Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State

A study of cooperation and competition between terrorist organizations

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1. Introduction

The year 2011 began with a series of popular uprisings across the Middle East that toppled various authoritarian regimes and which was largely regarded as the region's turn to modern democracy. However, six years later the outcomes of these revolts seem less rosy. While regime change took place in, for example Tunisia and Egypt, the violent removal of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and the armed uprising against Syria's Bashar al-Assad have plunged the latter two countries into civil war.[1] In addition, in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq (2011), a violent insurgency has swept the country and eventually resulted in the capture of large cities and territories in Northern Iraq by a terrorist organization that would become known as the Islamic State (IS).[2]

Apart from its violent campaign in Iraq, in 2013 the IS crossed into Syria (taking advantage of its civil war) where it too captured large swaths of land. In 2014, after the capture of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, the terrorist organization announced the reinstatement of the Caliphate, with its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to become the Caliph.[3] They urged Muslims throughout the world to migrate to the Caliphate or to at least pledge their allegiance to the new Caliph. As a result, thousands of jihadists made their way to Syria and Iraq and even more individuals and terrorist groups from across the globe aligned themselves with the organisation.[4]

While both Syria and Iraq experienced high levels of violence and insecurity at the time of the IS's rise, their rapid conquest surprised many observers. What surprised them even more was the fact that al-Qaeda Central (AQC),[5] publicly disavowed the organization. This is strange for a number of reasons: the IS used to be an al-Qaeda affiliate (al-Qaeda in Iraq); AQC too aspires to establish a (global) Caliphate; the IS quickly became the most

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[1] I. Salamey, 'Post-Arab Spring: changes and challenges', in *Third World Quarterly* 36 (2015) No.1, p. 112.

[2] A. S. Hashim, 'The Islamic State: from Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate', in *Middle East Policy* XXI (2014) No. 4, pp. 75; Note: The group now known as the Islamic State has changed names several times over the past couple of years. In the introduction, the paper will refer to the Islamic State, in later chapters the group's transformation, in addition to its name changes, will be discussed.

[3] BBC, 'Isis rebels declare 'Islamic state' in Iraq and Syria', *BBC* (June 30, 2014), retrieved November 7, 2017 from: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28082962.

[4] D. Milton, M. al-'Ubaydi, 'Pledging Bay`a: A Benefit or Burden to the Islamic State?', in *CTC Sentinel* 8 (March 2015) no. 3, pp. 1-2.

[5] After the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan the central leadership of al-Qaeda relocated to the border region of Afghanistan – Pakistan, from which it established multiple affiliated groups across the world. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.4.

powerful terrorist group in the region, if not the world. However, to scholars like B.J. Philips, S. Nemeth, and T. Bacon, the event should have been less of a shock. To them the relationship between the IS and al-Qaeda can be said to be clear evidence of cooperation and competition between terrorist groups, which they have all studied.

Even though these theories describe two opposite relationships, the described effects of these links are fairly similar. Both phenomena can be said to positively affect terrorist organizations, as they commonly increase the endurance as well as the lethality of groups. However, it can be argued that groups seek cooperation specifically to improve their situation, while competition arises largely by accident. Additionally, it should be noted that while scholars agree that competition can strengthen a group's cause, the effects can also severely damage an organization or lead to their demise.

Whereas al-Qaeda has given an official statement on their decision to break ties with the IS, and has initiated a campaign to discredit the organization, their account naturally fails to address the underlying motivations between the split. By using the theories about terrorist cooperation and competition, this thesis seeks to provide an academic explanation as to:

Why did al-Qaeda break ties with the Islamic State in 2014?

To answer the research question, this thesis will use the theories about cooperation and competition between terrorist organizations. The split between al-Qaeda and the IS has been discussed in the news, and by scholars, but no studies have sought to explain the break up by making use of the theories about terrorist competition. Hence, this thesis seeks to improve the academic debate around this historic breakup, and provide an explanation that takes into account the underlying processes that motivated the complicated relationship between the two organisations. Such an explanation addresses gaps in our knowledge about the links between the two groups and their behaviour towards each other. In addition, this thesis seeks to further improve our understanding of cooperation and competition between terrorist organizations, as the case of al-Qaeda and the IS provides an excellent opportunity to test these theories in a real-world scenario.

The answer to this research question will first of all provide a better understanding of the links between al-Qaeda and the IS. Secondly, as their affair is both an

example of cooperation and competition, the thesis will provide an excellent example of how these kinds of relationships affect terrorist organizations. Finally, a better understanding of the links between al-Qaeda and the IS, in addition to a better understanding of how these relations affect terrorist organizations, will lead to a better understanding as to why the two organizations are now at odds with each other. Such an understanding will not only add to the academic debate about cooperation and competition between terrorist groups, but can also be useful to policymakers who are tasked with counterterrorism efforts.

The timeframe for this study is limited to the period between 2004, when al-Qaeda and the IS's predecessor formalized their alliance, and July 2017 when the IS increasingly began to lose ground after their defeat in Mosul. However, as this thesis seeks to give a better understanding of the two organizations it will first discuss their origins, which date further back than 2004. After the histories of both groups have been described, in addition to why they formed an alliance, the thesis will discuss the common narrative behind their break up. The remainder of this thesis will analyse three key developments in the relationship between al-Qaeda and the IS by applying the theories on cooperation and competition to the case. First, al-Qaeda's decision to form an alliance with the IS's predecessor in 2004 will be analysed. Thereafter their falling out in 2014 and the aftermath of the split 2014-2017 will be studied.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction and Definitions

This thesis uses the Oxford Dictionary definition of terrorism, which states that terrorism is "the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims".[6] The study also limits itself to the use of terrorism by non-state actors, though it acknowledges that states can also use terrorist tactics.

Before discussing the available theories about cooperation and competition between terrorist organizations, this literature review will first discuss why certain groups decide to engage in terrorist acts as a way to achieve their goals. In this study the work of P. Rogers and E. Neumayer & T. Plümber will be used to define terrorist organizations and to explain why they revert to terrorist tactics as a way to obtain their goals. The thesis acknowledges that there are other studies to help explain this phenomenon, but has chosen to use these two studies because they present terrorist organizations as political actors, and the use of terrorism as a strategic choice. These definitions have been chosen because, unlike other studies of terrorism, they help to explain why terrorist organizations can cooperate or compete with each other.

