empowerment' which includes the establishment of

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[84] Napoleoni, Loretta. *The Islamist Phoenix: The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*: Seven Stories, 2014. Print. p85.

[85] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print. p15.

[86] Ibid. p15.

regions that are under the control of *Jihadists* and can eventually grow to become a regeneration of the caliphate.[87]

Furthermore, Abu Musab al Suri, an influential modern *Jihadist* ideologue also wrote a book, *A Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, also used by IS, that lays out the blueprint for "leaderless resistance" which involves a *jihad* revolution carried out by small groups or individuals not under control of a central authority.[88] These two works form the foundations of a guide line to *Jihadism* under IS. Overall, the first part of this section included relevant background information, continuing on, several authors and their perspectives will be discussed more in depth. These relevant authors include Stern and Berger and Loretta Napoleoni.

The question that these authors discuss, is how *Jihadists* are motivated to pick up and follow these guidelines? Stern and Berger provide their insight into this question:

> Traditionally, *Jihadist* fighters have found internal motivation in the promise of perceived religious rewards such as entry into heaven and the benefits that promise includes…but for many, perhaps most, *Jihadists*, religious motivations are necessary but not sufficient to explain the leap to violence action. Some mix of political sentiment, religious belief, and personal circumstance is required.[89]

In this excerpt from their book Stern and Berger emphasize that usually there is a large emphasis on religious motivation when it comes to acts by *Jihadist* fighters. However, as was seen in the last chapter, with the development and ideology of IS, the authors describe that there are a lot of underlying political influences as well. This was seen in other excerpts by Stern and Berger as well, and it is noteworthy that although they recognize the role of religion in *jihad* traditionally, they explicitly mention that these religious motivations are not a given. They explain that concerning IS, political and economic circumstances in the region have played a large role as well, as seen in the description of the relevant historical developments. This is significant because it adds to the view that the authors of these books primarily identify with a functionalist view of religion when it comes to IS since the emphasis is not solely on the essence of religion, but also includes the impact of political and socio-economic circumstances.

Building on this and looking at the relationship between religion and violence, Stern and Berger also mention that:

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[87] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print.p22.
[88] Ibid. p60.
[89] Ibid. p83

Killing civilians and destroying infrastructure are not typically a terrorist organization's end goals. Rather, they are a means to provoke a political reaction. Although people understandably forget sometimes, terrorism is ultimately intended to send a message to the body politic of the target, rather than being a pragmatic effort to destroy an enemy, although there are exceptions.[90]

This excerpt provides a look at the way in which the Stern and Berger view the link between religion and violence. This comes down to what seems to be the same functionalist view as seen earlier: violence in this case is committed in order to create a political reaction. The authors argue that this means that the violence is not something that is sparked by the essence of religion itself. Instead of being used as a religiously condoned tool, violence is seen and used as a strategy:

> The use and depiction of violence are among the most important elements of the strategy: those who have not boldly entered wars during their lifetimes do not understand the role of violence and coarseness against the infidels in combat and media battles…the reality of this role must be understood by explaining it to the youth who want to fight…if we are not violent in our *jihad* and if softness seizes us, that will be a major factor in the loss of the element of strength, which is one of the pillars of the Umma of the Message.[91]

This example shows a description by the authors on the use of violence as a strategy in order to show power and strength. Yes, it is related to religious *jihad*, but in this excerpt it is not described as something that is sparked by religion itself. Instead violence is depicted as a tool used to obtain and retain power and strength in the mission. This corresponds with the views of both Juergensmeyer and Kippenberg as described in chapter 2.

A relevant part of *jihad* and specifically that of *Jihadi* Salafists is the use and application of *takfir*. This concept can be traced back to the origins of the Sunni-Shia clash and civil war. By accusing the other party of *takfir*, the two branches of Islam have used it on their respective bids for power, since 'the concept of *takfir* has remained solidly anchored to political and economic issues' as Napoleoni maintains.[92] In this statement Loretta Napoleoni emphasizes that in addition to *jihad* itself, *takfir* also has deep roots in the political and economic sphere instead of necessarily a religious one. Furthermore, Stern and Berger explain that *takfir* is an important part of *jihad* because among *Jihadists* themselves, it is perceived as a blank slate of permission to kill

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[90] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print.p142.
[91] Ibid. p24
[92] Napoleoni, Loretta. *The Islamist Phoenix: The Islamic State and the Redrawing of the Middle East*: Seven Stories, 2014. Print. p89.

the subject identified as an apostate.[93] As seen with the functional approach to religion and violence as explained by Jack Eller: 'religion is not a necessary or sufficient component in violence…every single form of religious violence – from war to terrorism to persecution to martyrdom and self-injury to crime and abuse – has its nonreligious correlate.'[94] This means that even though *jihad* and *takfir* relate to religious violence, there are non-religious influences from the political and economic spheres as well.

As seen in the previous section on the historical development of IS, the authors that were covered under the topic of *Jihadi*-Salafism also portrayed a leaning towards a functionalist perspective on religion and the link between religion and violence. Once again the emphasis was placed on underlying political and economic influences instead of religious ones. What is relevant to note, is that up until this point, the authors discussed have been the authors of the selection of books used in the thesis. The next topic, the role of Islam, is primarily based on the article by Graeme Wood. At the conclusion of that topic I will be able to make a comparison of the perspectives of authors of the books and the authors of articles in order to see whether there is a difference.

The *Atlantic* Dicussion

An article published by the *Atlantic* has raised a lot of discussion on IS and the relationship between religion and violence. I made a selection of different articles that contained a specific reference and response to the article by Wood. Each of these articles will be discussed and analyzed in this section. The different authors will be introduced briefly as well. In his article, "What ISIS Really Wants," Graeme Wood takes a look at IS as a religious group with carefully considered beliefs. He states that 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.'[95] He references to Princeton scholar Bernard Haykel who

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[93] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print.p22
[94] Eller, Jack David. *Cruel Creeds, Virtuous Violence: Religious Violence across Culture and History*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010. Print. p15.
[95] Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, (2015).

according to Wood stated that "the ranks of the Islamic State are deeply infused with religious vigor."[96]

Based on his article, Wood's view of religion can be viewed as having the characteristics of a substantive one. He links the actions of IS, even the violent ones, to the essence of Islam which corresponds with the idea the there is something in the nature of the religion that tends to spark conflict. This is explicitly seen when he describes the use of *takfir:*

> Following takfiri doctrine, the Islamic State is committed to purifying the world by killing vast numbers of people…Exempted from automatic execution, it appears, are Christians who do not resist their new government. Baghdadi permits them to live, as long as they pay a special tax, known as the *jizya*, and acknowledge their subjugation. The Koranic authority for this practice is not in dispute.[97]

This portrays Wood's view of an important link between religion and violence as "purifying the world" is justified by "Koranic authority." This reference to the authority of the Koran is an argument that Wood uses throughout the entire article. Another example is his discussion on the use of slavery and crucifixion:

> Muslims can say that slavery is not legitimate now, and that crucifixion is wrong at this historical juncture. Many say precisely this. But they cannot condemn slavery or crucifixion outright without contradicting the Koran and the example of the Prophet.[98]

This excerpt shows how Wood emphasizes that because these acts are written in the Koran, they become justified religiously. Wood implies that the fact that IS condones these activities, shows that IS abides by the original Koranic texts, and is therefore Islamic. This opinion further shows that Wood's ideas strongly lean towards a substantive view of religion, as he places importance on the reliance on the transcendental and religion as a philosophy to live by. Wood further emphasizes this by discussing what those who 'simply denounce[ing] the Islamic State as un-Islamic can be counterproductive especially if those who hear the message have read the holy texts and seen the endorsement of many of the caliphate's practices written plainly within them.'[99] This excerpt further shows that Wood explains IS and its actions as being Islamic due to the organization's reliance on the holy texts. This corresponds with a substantive view due to the

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[96] Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, (2015).
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

focus on the content of Islam and a religion and the large extent to which this influences and allows IS to implement slavery and crucifixion.

In the article, Wood includes a lot of quotes from one scholar and professor of Near Eastern Studies, Bernard Haykel. Wood explains and uses these quotes to support his main argument of IS being an Islamic organization, for example:

> Bernard Haykel, the foremost secular authority on the Islamic State's ideology, believes the group is trying to re-create the earliest days of Islam and is faithfully reproducing its norms of war. "There is an assiduous, obsessive seriousness" about the group's dedication to the text of the Koran, he says.[100]

This excerpt corresponds with the rest of Woods article and again shows characteristics of a substantive view of religion. This can be seen in the reliance on the fundamentals of Islam for the organization. The way in which Wood explains it in this excerpt, Haykel shares his view of how the organization operates and what ideology it relies on. This is relevant to note and to come back to later since other articles that will be discussed later in this chapter are by authors who have responded or referred to Haykel's work in their articles.

In addition to the link to a substantive view of religion seen in this article, the relationship between religion and violence is again exemplified in these excerpts. The explanation by Wood that slavery and crucifixion, which can be considered violent acts, are condoned by the religion of Islam. This directly links to the substantive view of violence caused by and originating from the nature of religion itself. As Wood states, 'no one has tried harder to implement strict *sharia* by violence. This is what it looks like.'[101] In this statement he directly links religious *sharia* law to violence. The idea that this violence is sparked by the nature of religion can also be discovered in the article for example, 'when a masked executioner says *Allahu akbar* (God is great) while beheading an apostate, sometimes he's doing so for religious reasons,' as well as 'following *takfiri* doctrine, the Islamic State is committed to purifying the world by killing vast numbers of people.' These excerpts show that according to Wood, violence, not just by IS, is committed in the name of religion, maybe not always, but that there are occasions in which this is the case and that the violence is justified by religion.

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[100] Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, (2015).
[101] Ibid.

What is interesting to see is that there were a lot of responses to this article by different authors. These authors include Jack Jenkins, the senior religion reporter for Think Progress. Dr. H.A. Hellyer, a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution's Foreign Policy section who writes primarily on the politics of the modern Middle East, including religion and politics, and Muslim-West relations. Furthermore, an article by J.M. Berger, the same author from *ISIS: The State of Terror,* is included. Next, Steven Mazie, Professor of Political Studies and Supreme Court Correspondent for *The Economist*. Then, Steve Niva, a teacher of International Politics and Middle East Studies at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. Finally, Sohaira Siddiqui, an assistant professor of Theology at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar. As can be seen this is a diverse group of authors including journalists and professors in relevant study areas, and therefore it will be informative to study how their views compare, and what this means. Relevant to mention is that all of the articles were published in either North America, or Europe as I have portrayed in the following table (Table 2).

Table 2: Publication Origin of the Relevant Articles

Author	Article Published By	Location
Wood	*The Atlantic*	Boston, USA
Jenkins	ThinkProgress	USA
Mazie	Big Think	USA
Hellyer	Saloncom	USA
Berger	The Brookings Institution	Washington DC, USA
Niva	The Immanent Frame	USA
Siddiqui	Scoop.it	USA/France

The fact that the background of where all of the discussed articles were published are in the United States and Europe is relevant to note since this could play a role in how the analysis of the perspectives compare in the conclusion. It is necessary to recognize that some the authors covered in this section are journalists or reporters who write for specific media outlets. This means that their opinions that are analyzed in the following section could be influenced by the

perspectives and opinions of the media outlets they write for. This should be taken into consideration for the final analysis of what the relevance of the origin of these articles really is.