2.2. Why Organizations Use Terrorism

According to Rogers, terrorist groups can best be viewed as political actors. However, as their ideas are often viewed to be too radical by the political establishment and the general population, they are largely excluded from political participation. Rogers argues that in this situation these organizations revert to terrorism mainly as a way to nonetheless spread their message, gather support and pressure the political decision makers. In addition to being excluded from the regular political process, these groups face an asymmetry with regards to power, numbers, and funding versus the government. They therefore revert to non-conventional tactics as a means to obtain their goals. For example, by deliberately targeting

[6] Oxford Dictionary, 'Terrorism', retrieved October 5, 2017 from: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/terrorism.

non-combatants, they hope to coerce the political establishment into making concessions. Additionally, they use terror attacks to escalate tensions already present in societies, this mainly serves to gather more support and thus political leverage.[7]

Neumayer and Plümber argue that the decision to use terrorism as a means to achieve one's political goals is a strategic decision which often serves to obtain the terrorist's intermediate goals. These objectives often include: generate media attention (as a means to promote the terrorist's cause); increase the cost of political stability (as a result of for example increased spending on defense and counter-terrorism); and alienate the target population from the government (as a way to increase popular support).[8] For example, the use of suicide bombings by al-Qaeda in Iraq against the Shia population can be said to perfectly serve these intermediate goals. Suicide bombings are not only a successful tool to generate media attention, they are also hard to prevent and therefore force the government to spend more on security. Moreover, by deliberately targeting the Shia population, tensions between Sunni's and Shiites in Iraq increased.

2.3. Terrorist Organizations and Cooperation

As this study will show, both al-Qaeda and the IS have established a number of official affiliated groups, in addition to a number of groups that have voiced their support for their cause. Even though most of these jihadist organizations aspire the establishment of a (worldwide) Caliphate, their primary objectives are often local. The decision to form international alliances seems rather odd. Why than do these organizations seek to cooperate with each other, and what are the effects of these joint ventures? It should be noted that there is little debate regarding this question, rather the handful of scholars who have added to the discussion complement each other.

This thesis has defined terrorist groups as essentially political actors. Therefore, T. Bacon's assertion that alliances are common practice between (international) political

[7] P. Rogers, 'Terrorism', in P. D. Williams (ed.) *Security Studies an Introduction* (2013, Routledge New York) pp. 223-224.
[8] E. Neumayer, T. Plümber, 'International Terrorism and the Clash of Civilizations', in *British Journal of Political Science* 39 (October 2009) no. 4, p. 717.

units, without regard to time and place, can also be applied to terrorist groups.[9] Due to their secretive nature terrorist groups face hurdles in forming alliances that are largely absent with cooperation between other political groups. According to N. A. Bapat and K. D. Bond, such obstacles are caused by the fact that terrorist organizations who seek to form alliances often face a commitment problem. This commitment problem is caused by the fact that terrorist organizations often lack transparency, which damages their credibility. Therefore, groups can never be entirely sure that their cooperative agreements will be fulfilled.[10] Bacon echoes this assertion and adds that terrorist organizations, unlike states, are unable to set up institutions that could help to overcome this distrust. While cooperation in the international sphere is increasingly being overseen, and enforced, by third party institutions, such institutions are naturally absent between terrorist organizations. As a result, terrorist organizations are inclined to use cooperation opportunistically.[11]

In addition to the commitment problem, terrorist organizations face a number of other problems with regards to cooperation. Bacon argues that they face a security-autonomy trade-off, as cooperation often includes ceding some degree of independent decision making. While a partner could provide extra security, exchanging some independence could aggravate members of the group, especially if in-group identities are strong. An alliance also poses the threat of being ill perceived by the real or perceived constituents of the group, especially if the ally engages in behavior that is viewed as unacceptable by this group. Forming alliances, Bacon warns, could also result in an increase of pressure by counterterrorism forces, as they are alarmed by the threat of an alliance. Bacon reinforces this argument by stating that an alliance also increases the risk of betrayals and leaks.[12] B. J. Philips in addition argues that an alliance can cause dependence and can even lead to competition, though it should be noted that most cases of competition exist regardless of prior cooperation. The next chapter will discuss the negative effects which competition can cause for an organization.[13]

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[9] T. Bacon, 'Alliance Hubs: Focal Points in the International Terrorist Landscape', in *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8 (2014) no. 4, p. 6.

[10] N. A. Bapat, K. D. Bond, 'Alliances between Militant Groups', in *British Journal of Political Science* 42 (2012) no. 4, p. 794.

[11] T. Bacon, 'Alliance Hubs', pp. 7-8.

[12] Ibid.

[13] B. J. Phillips, 'Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity', in *International Studies Quarterly* 58 (2014) no. 2, p. 337.

If terrorist organizations manage to overcome the commitment problem in addition to overcoming the internal and external pressures with regards to cooperation, the benefits of cooperation can be multiple. A number of scholars, including, Bapat, Bond, and Phillips have asserted that cooperation allows organizations to pool their resources (both material and human), which should increase military strength.[14] Moreover, Bapat and Bond argue that cooperation amongst terrorist organizations allows them to specialize, and focus on their own area of operations. This is especially the case for organizations that are active in a similar region and face a common enemy.[15] In addition, scholars like M. C. Horowitz and K. Craign, agree that cooperation between terrorist groups facilitates the diffusion of tactics and ideologies, such as the use of suicide bombings.[16] As a result, it is widely recognized that terrorist organizations with (multiple) allies become more lethal.[17]

Similarly, Phillips has found that cooperation between terrorist groups can increase their longevity. This can be attributed to several factors, including the pooling of resources, support and recruits. In addition, cooperation between groups can help them to overcome mobilization concerns. Phillips attributes this aspect to the fact that terrorist groups with allies are usually able to carry out more deadly and sophisticated attacks these can then serve as fresh propaganda to gather fresh recruits and finances.[18] Philips also introduces the concept of eigenvector centrality, which refers to the indirect connection to other groups through allies. Groups with a central position within a network, with multiple (in)direct connections, such as the IS and al-Qaeda, can maximize the profits of cooperation and thus are likely to endure longer.[19]

2.4. Terrorist Organizations and Competition

[14] N. A. Bapat, K. D. Bond, 'Alliances between Militant Groups', p. 795; B. J. Phillips, 'Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity', p. 337.
[15] N. A. Bapat, K. D. Bond, 'Alliances between Militant Groups', p. 795.
[16] M. C. Horowitz, 'Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism', in *International Organization* 64 (2010) no. 1, pp. 35-37; K. Craign, *Sharing the Dragon's Teeth: Terrorist Groups and the Exchange of New Technologies* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006).
[17] See for example: B. J. Phillips, 'Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity', p. 337; T. Bacon, 'Alliance Hubs', p. 5; V. Asal, R. K. Rethemeyer, 'The Nature of the Beast: Organizational Structures and the Lethality of Terrorist Attacks', in *The Journal of Politics* 70 (2008) No. 2, p. 440.
[18] B. J. Phillips, 'Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity', pp. 337-338.
[19] Idem p. 338.