The first article that was a direct response to the article by Wood is 'What the Atlantic Left Out about ISIS According to their Own Expert' by Jack Jenkins. This is also the article referenced to earlier that directly discusses the quotations by professor Haykel. In response to Wood's article Jenkins approached professor Haykel himself and discussed the role of Islam in IS as an organization as well as the specific statements by Haykel used in the *Atlantic* article:

> One of the oft-mentioned criticisms of *The Atlantic* piece is that it echoed the inaccurate belief that since ISIS's theology draw upon Islamic texts to justify its horrendous practices, it is an inevitable product of Islam…[102]

In this very first sentence of a key excerpt, Jenkins makes it clear that he disagrees with Wood's opinion on IS being Islamic based on its reliance on Koranic texts, as he describes it as "inaccurate." He continues to explain that:

> …Haykel didn't say whether or not he thought Wood's article says as much, but when ThinkProgress asked him directly whether Islamic texts and theology necessitate the creation of groups like ISIS, he was unequivocal. "No," he said. "I think that ISIS is a product of a very contingent, contextual, historical factors. There is nothing predetermined in Islam that would lead to ISIS."[103]

This quote by Haykel is relevant because what he says about the role of religion in the forming of IS leans towards a functional approach in the quotations used by Jenkins. This can be seen in this perspective since he clearly explains that it is nothing about Islam itself that would lead to the creation of IS. In this light, Islam gives IS a purpose and ideology based on its own interpretations of the religion, but is not inherently linked to it. In this argument, the creation of IS is based on religion as a tool for IS, but not what it is completely based on. As Haykel states, the development of IS as an organization was due to more factors than simply religion. This interpretation of Haykel's opinion in a functional light is relevant since in the article by Wood, Haykel's quotes are used and portrayed in coincidence with a substantive point of view of religion. In order to further compare the two articles by Jenkins and Wood, and the use of quotes

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[102] Jenkins, Jack. "What The Atlantic Left Out About ISIS According To Their Own Expert."*ThinkProgress RSS*. (2015).
[103] Ibid.

by professor Haykel, I will be looking at a few more relevant excerpts from the article by Jenkins:

> The implication, according to many who read the piece, is that ISIS's theology is founded in Islamic texts that cannot be debated. Haykel, however, clarified that while he saw ISIS as rooted in authentic Islamic texts, those texts are not above interpretation, and it is only ISIS and related groups - not Islam as a whole – who would consider such challenges apostasy.

This is a key quote since, according to Jenkins, Haykel recognizes that there is a link between IS and Islamic texts, it is again the interpretation of these texts that makes IS what it is today, and that this does not necessarily make the interpretations by IS coincide with Islam as a whole. This view shows that Haykel recognizes IS as Islamic because of its reliance on Islamic texts and history, but that the extent to which IS uses this to justify their ideology is based on their interpretation of the religion, and not a universally recognized interpretation. The following quote further supports this argument:

> 'Haykel readily acknowledged there are numerous Islamic scriptures "that advocate a more kind of pacifist, less violent, and, in fact, an even tolerant and open-minded [religion that is] accepting of, let's say, non-Muslims." But he concludes that the texts ISIS pulls from still exist within the Islamic tradition, thus making them Islamic. "ISIS draws inspiration from Islamic traditions and Islamic texts – a very particular reading of that tradition and those texts – and it should be described and labeled as an extremist Islamic movement, or an Islamist [political] movement," he said.'[104]

In this excerpt, Haykel is quoted explaining that Islamic scriptures include and can be interpreted to advocate a pacifist religion, but also violent aspects. The interpretation and application of these scriptures in a certain way allows organizations such as IS to build an ideology on the basis of Islamic scriptures, making it Islamic, but the way in which this is done relies on the manner of interpreting. In the case of IS, as Haykel is quoted mentioning that this is done in an "extremist" fashion. This shows Haykel's view of the role of religion and the fact that since IS draws inspiration from Islamic tradition, it is drawing from the content of religion – hinting towards a substantive view. By relying on specific Islamic religious traditions and using these to justify

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[104] Jenkins, Jack. "What The Atlantic Left Out About ISIS According To Their Own Expert."*ThinkProgress RSS*. (2015).

actions shows IS using religion as a type of philosophy to live by. The fact that this depends on a certain interpretation of the religion stands separately from this analysis. In simple terms, according to Haykel IS uses Islamic traditions to justify its ideology and therefore can be linked to reliance on the essence of Islam. Also concerning the link between religion and violence, with this interpretation of how IS justifies violence through the use of interpretations of scriptures, implies that there is something in the content of religion that sparks violence. Again, this stands separately from Haykel's opinion that it all depends on how religion and religious texts are interpreted. However, when looking at it simply, separate from the interpretation factor, his opinion in this case leans towards a substantive view of religion.

The relevant aspect of the link between the article by Jenkins and the one by Wood, is that even though generally the same conclusion is found based on the interpretation of Haykel's words, there is a difference in how it is portrayed by the different authors. In order to further compare this, it is also relevant to note the difference in how key quotes from the respective articles reveal a shift towards a substantive or a functional view of religion. When comparing the different articles in which Haykel is referenced, it can be seen that in his opinion IS originated from factors besides religion such as political and economic factors (Hellyer - functional), but that its ideology is Islamic since it is based on religious tradition (Wood and Jenkins - substantive).