As the split between al-Qaeda and the IS has shown, competition between terrorist groups also exists. Surprisingly the effects of competition between groups can be said to be fairly similar to the effects that have been discussed with regards to cooperation. In the scholarly debate about competition between terrorist organizations, the outbidding thesis is the most often-cited theory, it is however not undisputed.

The outbidding theory can best be explained through the lens of Rogers in addition to Neumayer and Plümber, who regard terrorist organizations as largely political actors. S. Nemeth explains that, in short, the theory holds that as organizations are competing over a similar pool of recruits and public support, they will use increasing levels of violence to demonstrate their commitment and capabilities versus the other organizations. As a result, even moderate groups are forced to engage in more extreme attacks. Consequently, states will experience increasing levels of violence as violence becomes the currency for terrorist organizations, which will legitimize and encourage ever increasing levels of violence.[20]

According to A. H. Kydd and B. F. Walter, the escalating violence that characterizes outbidding also has a tendency to target objectives that might be of lesser importance to the attacking group. Attacks are increasingly designed to show determination and power, which also helps to explain why terrorist attacks continue in an environment where they are unlikely to produce any (political) results.[21] M.G. Findley and J. K. Young add to the theory that outbidding will likely intensify when there are multiple groups competing for the support of a similar segment of the population. Ethnic, cultural, and religious differences between the competing groups will further escalate the violence.[22] As will be discussed later, the split between al-Qaeda and the IS occurred in an environment where multiple parties were competing for popular support.

In a situation of terrorist outbidding, suicide attacks are often seen as the pinnacle of dedication to a cause, and once the tactic has been used by one party it can be argued that others will have to follow suit. Moreover, in line with this kind of reasoning, B. Acosta argues that a terrorist group's longevity can increases as a result of the adoption of suicide attacks. Suicide attacks require extensive planning and need a strong in-group identity as they involve

[20] S. Nemeth, 'The Effect of Competition on Terrorist Group Operations', in *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58 (2014) no.2, p. 337.
[21] A. H. Kydd, B. F. Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', in *International Security* 31 (2006) No. 1, p. 77.
[22] M. G. Findley, J. K. Young, 'More Combatant Groups, More Terror? Empirical Tests of an Outbidding Logic', in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24 (2012) no.5, pp. 708-709.

the voluntary sacrifice of a group member. According to Acosta, suicide attacks are thus the perfect tactic to show how determined a group is, and will likely bring in new recruits.[23] However, M. Bloom, who has largely been responsible for this notion of the outbidding thesis, emphasizes that the social environment in which suicide attacks occur has to be supportive of such extreme forms of violence. When there is no popular support for suicide attacks, the adoption of the modus operandi might alienate support.[24]

Nemeth explains that, in a setting where there is limited support for extreme violence, such as suicide attacks, competition can still intensify. Groups that refrain from using extreme violence, in order to maintain support, will try to free-ride on the efforts of other groups. This further exacerbates the collective action problem that all terrorist groups face. In this situation, groups are still competing with each other, but outbidding as described above will largely remain absent. In cases where one group uses extreme violence, and other groups try to free-ride on its effects, violence might actually decrease according to Nemeth.[25]

The outbidding thesis has also been discussed with regards to the terrorist group's ideology. With regards to ideology, the distinction between secular and religious organizations is most prevalent. According to J. Piazza, most religious groups are likely to view their struggle as a battle between "good and evil", hence they are less concerned about winning over the "hearts and minds" of the general population. Secular organizations are far more concerned with winning over the support of the people. In a situation of competition, Piazza argues that religious groups are more likely to adopt an outbidding strategy than their secular counterparts.[26] Nemeth notes that when terrorist groups receive state support, they become less concerned with winning over popular support and are likely to escalate violence in a competitive environment.[27]

While the effects of terrorist competition as described by the outbidding thesis can be said to be predominantly positive, authors like P. Staniland argue that the effects might be negative as well. This is especially true when the competition between groups turns violent.

[23] B. Acosta, 'Dying for survival: Why militant organizations continue to conduct suicide attacks', *in Journal of Peace Research* 53 (January 2016) no. 2, pp. 5-6.
[24] M. Bloom, 'Dying to Kill: Devising a Theory of Suicide Terror', *Paper for Presentation to the Harrington Workshop on Terrorism* (2005) pp. 117-118.
[25] S. Nemeth, 'The Effect of Competition on Terrorist Group Operations', pp. 340-341.
[26] J. Piazza, 'Is Islamist Terrorism More Dangerous? An Empirical Study of Group Ideology, Organization, and Goal Structure', in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (2009) no. 1, pp. 64-65; S. Nemeth, 'The Effect of Competition on Terrorist Group Operations', pp. 342-343.
[27] Ibid.

Attacks against each other not only directly damage the groups, as members are killed, but can also lead members to defect or disengage. This form of competition, referred to as fratricide by Staniland, often occurs when a faction within a group tries to consolidate its power and push for more control. Fratricide can also amount when factions compete over personality, terrain, and resource flows. Staniland notes that in such a situation, the government could try to attract defectors and use them as intelligence assets.[28]

[28] P. Staniland, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Insurgent Fratricide, Ethnic Defection, and the Rise of Pro-State Paramilitaries', in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 56 (2012) No. 1 pp. 20-23.

3. Salafist Jihadism, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State

3.1. Introduction

To understand why al-Qaeda and the IS eventually broke ties with each other, even though the two organisations adhere to the Salafist Jihadist[29] ideology, it will first be necessary to discuss the latter movement. Thereafter the origins of the two former organizations will be discussed, as this too will shed light on the reasons behind their break up. For chronological purposes al-Qaeda will first be introduced after which the IS will be discussed. The last part of this chapter will elaborate on the split between al-Qaeda and the IS.

3.2. Salafist Jihadism

Salafist Muslims adhere to a very strict interpretation of the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The ideology is often equated with Wahhabism, after the eighteenth century Salafist scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and is particularly popular on the Arabian Peninsula.[30] Salafism is concerned with an idealized Islamic world and seeks to re-model the present-day world by looking to the time of the Prophet in an effort to restore Islam to its origins.[31] The ideology gained popularity in the latter half of the twentieth century, which can best be attributed to the fact that it promises a renewed vision of power and glory. At the time it appealed to the resentment, disenfranchisement and disillusion among Sunni Arabs. These feelings in part originated from the region's struggle with its colonial past, the consequences of decolonisation (for example the fact that Arab regimes modelled themselves after western states), and the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate.[32] Salafists became convinced that the West and the Jews were engaged in a cultural, economic, and military struggle to destroy the religion of Islam. According to Salafists, the modern Arab states

[29] It should be noted that not all Salafists preach jihad, however the majority of them do. For the purpose of this paper I will nevertheless use the term Salafists to refer to those organizations that preach jihad.
[30] B. Haykel, 'ISIS and al- Qaeda—What Are They Thinking? Understanding the Adversary', in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 668 (2016) no. 1, pp. 71-72.
[31] J. Turner, 'From Cottage Industry to International Organisation: The Evolution of Salafi-Jihadism and the Emergence of the Al Qaeda Ideology', in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 (2010) no. 4, p. 543.
[32] Idem p. 542

facilitate this practice, and therefore these regimes are deemed to be apostates and should be defeated as well.[33]

According to Salafists this was all proof of the decline of the Muslim world, and various groups sought to gain political leverage. Most of these groups styled themselves to the image of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood sought to capture the apparatus of government (initially by participating in elections and by engaging with the government), and use these institutions to impose Islamic law and restore "Gods rule."[34] However, Islamist movements across the Muslim world were being violently repressed, and many Islamists fled into exile to countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan or Europe. In exile, Islamists became radicalized and started to advocate for, and helped to organize, jihad as a means to achieve regime change.[35]

The term Jihad both refers to a personal and collective duty to struggle in the name of Allah. The personal aspect of jihad is concerned with resisting temptations, and striving to be a better Muslim. The collective effort of jihad involves bettering one's community, this could include defending or expanding it by means of war. However, warfare is described as the lesser jihad, improving oneself and one's community is seen as the greater jihad.[36] Nonetheless, as the concept of jihad only appears in 28 verses in the Quran (out of 6234 verses in total), the concept is highly contested.[37] As a result, the concept of jihad is constantly being re-interpreted, deepened, and given new purpose in light of contemporary events. When Salafists increasingly became concerned with what they viewed as Western encroachments upon Islamic lands, they developed it in to a concept that demands armed struggle against the West and the apostate Arab regimes.[38]

Before they could violently engage the Arab regimes, the Salafists needed to find religious justification because the Quran prohibits violence against fellow believers. Salafist Jihadists have for example re-interpreted the concept of takfir, which enables them to question a person's religious belief (iman) and to deem it impure, false or wrong. Based on this they can then declare a person to be a non-believer, kafir, which allows violence against

[33] B. Haykel, 'ISIS and al- Qaeda—What Are They Thinking?', p. 72.
[34] Idem p. 73.
[35] Ibid.
[36] J. Turner, 'From Cottage Industry to International Organisation', p.544.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Idem pp. 547-553.

them.[39] It should, however, be noted that this too is a highly contested concept within Islam, and that most groups like the IS selectively quote verses from the Quran to justify their actions. In general, (Islamic) scholars agree that the Quran in fact prohibits the practice of declaring takfir or kafir by fellow Muslims, as it is believed that such a sin is by definition one that can only be punished in the afterlife.[40] Still, in the twentieth century notable Salafists like Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Abul A'la Maududi, one of the founders of Pakistan's *Jammat-e-Islami*, have been influential in developing the modern, anti-Western, notion of takfir and kafir as a way to justify jihad against both the West and those Muslim states that in their eyes were too westernized.[41]

The practice of using the notions of takfir and kafir to justify jihad has been a recurrent phenomenon by dissenting groups throughout the ages to justify their rebellion against legitimate regimes. As it has been noted, in the latter half of the twentieth century opposition amongst (Salafi) Muslims throughout the Islamic world was growing but was violently repressed.[42] However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989), amongst other events, would provide an opportunity for both Salafists and governments to address their respective issues. It is in this climate that the current Salafist Jihadist organisations, like al-Qaeda, have formed.

3.3. Al-Qaeda's Afghan Origins

The origins of al-Qaeda can be traced back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989), a protracted conflict which pitted Soviet and Afghan forces against a popular uprising of local fighters, known as the Mujahedeen. Although the Mujahedeen's motivations were religiously inspired, their objectives were primarily local.[43] During the war the Mujahedeen received support from foreign fighters, and governments. Islamic countries like Pakistan, Egypt, and the Gulf States all sent support and fighters to the country. In addition, the United States soon started to back the Afghan resistance as well. While it can be said that the American

[39] M. Badar, M. Nagata, T. Tueni, 'The Radical Application of the Islamist Concept of *Takfir*', in *Arab Law Quarterly* 31 (2017) no. 2, p. 133.
[40] Idem pp. 133-135.
[41] Idem p. 139.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Grau L. W., Gress M. A., *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002) XXII-XXV.

involvement in the Afghan struggle was mostly driven by Cold War politics, the support from Muslim majority states can best be explained by shortly discussing pan-Islamism.[44]

Pan-Islamism is a Muslim ideology that dates back to the nineteenth century, it is derived from the idea that all Muslims constitute one people (umma), and should therefore protect each other from external threats. Pan-Islamism can be compared to the idea of (religious) nationalism; it emphasizes the defence of the Muslim world and has a tendency towards self-victimization. For decades, pan-Islamism had especially been an important feature of Saudi foreign policy and it became especially important during the 1980s. This can be attributed to the fact that the Saudi government increasingly had to deal with discontent amongst its people (e.g. Salafists). The Saudi government sought to divert these dissenting groups, and the war in Afghanistan provided an ample opportunity. Other Muslim governments throughout the Middle-East experienced similar problems, which is why they all started to promote a populist (or extreme) version of pan-Islamism.[45]