Steve Mazie provides an insight into the discussion as he responds to both the article by Wood, as well as the critique on that article by Jenkins. In general, Mazie does not completely agree with all of the criticisms against Wood's article:

> It is one thing to say that ISIS's religious ideology has "just as much legitimacy as anyone else's." That is pure postmodern trash: there are better and worse interpretations of faith traditions, and it is conceding way too much to give "behead and burn" the same credence as mainstream interpretations of Islam according to which people treat each other with respect and honor.[105]

In this excerpt Mazie places importance of the interpretation of Islam and the way in which IS does this that does not necessarily have to be accepted as Islamic. Just because it is religiously framed, does not mean that it is justified. His view shows that there is a two-way street and that in

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[105] Mazie, Steven. "How Islamic Is ISIS?" *Big Think*. (2015).

a way Wood has a point, and that 'these criticisms are only partially on the mark' since there are extremes to both sides, as seen in this quote. In the next paragraph he goes into more detail and further explains his own opinion:

> Jenkins' critique misses Wood's more basic point that ISIS is dead serious about what it perceives as its Islamic mission to re-establish the caliphate and bring on the End of Days. We may despise and revile the ISIS ideology, but it is no milquetoast set of ideas and principles. The leaders of the Islamic State are literally gunning to win a messianic battle, and the rest of the world will find it hard to resist them if it misunderstands their mission. [106]

Mazie argues that, in his view, what drives IS as an organization is the religious aspects of its ideology and the goal of winning a 'messianic battle.' This opinion leans towards a substantive view of religion as it refers to religion as a philosophy that includes achieving a transcendental goal. This substantive view of Islam as having a role in the ideology corresponds somewhat with Wood's opinion. The difference is that Mazie remains critical of both sides and warns that there is no hard line that divides the two and that many of these examples can be interpreted in multiple ways.

Another article that counters the arguments made is "This Stupidity Needs to End: Why the Atlantic and NY Post are Clueless about Islam" by Dr. H. A. Hellyer, a non-resident fellow at the Centre for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.[107] He provides a view of what his perspective of religion concerning IS is. According to Dr. Hellyer:

> Islam clearly admits a great diversity in spirituality, jurisprudence and theology. But religious authorities – jurists, theologians, spiritualists – have also traditionally been careful about uniting that pluralism within a harmonious prism. That prism has systems of interpretation – systems that ISIS and its cohorts reject – and therein lies an important part of the puzzle.[108]

He explains that IS is not necessarily "Islamic." It can be seen that 'ISIS is citing religious texts…these citations, however, don't establish authenticity. Rather, the ability to interpret the primary texts as the Prophet did, and secondary texts as the authors did, is what establishes

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[106] Mazie, Steven. "How Islamic Is ISIS?" *Big Think*. (2015).
[107] Hellyer, H. A. "This Stupidity Needs to End: Why the Atlantic & NY Post Are Clueless about Islam." *Saloncom RSS*. (2015).
[108] Ibid.

authenticity.' This shows that even though IS can make interpretations of Islam that justify their use of violence as described by Wood, there is no authenticity to these claims as described by the perspective of Dr. Hellyer. The reason for the fact that IS relies so heavily on religious texts without having the religious authenticity, according to Hellyer, is because:

> Islam lacks an ecclesiastical, hierarchical authority structure….—so, essentially, everyone is entitled to define religion as they see fit within the Islamic faith. Essentializing "Islam" as "good" or "bad" thus misses the point: there is no way to essentialize Islam. ISIS is as "Islamic" as its detractors –the only difference is popularity (which heavily favors the latter).[109]

In this excerpt Hellyer explains that because Islam has essentially no structure of authority, there is no defining of how people can interpret the religion and for example the texts of the Koran. In this view, there is no way of saying IS is not Islamic since there is no structure of religious authority that can verify this. This builds on the earlier excerpt by Hellyer where he explains that a lot of the religious background behind IS and its ideology relies on a certain interpretation and understanding of Islam. His perspective can be seen as leaning towards a functional view of religion since he argues that the religious factor of IS is based on interpretation that cannot be verified and is therefore not inherently part of the essence of Islam.

Additionally, J.M. Berger also provided a response to the *Atlantic* article with a certain perspective as he discusses the framing of IS as a religious organization by Wood. He responds to Wood's quote of "the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very* Islamic" with:

> The Ku Klux Klan is also white. *Very* white. The problem with framing discussions of extremism in this manner is that, for many people, it extends into causality and a too-intimate merging of a mainstream demographic with the identity-based extremists who claim to be its exclusive guardians.[110]

Berger does say that :

> Religion matters to ISIS. A lot. But the concept of an exclusive identity matters far more, to the point that ISIS will engage in virtually unlimited theological gymnastics to justify it. For identity-based extremist groups, one function of extreme religious observance is to serve as an identity marker, a signal to establish who is a part of the in-group and who is a part of the out-group. Religion is therefore of primal importance in the narrative created

[109] Hellyer, H. A. "This Stupidity Needs to End: Why the Atlantic & NY Post Are Clueless about Islam." *Saloncom RSS*. (2015).

[110] Berger, J M. "Enough about Islam: Why Religion Is Not the Most Useful Way to Understand ISIS." *The Brookings Institution*. (2015).

by an extremist group's adherents, but a group's extremism does not naturally proceed from its claimed religious basis.[111]

This excerpt clearly explains Berger's opinion, he notes that religion is a big part of IS as an organization, and that as an organization they will go to any length to justify their actions based on Islam. This is the same J.M. Berger from *ISIS: The State of Terror.* As mentioned in the description of the authors, his argument here corresponds with the arguments made in the book with Stern. Furthermore, his argument also corresponds with the article by Hellyer, who also touches on the relevance of how scripture is interpreted and justified, and whether or not there is enough authority to do so. Additionally, the last sentence shows Berger's opinion that reflects a functional view of religion and its link to violence as Berger states that a group's extremism and violence 'does not naturally proceed from its claimed religious basis' and therefore violence is not something that is necessarily sparked from within the religion.

Steve Niva is another author that describes the workings of IS that corresponds with functionalism. He explains that:

> The ambitions and behavior of ISIS have less to do with doctrines derived from the Qur'an or the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad than with the strategic doctrines of Mao Zedong, Che Guevara and the tradition of revolutionary insurgent warfare in the twentieth century, dressed up for the information age. While ISIS may have a Salafist orientation, they are also a revolutionary insurgent organization.[112]

This excerpt shows that Niva views the ideology and motivations of IS as that of a revolutionary insurgent movement instead of a religious movement. This corresponds with a functional view of the role of religion as emphasis is placed on revolution instead of religion, specifically.

Furthermore, Sohaira Siddiqui also responded to the article by Wood and looks into IS's judicial understanding and its relationship to the classical Islamic legal tradition. She argues that besides looking just at the use of Islamic tradition by IS as seen in Wood's article, the fundamental issue being overlooked is relationship between IS and classical Islamic legal tradition. She explains that:

> By situating ISIS within the Islamic tradition on the basis of their mere utilization of it, Wood's article and others like it overlook the fundamental issue which stands at the heart

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[111] Berger, J M. "Enough about Islam: Why Religion Is Not the Most Useful Way to Understand ISIS." *The Brookings Institution*. (2015).
[112]Niva, Steve. "The ISIS Shock Doctrine." *The Immanent Frame RSS*. (2015).

of the debate – ISIS's juridical understanding and its relationship to the classical Islamic legal tradition.[113]

Here Siddiqui argues that the fact that IS uses Islamic tradition to explain and justify their actions and ideology does not mean that that makes it legitimate. The legitimacy of interpretation is something that other authors have discussed as well. However, none of these authors have looked at the specifics of Islamic law when it comes to IS claiming religious authenticity. She described further that:

> As a group that is seeking to be a legitimate manifestation of Islam, ISIS constructs its authority and the validity of its actions outside the boundaries of what has been normatively accepted both in terms of conceptualizing the law, and more specifically in the realm of warfare.[114]

Her argument here concerning the judicial side of Islamic law, is that IS does not have the authority or ability to legitimate its actions under Islamic law. As mentioned, this is specifically the case with the use of warfare which shows that the violence that the organization uses and implements is not condoned under Islamic law. For Siddiqui as an author these excerpts portray her to have a functional view of religion for IS since she portrays religion as something being used to achieve a goal and thereby bypass the law in order to achieve authority and legitimate ideology and actions.

Overall, this section dealt with the debate on whether the ideology of IS is Islamic or not. As described previously, a large debate was created after the publication of an article in the *Atlantic* by Graeme Wood. This section provided an overview of what Wood's article included and what different responses and opinions about the article were. From each article and response, relevant quotes were explained and analyzed in terms of what view of religion and the link between religion and violence could be observed. It is interesting to see how this debate has developed and how the different opinions coincide and compare. In order to provide a simple overview of how the authors compare I have a constructed a table (Table 3).

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[113] Siddiqui, Sohaira. "Beyond Authenticity: ISIS and the Islamic Legal Tradition" *Scoop.it*. (2015).
[114] Ibid.

Table 3: Background and Perspectives of the Relevant Authors

Author	Background	Perspective
Wood	Journalist and editor	Substantive
Jenkins	Reporter	Functional
Hellyer	Nonresident Fellow	Functional
Berger	Researcher/Analyst	Functional
Mazie	Professor	Substantive
Niva	Professor	Functional
Siddiqui	Assistant Professor	Functional

Note that these are just the authors discussed on the topic of the role of Islam, but this is to provide an overview on the discussion concerning the article by Wood. There are a few things that I noticed after putting these perspective together. Firstly, even though a goal was to look at different types of authors such as researchers, professors and journalists, based on the perspectives in this section, there was no clear distinction between views and perspectives based on the type of author. On the other hand, all of the authors, besides Siddiqui, are from or work in North America. Siddiqui then still teaches at a branch of Georgetown University, located in Washington DC. The fact that all of the authors work in the West is something that they have in common. It is necessary to mention here that this is just limited to the authors referenced to in this research process.

Secondly, I noted that the majority of the perspectives covered in this thesis (and this can even include the perspectives from the previous section on the historical development of IS), lean towards a functional view of religion and religion and violence. Putting these two observations together, a conclusion that can be made is that the authors, who are all primarily based out of Western information outlets and organizations, tend to share a functional view of religion when discussing IS. Wood and Mazie are an exception in this case, but the fact that Wood's article received so much critique (including from many more authors than the ones covered here specifically) shows that in general, the audience is more connected to a countering functional view of religion concerning IS. Furthermore, even though Mazie's overall perspective seems to

be a substantive one, he does explain that concerning IS, whether or not the organization is Islamic is based on an interpretation that is not necessarily justified.

Furthermore, as discussed at the beginning of the section, some of the authors are specifically journalists or reporters that write primarily for one specific media outlet. It should be taken into consideration that in this case, as can be seen in Table 3 above, Wood and Jenkins could publish their work according to specific editorial policies by their respective media outlets. As mentioned, Wood is a journalist for *The Atlantic* and Jenkins a reporter for ThinkProgress. However, for the argument being made here, the origin of the articles themselves can still be considered as Western, since the two media outlets are from the West as well. Therefore, even though the perspectives of Wood and Jenkins could be influenced by the editorial views of their respective media outlets, the origin of the author and outlet remain the same.

Seeing as the articles and the majority of the readers are based in North America and Europe; the West, a link can be made back to the argument by Cavanaugh. This argument includes that there is a tendency in the West to favor the secular as rational, over the irrational influences of religion. What this would mean is that Cavanaugh's argument is supported by the analysis from this research and that there also is a tendency towards a functional perspective of religion by Western authors discussing the ideology of IS. It is important to note that these findings are based solely on the selection of sources used in this specific thesis. I recognize that with a different selection of sources and authors the outcome could have been different.

This summarizes the findings based on the discussion of the role of Islam concerning IS. The following chapter will provide an insight into the identity of the followers of IS as an organization and cover different author's perspectives on that topic as well. This will provide another source to check whether the conclusions from this section also apply, where after the final conclusion can be made in the last chapter.

Motivation of the Followers

The previous section of this chapter provided a look at how the different authors interpret the ideology and actions of IS in terms of religion and politics. This next section will provide an insight into how the different authors declare the motivations of the followers of IS. The authors

that had an opinion and argument on this topic included Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan in

ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, as well as Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger in *ISIS: The State of*

Terror.