Governments across the Middle East encouraged unwanted radicals to participate in the war in Afghanistan in an effort to relieve pressures on their own regimes. The Saudi Arabians organized a special Afghan support committee that recruited volunteers amongst the ranks of various organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to join the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan. One of these figures was Osama bin-Laden, a member of a wealthy Saudi-Yemeni family, who would become a key figure in the organization of the Saudi support to the Afghan jihad. The Arab aid and the presence of many (radical) foreign fighters in Afghanistan, increasingly turned the war in Afghanistan into a jihad against the Soviet Union.[46]

During the war, Pakistan served as a gateway for foreign support to the Mujahedeen. Here, bin-Laden would co-found *Maktab al-Khidamat* (MAK, “Offices of Services”). MAK served as a recruitment agency for Arab volunteers and provided them with assistance upon arrival in Pakistan.[47] MAK contributed greatly to the radicalization of the war in Afghanistan, as its leadership produced much of the ideological backing for the jihad in Afghanistan, and

[44] B. R. Rubin, *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 77-78.
[45] T. Hegghammer, ‘Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia’ in *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 84 (2008) no.4, pp. 703-704.
[46] Rubin, ‘Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror’ p. 81.
[47] R. K. Cragin, ‘Early History of Al-Qaida’, in *The Historical Journal,* 51 (2008) no. 4, pp. 1047.

subsequently elsewhere in the world. Abdullah Azzam (the other co-founder of MAK) published a religious article in which he differentiated between the offensive or defensive jihad. Although at the time his writings supported the idea of the defensive jihad in Afghanistan, his work would later be used to justify attacks against the West. Azzam also stressed the fact that that support of the jihad was not just a personal responsibility, but a duty for the whole Muslim community.[48] High ranking members of MAK would eventually come to constitute the core of al-Qaeda.[49]

At first the so-called Afghan-Arabs took part in the various groups of Afghan Mujahedeen, but towards the end of the war they increasingly started to form their own groups. This can be attributed to the fact that they grew increasingly dissatisfied with the infighting among the Afghan Mujahedeen, but also to the fact that they sought to expand the jihad beyond Afghanistan. In the latter half of the 1980s, the Arab fighters residing in the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan started to create their own groups, and training camps.[50] Between 1986 and 1987, Osama bin-Laden would establish one of these camps, known as the Lion's Den. It sought to exclusively recruit Saudi mujahedeen and was constructed in close proximity of a Soviet base. There, bin-Laden and his followers fought a vicious battle against the Soviets, it can be argued that this battle gained bin-Laden the respect that he later used to create his own group.[51]

3.4. From Mujahedeen to Al-Qaeda

Although disputed, it is often assumed that al-Qaeda was somewhat formally founded on 18 August, 1988 during a three-day meeting in bin-Laden's Peshawar house.[52] Minutes of this meeting were found at a Bosnian Muslim charity in 2002. the time of its founding the group was mainly focused on the politics of the jihadist movement within Pakistan and Afghanistan, thus it was not created with the sole aim of waging a global jihad.[53] However, a series of events would soon change this attitude.

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[48] R. K. Cragin, 'Early History of Al-Qaida', pp. 1051-1052.
[49] Idem p. 1047.
[50] Rubin, 'Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror', pp. 87-88.
[51] P. Bergen, P. Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda: An Updated Account of its Formative Years', in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35 (2012) no. 1, pp. 5-6.
[52] Idem pp. 1-3.
[53] P. Bergen, P. Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda', pp. 4-5.

Besides growing dissatisfied with the infighting among the Afghan Mujahedeen, rifts started to emerge between leading figures of the Afghan-Arabs. For example, between bin-Laden and Azzam, about the definition of jihad and whether or not to expand the jihad beyond Afghanistan.[54] Even before al-Qaeda had been established, these discussions had emerged. Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian who had previously been the leader of the insurgency group Islamic Jihad in Egypt, was important with regards to these discussions. Al-Zawahiri had already been imprisoned and tortured in Egyptian jails before making his way to Afghanistan, which likely influenced his notion of jihad. Rather than defending Muslim lands from foreign invaders, al-Zawahiri emphasized the need to overthrow the apostate governments of Arab countries. In Afghanistan, al-Zawahiri and bin-Laden reportedly also grew closer.[55]

The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in February 1989, accelerated discussions about the need to export the Afghan jihad to other places in need. Bolstered by the fact that they had brought down a superpower, some of the Afghan-Arabs were looking to expand the jihad. Bin-Laden wanted to fight in Yemen, which was at the time governed by communists. To this end bin-Laden travelled to Saudi-Arabia in 1989, while one of his confidants was sent to Sudan to discuss the possibility of setting up a base there.[56] Up until then, it looked like al-Qaeda was hoping to expand its Afghan jihad to other Muslim countries who in their vision also needed liberation. The United States, or the West in general, had largely been absent in discussions among the jihadists. The invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, would change this discussion.[57]

When Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990, Saudi Arabia called the United States for help. As a result, thousands of US soldiers were stationed on the Arabian Peninsula. Although the American troops were stationed in Islam's holy land to protect it from Iraqi attacks, many, including bin-Laden, viewed their presence as an invasion.[58] Attention thus gradually started to shift to the United States, yet for a while bin-Laden stayed focused on other fights. Attention was again drawn to the United States when the Americans started to

[54] R. K. Cragin, 'Early History of Al-Qaida', pp. 1053-1056.
[55] Idem pp. 1053-54.
[56] Idem pp. 1056-1057.
[57] Idem pp. 1057-1058.
[58] Idem p. 1058.

express their concerns about the security situation in Somalia.[59] To bin-Laden this signaled that the Americans were again getting ready to intervene in Muslim lands. Soon al-Qaeda started to train and fund Somali fighters in anticipation of the American intervention. Bin-Laden hoped that an American defeat in Somalia would lead them to completely withdraw from the Muslim world. [60]

3.5. The Road to 9/11

After its founding in 1988, Osama bin-Laden and other high-ranking al-Qaeda members travelled around the Middle-East in search for a new base and a new cause. From 1992-1996 bin-Laden is said to have resided in Sudan, where he began to implement a new vision of al-Qaeda. While in the previous period much of al-Qaeda's activities had still focused on the fight in Afghanistan and the training of other jihadists groups, in Sudan the organization began to emphasize the need to spread its operations, influence and expertise to different jihadist fronts across the world. In addition, as previously described, al-Qaeda began to think about targeting the United States.[61]