Firstly, Weiss and Hassan dedicated an entire chapter to the profiles of different ISIS

fighter. What they discover when analyzing the link between religion and violence is the

following:

> For this book we conducted interview with dozens of ISIS associate who operate inside
> Syria and Iraq in a range of sectors, including religious clerics, fighters provincial emirs,
> security officials, and sympathizers, and we found that what draws people to ISIS could
> easily bring them to any number of cults or totalitarian movements, even those
> ideologically contradictory to Salafist *Jihadism*.[115]

This excerpt shows that Weiss and Hassan argue that there is not necessarily a specific aspect of

religion that tends to spark conflict, and that this can also originate from other movements and

beliefs, not necessarily religious nor Salafist *Jihadi*. So what are the specific motivations of these

individuals according to the authors? In their chapter Weiss and Hassan cover several examples

of IS followers who shared different reasons for joining in *jihad* for IS. An examples is that of

Abu Bilal al-Layli, a Syrian in charge of funding the Free Syrian Army, who shared that:

> ISIS used money and talk of justice and war against thieves to lure people. For some, it
> worked. In our areas, you see people longing for Islam and wanting someone to fight
> thieves. They bought into the "Islamic State" idea, thinking that the *Jihadists* were honest.
> Those who joined Daesh hardly memorized a few Quranic verses. They had no religious
> base. They were simply lured by the power of persuasion.[116]

This excerpt portrays that according to the Weiss and Hassan, for many followers, religion did

not necessarily play a significant part in what convinced them to join. Violent ideas of war and

claiming justice are in this case what is described as the motivating factor for followers. This

exemplifies a functionalist view of religion, since religion is used to label the mission and the

organization, but the actual drive for followers is fueled by the promise of power and politics.

A different example is one of what Weiss and Hassan label as "Fence-sitters." These

fence-sitters include a category of IS followers who already have a *Jihadist* or Islamist

background but 'limited themselves to only orbiting *takfiri* ideology.'[117] This means that some

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[115] Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*: Regan Arts, 2015. Print. p153.
[116] Ibid. p156.
[117] Ibid. p160.

only joined IS because it was the only Islamist faction in the area to join, while others were impressed with the military power and capabilities of the organization. This again shows that even though the followers had a religious background that fell in line with the ideology of IS, the final push for them to join was once again based on political opportunities and power.

Additionally, another type of follower are labeled as the "Politickers." The name already says it, these are the followers who join IS solely as a political project. As Weiss and Hassan explain: 'the closer ISIS came to realizing its territorial ambitions, the less religion played a part in driving people to join the organization.'[118] The people in this category see IS as the only option for Sunni Muslims who have lost all form of control in Iraq after the US invasion and the Iraq War.

Furthermore, a large breeding place for new followers of IS were the large prisons run by the US in Iraq. Members of IS actively tried to infiltrate these prisons in order to gain new recruits. Takfiri would purposely get caught, infiltrate the prisons, and slowly round up followers to join IS as soon as the prisoners were released. Weiss and Hassan do mention, however, that 'AQI's use of women and children as suicide bombers had "disgusted" many. Money. Not ideology, was the primary motivation for joining.'[119] This is important because it shows that in the prisons, it was easy to gather followers since they could rile them up against their captors, the West. In addition, these prisoners could be recruited with the promise of money and power – as seen in the excerpt, ideology did not necessarily play a role.

In addition to gathering general followers, according to Weiss and Hassan, another tactic IS uses is to brainwash younger children and train them to become full-blown *Jihadists,* as they explain in their book:

> 'An especially effective tactic has been the brainwashing of Raqqa's children. "People that are poor and uneducated and not paying attention to what their kids are doing, their ten-year-olds will go out and then ISIS will promise the family food and money. They elevate these kids and call them 'sheiks' and give them weapons and power, turn them into child soldiers. But these are ten-year-old boys who have never studied theology, and now they are 'sheikhs!"[120]

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[118] Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*: Regan Arts, 2015. Print. p162.
[119] Ibid. p84.
[120] Ibid. p188.

Weiss and Hassan explain that children are used by IS as very effective targets for followers since they can train and brainwash them to follow IS ideology specifically. The important aspect of this concerning religion, is that it barely plays a role in the motivations of followers in this case. Yes, the children are taught the religious ideology of IS, but this is not something that they obtain from the essence of religion itself. Therefore, this is yet again an example of a functional view of religion: religion is used a tool to shape the psychological and sociological aspects of the lives of these followers.

Finally, a last example of the effect of violence during the recruitment process of followers is the fact that IS uses violence as a tool of governance, in a non-religious way:

> The combination of brute force and effective governance means that the local population has little motivation and a huge deterrent to rise up against ISIS, particularly in the absence of a viable and acceptable alternative.[121]

Weiss and Hassan argue that IS uses violence as a tool to enforce their power and ideology, instead of justifying this violence as being sparked by religion itself. They implement violence in order to exert control and ensure that there is no resistance in the populations that they control.

Furthermore, Stern and Berger included a chapter in their book about the foreign fighters that have joined IS. Foreign fighters are a relevant topic since in general they have no common religious background. They argue that the motives for these foreign fighters from all over the world join are related to a combination of internal and external motives.[122] External motives have to do with 'an individual's perception of large-scale events in the world,'(weak states, economic disadvantage and education) while internal motives 'stem from what an individual wants or needs for himself' (feeling of belonging, new identity, money, or adventure).[123] Relating this back to the view by Stern and Berger on foreign fighters that come to IS, they argue that:

> For many, perhaps most, *Jihadists,* religious motivations are necessary but not sufficient to explain the leap to violent action. Some mix of political sentiment, religious belief, and personal circumstance is required.[124]

[121] Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*: Regan Arts, 2015. Print. p229.
[122] Stern, Jessica, and J. M. Berger. *ISIS: The State of Terror*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015. Print. P81.
[123] Ibid. p82.
[124] Ibid. p82.

Their argument made by Stern and Berger here shows that even though religion can play a role, in general there are other social and economic factors and circumstances that have an influence. This corresponds with the general aspects of a functional view of religion.

       Overall, this chapter provided a short overview of some of the different types of followers that exist and what their specific motivations are. Concerning the comparison of the perspectives of the authors, the primary view of the role of religion here is a functional one. Concerning these authors, that means that for the majority of the followers, it is not the essence of religion that causes them to join, but a combination or social and psychological factors that have a religious label or influence. Considering the findings from earlier parts of the research that covered the authors of these books, respectively, there is no surprise that the primary perspective is a functional one. In the conclusion I will discuss how all the different topics and the perspectives of different authors compare.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to contribute to the debate on the link between religion and violence by answering the research question: *how do scholars and journalists view and frame the role of religion and the relationship between religion and violence concerning the historical development and ideology of the "Islamic State?"* As the research question reads, the goal of the research was to look at how scholars and journalists view and frame the role of religion and the relationship between religion and violence concerning the historical development and ideology of the "Islamic State." In the different chapters I shared, explained, and analyzed different excerpts on different relevant topics concerning IS that portrayed authors view of the role of religion. The goal was then to look at these different opinions and analyze them in terms of how the authors perceived the role of religion. This included whether or not it could reference to a functional or substantive definition and view of religion, as well as how this was reflected on the link between religion and violence. A functional definition of religion is based on what religion does and how it operates in terms of the social and psychological system while a substantive definition entails defining religion in terms of its content or essence. Concerning the link between religion and violence: from a functional perspective religiously framed conflicts are always about something else since religion is seen primarily as having a function in psychological and social matters. From a substantive perspective there is something in the nature of religion that sparks conflict and violence. The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of what can be concluded from the different analyses of work by the different journalists and authors and reflect on to what extent the research question was answered.

Firstly, an overview the description of the findings from the different topics; The section on 'Historical Development' covers the Sunni-Shia divide as well as the impact of the Ba'ath regime. What was seen with both sections, is that these developments were both significantly based on political strife and power. The Sunni-Shia divide, even though the original split was based on a religious choice, has always been considered a political conflict. The sectarian conflict still thrives today and plays a large role in the development of IS. The sectarian conflict itself, with IS being a Sunni organization, in combination with the impact of the disenfranchisement of Sunni's in the political sphere after the fall of Saddam Hussein have contributed significantly to

the development of IS. The analysis in this section was therefore primarily described as functional by all authors. Furthermore, the influence of the Ba'ath regime section saw a continuation of the same trend. A focus on political and military power, as well as again the link to the disenfranchisement of Arab Sunni Ba'athist after the fall of the regime. The examples from different authors also primarily lean towards a functional view of religion.

Next, the section on "The Ideology of IS" provided more variety in the analysis of the role of religion. The first section on Wahhabism revealed some more religious influence from the history of Wahhabism itself, however this provided just a few substantive examples. Functional examples were present as well due to the impact of the social system on converts to follow Wahhabism instead of simply religious ones. Furthermore, the section on *Jihadi*-salafism also provided a variety of examples. However, even though *Jihadi*-salafism is technically a religious movement, it is also a very militant and violent movement. This causes the fact that politics play a large role as well due to the importance of power and use of violence in *jihad* and *takfir*.

Furthermore, the section on "The *Atlantic* Discussion" covered the discussion concerning the *Atlantic* article is what included the most divers examples and analysis. The article by Wood that starts off the discussion contains primarily substantive examples, since the main argument is that IS is very Islamic. The response by Jenkins however, contains mostly examples leaning towards a functional view of religion. This makes sense since Jenkins article is written as a criticism of the article by Wood. Relevant to mention is that both of these authors utilize the work of Bernard Haykel to support their opinions. The interesting aspect of this however, is that in Wood's article Hellyer is portrayed as having a substantive opinion while in Jenkins article he is portrayed as having a functional opinion. This shows that in these opinion articles, the opinion of the main author becomes evident in not only his own work, but also in the opinions of others they choose to interpret and share. Steven Mazie provides another different perspective of the discussion by remaining critical of both sides and warns that there is a possibility and danger of being able to analyze examples in both a functional and a substantive manner. This corresponds with what was mentioned with the explanation of substantive and functional definitions of religion: there is no clear-cut division. It is important to take this into consideration when labeling and analyzing different examples. The different definitions complement each other and therefore it is not possible to clearly label an example. The labelling of examples in this thesis as being

functional or substantive means that the example primarily contains characteristics of one or the other and therefore leans towards a certain perspective. Nevertheless, the two types of definitions remain complementary, and when an example is labelled as functional, it does not necessarily mean that religion is factored out completely.

Lastly, the section on "Motivation of the Followers" included an overview of some of the different motivations of followers that join IS. Weiss and Hassan labeled different types of followers and noted how they came to join IS. This included an overview of older citizens, prisoners of war, and even children. What was interesting to see is that the followers covered by Weiss and Hassan almost all had primarily non-religious reasons and motivations for joining IS, linking their view to be a functional one since religion is not the essence of the motivations. The arguments by Stern and Berger on motivations of foreign fighters, corresponded with the perspectives of Weiss and Hassan and also portrayed a functional perspective.

It is noteworthy that there was a difference between the types of sources covered in Chapter 3. On the one hand there were the three books used that provided general background information on IS as well as specific perspectives by the authors on the role of religion. On the other hand I covered the article in *The Atlantic* by Graeme Wood in addition to several articles written in response to the one by Wood. This included different authors of magazines as well as scholars who shared their opinion on the matter in different articles of their own. The genre of these articles were primarily journalistic and opinion-pieces aimed at readers of international and foreign policy think tanks.