In an effort to fight the Americans, al-Qaeda sent fighters to Somalia since US forces had been active in this country as part of the United Nations mission to stabilize the country, which had been embroiled in a civil war. However, they seem to have been largely ineffective, as they failed to set up a safe base and forge allegiances with local groups like they had enjoyed in Afghanistan.[62] Still, al-Qaeda took great credit over the withdrawal of US forces from Somalia in 1994. Moreover, in 1993 the first al-Qaeda-linked terrorist attack against the United States was carried out, when a truck bomb exploded in the basement of the World Trade Centre in New York. Although the explosion failed to bring about the collapse of the World Trade Centre, six people died and about a thousand people were injured.[63] No direct involvement of al-Qaeda's leadership has been established, but the terrorists who carried out the attack had trained with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.[64]

[59] R. K. Cragin, 'Early History of Al-Qaida', pp. 1059-1060
[60] Ibid.
[61] P. Bergen, P. Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda', pp. 18-19.
[62] Idem pp. 19-20.
[63] Federal Bureau of Investigation, 'First Strike: Global Terror in America', by FBI, retrieved June 23, 2017 from: https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/news/stories/2008/february/tradebom_022608.
[64] P. Bergen, P. Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda', pp. 21-23.

In 1993 al-Qaeda began to plan its own attacks against US targets, it would take five years before they were being executed but this time the al-Qaeda leadership was heavily involved.[65] Before the U.S. embassies in Kenia and Tanzania were attacked, Osama bin-Laden increased his criticism of the Saudi government for backing the communist forces in Yemen. The Saudi government responded by revoking his passport and by forcing his (wealthy) family to disown him. Moreover, the Saudi government led the international discussion that pressured the Sudanese government into expelling bin-Laden and his followers from the country. When bin-Laden declared a jihad against the 'Judeo-Christian alliance' (the U.S. and Israel) in 1996, he and his organization had returned to Afghanistan[66].

In Afghanistan, al-Qaeda enjoyed the protection of the Taliban, who had come to power in the wake of the civil-war that had followed after the Soviet withdrawal from the country.[67] There, bin-Laden was joined by his soon-to-be second in command, Ayam al-Zawahiri. Zawahiri had not been part of al-Qaeda since its formation in 1988, but had instead returned to Egypt to resume his fight against the Egyptian government. However, this fight proved to be increasingly difficult and his organization almost ceased to exist. When he too returned to Afghanistan Zawahiri pledged his allegiance to bin-Laden.[68] With its leadership safe in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda carried out the attacks on the U.S. embassies in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi, killing 257 people.[69] The US quickly retaliated against al-Qaeda by firing a number of Tomahawk cruise missiles against what was presumed to be a gathering of senior jihadists in Afghanistan hosted by bin-Laden. Although the missiles caused massive destruction, al-Qaeda was quick to announce that bin-Laden had been unhurt and safe.[70]

3.6. 9/11 and the Globalization of Jihad

After the 1998 embassy bombings, al-Qaeda had positioned itself as a transnational terrorist organization and it had gained the attention of other jihadist groups but also from US intelligence agencies. In 1999, a year after the successful embassy bombings, bin-Laden and

[65] P. Bergen, P. Cruickshank, 'Revisiting the Early Al Qaeda', pp. 21-23.
[66] R. K. Cragin, 'Early History of Al-Qaida', p. 1064
[67] F. A. Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 56-63.
[68] Idem pp. 64-65.
[69] R. K. Cragin, 'Early History of Al-Qaida', pp. 1064-1065.
[70] S. G. Jones, *Hunting in the Shadows: the Pursuit of al-Qaeda since 9/11* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012) p. 48; F. A. Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda,* pp. 67-68.

his aides started to plot the 9/11 attacks. By killing dozens of Americans in their homeland they hoped to force the United States into completely withdrawing their troops from the Muslim lands. Little did they know that in the aftermath of the attacks the United States would only become more present in the region.[71]

After months of careful planning, on 11 September, 2001 19 hijackers took control of four U.S. commercial flights. Two of these flights crashed into the World Trade Centre in New York City, one of the planes crashed into the Pentagon in Washington D.C. and a fourth one crashed just outside of Shanksville, Pennsylvania. In total, 2977 people were killed in the single most destructive attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbour.[72] With this attack al-Qaeda once more hoped to force an American 'withdrawal' from Muslim countries, and though they expected a retaliation attack they did not expect the United States to invade Afghanistan.[73] This proved to be a serious miscalculation as the United States was quick to announce 'Operation Enduring Freedom', which sought to topple the Taliban regime, destroy al-Qaeda, and bring peace and development to Afghanistan in order to ensure that the country would no longer be a safe haven for terrorists.[74]

Within weeks the Taliban and al-Qaeda had been defeated, and most of their fighters and leadership either fled the country or went into hiding. Senior Taliban and al-Qaeda members took refuge in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the largely ungoverned and mountainous border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.[75] From their hideouts in this region, al-Qaeda entered a new phase, in which they increasingly formed alliances with local groups or established local affiliates. It can thus be said that the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan has aided the globalization of the al-Qaeda brand. Terrorist organizations throughout the world pledged their allegiance to al-Qaeda and bin-Laden, or merged with one of al-Qaeda's local branches.[76]

Al-Qaeda especially started to expand after 2003. This can be attributed to the fact that the U.S. had to redirect part of its military and intelligence assets to Iraq, following the 2003 invasion of the country. As a result, the al-Qaeda leadership in hiding was given some

[71] F. A. Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda,* pp. 84-86.
[72] CNN, 'September 11, 2001: Background and timeline of the attacks' (Septmber 8, 2016) Retrieved June 27, 2017 from: http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/27/us/september-11-anniversary-fast-facts/index.html.
[73] F. A. Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of al-Qaeda,* pp. 84-85, 90.
[74] A. Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I.B. Touris & Co Ltd, 2012) p. 234
[75] Idem p. 235.
[76] B. Mendelsohn, 'Al-Qaeda's Franchising Strategy', in *Survival* 53 (2011) no. 3, pp. 29-30.

breathing space. Moreover, the Iraq invasion provided fresh material for al-Qaeda's propaganda.[77] Al-Qaeda Central[78] established a number of official affiliates: Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM, operating in Northern Africa) Al Shebaab (active in Somalia and Yemen) and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP, Saudi Arabia and Yemen) in addition to a number of smaller, more loosely associated groups. In 2004 al-Qaeda would also establish an affiliate in Iraq, which would eventually turn into the Islamic State.[79]

3.7. The Islamic State's Iraqi Origins

The founding of the group that would become known as the IS can be traced back to the Jordanian jihadist Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. In 1999 Zarqawi made his way to Afghanistan, where he set up a military training camp to train a jihadist group of his own. While he had been in contact with Osama bin-Laden's al-Qaeda, the two organizations did not develop close relations at that time. Rather, it would already become apparent that the two groups aspired to different goals. While al-Qaeda was aiming to overturn the global establishment by military force, Zarqawi is said to have spent considerable time and effort into building a complete social structure and governing bodies.[80]

In Afghanistan, Zarqawi managed to establish a large following, mainly consisting of exiled Islamists from Jordan, Palestine and Syria. In 2001, when the country was invaded by the US-led coalition, Zarqawi and his men left Afghanistan. Zarqawi eventually settled down in Northern Iraq where he began to establish a network of smuggling routes, safe houses, and weapons caches in anticipation of the American invasion of the country in 2003. By that time, Zarqawi's group, by then known as al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, had established a large following, mainly consisting of foreign fighters. Moreover, the network of smuggling routes and safe houses would allow the organization to carry out a carefully planned insurgency against the US-led coalition.[81]

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[77] B. Mendelsohn, 'Al-Qaeda's Franchising Strategy', pp. 32-33.
[78] The original group under the leadership of bin-Laden and later al-Zawahiri who remained in the tribal areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
[79] D. Byman, 'Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations', in *Security Studies* 23 (2014) no. 3, p. 435.
[80] B. Price, D. Milton, M. al-Ubaydi, N. Lahoud, *The Group that Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State*, (West Point: Combatting Terrorism Center, 2014) pp. 9-11.
[81] M.J. Kirdar, 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq', in *Aqam Futures Project Case Study Series (Center for Strategic & International Studies),* (2011) no. 1, pp. 3-4.

After Saddam Hussein's forces had been defeated by the coalition forces, the disgruntled Sunni population of Iraq launched an insurgency. Out of the five distinct organizations that took part in the insurgency, Zarqawi's group was the one that mostly consisted of foreign fighters. In addition, many former members of the Iraqi military, who had been disbanded by the US-led coalition after they had been defeated, had joined his organization.[82] The strategy focused on alienating U.S. coalition forces, deterring Iraqi cooperation by targeting, for example, the police and by disrupting the rebuilding process by targeting humanitarian aid workers. In addition, his group targeted Iraqi Shiites, hoping that retaliatory responses against the Sunni population would trigger sectarian conflict.[83] Moreover, Zarqawi was already floating the idea of establishing an Islamic state in the region.[84] Zarqawi's group would gain prominence during the Iraqi insurgency, especially because of his ruthless use of suicide bombings, and the online publishing of videos of their attacks.[85]

As a result of al-Tawhid wal-Jihad's success, al-Qaeda became interested in the group and the two organizations formalized their relationship in October 2004 when Zarqawi announced his allegiance to bin-Laden and renamed his group to Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad Bilad al-Ra-dayn, or al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). It can be argued that al-Qaeda's central leadership, hiding in the tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, was attracted to the group since it provided them with an opportunity to rise to prominence again after they had kept a low profile for a while. For Zarqawi, the alliance with al-Qaeda provided him with prestige as well as access to fresh recruits and funds.[86] It should, however, be noted that this alliance was far from being a convenient one, as al-Qaeda's central leadership was already wary of Zarqawi's use of suicide bombings, and the targeting of the Shia population. They feared that such attacks would diminish the popular support of the Iraqi insurgency, in part because of the collateral deaths of civilians (including Sunni's). In addition, they feared that the excessive attacks on Shiites would lead to retaliatory actions of Iran, which at the time held a lot of al-Qaeda fighters in prison.[87]

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[82] A. S. Hashim, 'The Islamic State: from Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate', p. 68.
[83] M.J. Kirdar, 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq', p. 4.
[84] A. S. Hashim, 'The Islamic State: from Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate', p. 68.
[85] Idem pp. 68-69.
[86] Idem p. 71.
[87] B.Price, D. Milton, M. al-Ubaydi, N. Lahoud, *The Group that Calls Itself a State,* p. 13.

Indeed, the violent tactics and indiscriminate attacks had already alienated large parts of the (Sunni) Iraqi population when Zarqawi was killed in a U.S. airstrike on 7 June, 2006. In the summer of 2006, Sunni tribesmen began a covert campaign to kill AQI members, in a campaign that became known as the Awakening Movement. In conjunction with the Awakening Movement the US deployed more troops (2007) to supress AQI's insurgency, and eventually they were even paying many of the Sunni tribesmen who were fighting AQI. As a result of these combined efforts AQI ranks were shrinking, while at the same time the flow of foreign fighters joining its ranks dried up.[88]

In an effort to regain popular support AQI changed its leadership and name in the fall of 2006 to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). However, counterterrorism forces kept pursuing the organization and in April 2010 the leadership was killed in a counterterrorism operation. From then on the organization was headed by its current leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who inherited an organization that can be said to have been in disarray.[89] Still, within four years the organization would again become an existential threat to Iraq and the wider region. To resurrect the organization al-Baghdadi initiated two carefully planned campaigns, known as the 'breaking the walls' and the 'soldiers harvest' campaigns. The civil war in Syria also provided an opportunity for the organization to increase its strength.[90]

3.8. From the Islamic State of Iraq to the Worldwide Caliphate

On 21 July, 2012, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the start of the breaking the walls campaign, an operation that was aimed at freeing fellow militants from prisons. At the same time the campaign involved a series of sustained vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attacks aimed at the Iraqi security forces and the Shia population of Iraq. During the campaign eight prisons were attacked. Although not all attacks were successful ISI managed to free several hundred militants over the course of a year.[91] The prison breaks did not only

[88] M.J. Kirdar, 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq', p. 5.
[89] Ibid.
[90] J. D. Lewis 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: the Breaking the Walls Campaign, Part 1', in *Middle Eastern Security Report* (2013) no. 14, pp. 7-10.
[91] Idem pp. 7, 12-20.

succeed in freeing AQI members, they also helped spread the idea that the Iraqi security forces were incompetent.[92]