What can be concluded from the overall comparison between the books and the articles is that the excerpts from the books included primarily examples that showed characteristics of a functionalist view of religion as well as a functionalist view of the link between religion and violence. This was seen in the section on the "Historical Development" as well as "Motivation of the Followers" which both included excerpts solely from the books. In contrast, the articles looked at from *The Atlantic* discussion included a range of different interpretations of substantive and functional views of religion, which sometimes even fluctuated within the same article. However, as already noted in the section on "The *Atlantic* Discussion," even though a difference in perspectives could be discovered in the articles, the majority still leaned towards a functional perspective. A tentative conclusion based on these findings is that in general, books are more

factual and include more straightforward information on the topic of IS. Even though author's opinions were present in the books, they were scarcer that opinions found easily in an article. Articles in this case, are written more from a personal perspective and opinion by the authors, while books remain on a different, more factual and informative level. This leaves more room in the articles for authors to discuss their personal opinions in more depth, which can be viewed as a reason as to why there are more examples of substantive perspectives on religion in the articles.

Connecting this back to the research question and the arguments in the introduction as to why the research project was interesting, a conclusion can be made. Concerning the research question, based on the findings from the different authors analyzed, scholars and journalists view and frame the role of religion and the relationship between religion and violence concerning IS primarily according to a functional view of religion. This is based on the fact that all of the excerpts from the books and the majority of the ones from the articles corresponded with this view. Now, seen this conclusion, it is relevant to note that all of the authors covered were either from or based out of Western organizations and institutions. They also all shared a perspective that was not condoning and/or accepting the views and actions of IS. This is relevant because it places all of the author in a 'Western' category. This links back to the argument by Cavanaugh which was used to support the relevance of the research. As explained in the introduction, according to Cavanaugh, there is a separation in the West between what is religious and secular; what is religious is considered irrational in contrast to the rationality of secular forms of power. The fact that majority of the authors were linked to a functional perspective on the role of religion, which includes a recognition of other factors besides religion such as social, economic and political influences, can be related to the argument by Cavanaugh and the relationship between religion and politics in the West. An important note here again, is that even though the primary perspective is functional, does not mean that religion can be factored out completely. Instead this means that the examples studied portray a recognition of other factors in addition to religion, and religion therefore plays a smaller role.

Overall, considering the fact that all of the books, as well as the articles were published in either the United States or Europe, an outcome such as this one could have been expected. The different perspectives published were overall comparable, which can be linked to the fact that they all originate from the same geographical and political areas. Even though due to this, a trend

could have been expected, the research shed light on the fact that most authors leaned towards a functional view based on the criteria applied in this thesis, which was not clear at the beginning of the research.

This conclusion is relevant and can form a contribution because it shows that since there is a 'Western' tendency to look at the development and ideology of IS in a secular manner, this is something that should be recognized and taken into consideration when doing research on the topic. This means that when researching IS, authors that come from a different academic or work background that is not necessarily linked to the West could be taken into consideration as well in order to see whether or not there is a difference in perspective and whether secularism has an influence. For this specific research the books used were the newest and most relevant books on the topic at the time. The articles were selected based on the *Atlantic* discussion, and concerned articles that delivered a specific response to the article by Wood. Due to these selection criteria, the authors discussed in the thesis all share a similar 'Western' background. Therefore, a further research possibility would be to apply the same process to authors who have written on the same topics but are not necessarily from a 'Western' atmosphere.

Appendix 1: Timeline History of Iraq

History of Iraq (Shows the succession of years of unrest and turmoil)

Date	Event
1534-1918	Ottoman Empire
1917	State of Iraq created by Britain
1932	Independence
1958	The monarchy is overthrown in a military coup led by Brig Abd-al-Karim Qasim and Col Abd-al-Salam Muhammad Arif. Iraq is declared a republic.
1963	Prime Minister Qasim is ousted in a coup led by the Arab Socialist Baath Party (ASBP). Arif becomes president.
1963	Baathist government is overthrown by Arif, succeeded by Maj-Gen Adb-al-Rahman Muhammad Arif
1968	A Baathist led-coup ousts Arif. Revolution Command Council (RCC) takes charge with Gen Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr as chairman and country's president.
1979	Saddam Hussein becomes president, succeeding Al-Bakr
1980-1988	Iran-Iraq War
1990	Iraq invades Kuwait, international tensions created – First Gulf War
1991	Southern Shia and northern Kurdish populations - encouraged by Iraq's defeat in Kuwait - rebel, prompting a brutal crackdown
1998	Bombing campaign "Operation Desert Fox" by the US and UK to destroy Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes
1999	Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, spiritual leader of the Shia community, is assassinated in Najaf.
2003	US coalition invades, Hussein is ousted – marks start of years of violent conflict with different groups competing for power
2003-2004	Intensified insurgency
2005	Amid escalating violence, parliament selects Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as president. Ibrahim Jaafari, a Shia, is named as prime minister.

2005	Draft constitution is endorsed by Shia and Kurdish negotiators, but not by Sunnirepresentatives. Voters approve a new constitution, which aims to create an Islamic federal democracy.
2008	Parliament passes legislation allowing former officials from Saddam Hussein's Baath party to return to public life.
2009	Iraq takes control of security in Baghdad's fortified Green Zone and assumes more powers over foreign troops based in the country. PM Nouri al-Maliki welcomes the move as Iraq's "day of sovereignty".
2009	US troops start withdrawing
2012	Bomb and gun attacks target Shia areas throughout the year, sparking fears of a new sectarian conflict. Nearly 200 people are killed in January, more than 160 in June, 113 in a single day in July, more than 70 people in August, about 62 in attacks nationwide in September, and at least 35 before and during the Shia mourning month of Muharram in November.
2012	Sunni Muslims stage mass rallies across the country over several months, protesting against what they see as marginalisation by the Shia-led government.
2013	New sectarian war ensues
2014	Sunni rebels led by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) surge out of Anbar Province to seize Iraq's second city of Mosul and other key towns. Tens of thousands flee amid atrocities. Kurdish forces, US and Iran assist government in repelling attacks, US carries out air raids. ISIS renames itself Islamic State, declares a caliphate.

Source: CNN

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