The campaign concluded on 21 July, 2013 and was soon to be followed by the soldiers harvest campaign. During this campaign ISI specifically targeted the Iraqi security forces, in an effort to instil fear and nervousness in them. It consisted of targeted killings of both on and off-duty security force members, the demolition of their homes, and attacks on checkpoints. These attacks also served to further diminish the public's confidence in the security forces. Arguably ISI also hoped that the Iraqi security forces, which are predominantly Shia, would retaliate against the Sunni population, thereby further increasing sectarian tensions in the country.[93]

Indeed, as a result of these actions the Iraqi government (dominated by Shiites) was forced to respond with force and ISI managed to capitalize on such actions by reinforcing sectarian tensions. While in previous years Iraq's Sunni tribes had fought against ISI's precursors, they now willingly joined its ranks.[94] The civil war in Syria would provide another opportunity for ISI to increase its fighting capabilities. In 2012, ISI expanded its activities to Syria by setting up training camps and by establishing a Syrian chapter, Jahbat al-Nusra.[95] Moreover, ISI was successful in recruiting among the thousands of foreign fighters that made their way to Syria to participate in the war against Assad. When ISI launched its surprise offensive in Iraq, which culminated in the attack and capture of Mosul on 6 June, 2014, it was in large part carried out by forces it had trained in Syria.[96] After its June offensive, ISI controlled large parts and cities in Syria and Iraq. From this position, it announced the restoration of the Caliphate and rebranded its name to the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was pronounced to be the Caliph Ibrahim.[97]

Soon after the Caliphate had been established, the Islamic State's leadership urged Muslims throughout the world to pledge allegiance to the new Caliph, a custom known

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[92] Idem pp. 20-21.
[93] M. Knights, 'ISIL's Political-Military Power in Iraq', in *CTC Sentinel,* 7 (2014) no. 8, p. 2.
[94] A. N. Celso, 'Zarqawi's Legacy: Al-Qaeda's ISIS "Renegade"', in *Mediterranean Quarterly* 26 (2015) no. 2, p. 27.
[95] Jahbat al-Nusra will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, which covers the split between al-Qaeda and ISI.
[96] M. Knights, 'ISIL's Political-Military Power in Iraq', p. 2.
[97] SITE Institute, 'ISIS Spokesman Declares Caliphate, Rebrands Group as "Islamic State"', (June 29, 2014) retrieved June 27, 2017 from: https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/isis-spokesman-declares-caliphate-rebrands-group-as-islamic-state.html.

as bay'a. Such a pledge not only acknowledges the new Caliph to be the rightful leader of the Muslim world, it also places the individual or group making the pledge under the Caliph's direct command. If these groups control any territories these will become official provinces (wilayats) of the Islamic State. Although the practice is highly contested throughout the Muslim world, a large number of individuals, scholars, and militant groups have made their pledge.[98] However, all pledges have to be officially accepted by the caliph, thus the IS can be selective in accepting the offers of bay'a.[99] Groups like Nigeria's Boko Haram, Afghanistan's al-Tawheed Brigade in Khorasan, and the Philippines' Jemaah Islamiyah, have all pledged their allegiance. Arguably the IS's network stretches from Western Africa, through Eastern Africa, the Middle-East, South/Southeast Asia all the way to the remote islands of the Philippines.[100]

3.9. The Split Between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State

After an inconvenient marriage of nearly ten years, al-Qaeda Central finally broke ties with the IS in February 2014. However, the timing of the split seems a bit strange, as it occurred at a time when Baghdadi's group was becoming increasingly powerful in both Syria and Iraq. To understand why al-Zawahiri broke ties with the Islamic State, and even encouraged resistance against them, this next section will review some of the strategic differences between the two organizations. In addition, the disagreement over the status of Jahbat al-Nusra, which can be said to be the direct reason behind their 2014 dispute, will be discussed.

Arguably, the main difference between al-Qaeda and the IS, is the way they perceive the Middle East as a theatre for operations. Although both organizations preach global jihad and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate, al-Qaeda seems to have concluded that the Middle East requires a different set of operational codes. Al-Qaeda appears to acknowledge that indiscriminate attacks on the civil population might harm their cause, as the establishment of a Caliphate requires winning the hearts and minds of the (local) population.[101] For example, al-Qaeda's central leadership was already critical of Zarqawi's

[98] J. Wagemakers, 'The Concept of Bay'a in the Islamic State's Ideology', in *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9 (2015) no. 4, p. 98.
[99] D. Milton, M. al-'Ubaydi, 'Pledging Bay`a', pp. 2-5.
[100] Idem pp. 1-4; CTC Sentinel, 'CTC's interactive Islamic State Bay`a Timeline' (no date). Retrieved June 27 from: https://ctc.usma.edu/isil-resources.
[101] J. Turner, 'Strategic differences: Al Qaeda's Split with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham', in *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26 (2015) no. 2, pp. 208-209.

extreme use of violence and strict enforcement of sharia law right after his group had joined al-Qaeda in 2004. They feared that this behavior might hurt the long-term goals of the global jihadist project. Arguably, this difference stems from the fact that al-Qaeda's central leadership advocated overturning the apostate governments of the Middle East, as a way to purify Islam, while Zarqawi was more focused on purging society from the kafirs (unbelievers).[102]

While al-Qaeda's central leadership disapproved of the IS's actions and extreme use of violence, they still aspire similar goals. It should therefore be noted that al-Qaeda's decision to disavow the IS's use of extreme violence is likely a more strategic choice, instead of a show of sympathy towards the more secular Muslims. It can be argued that al-Qaeda's central leadership had taken note from past experiences, for example the previously mentioned Awakening Movement, which almost led to the demise of AQI, and the fate of Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (AIG). Before its reorganization and affiliation to al-Qaeda, the AIG had conducted a campaign of violence against civilians, intellectuals, foreigners and journalists, which had sparked condemnation from throughout the Muslim world and almost led to its downfall.[103]

Surprisingly, al-Qaeda's decision to break with the IS can also be said to be inconsistent with their long-term strategy. Before conducting the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda had already laid out a strategic plan for their global jihad. The plan includes seven phases to be executed over the course of twenty years, and culminates in the establishment of a global Caliphate. The first stage, which included the terror attacks of 9/11, was titled the 'awakening' and sought to provoke a US attack on the Muslim world. Stage 2 ('opening the eyes') and 3 ('arising and standing up') included attacks on Western forces in the Middle-East, attacks on secular Muslim states and on Israel, and sought to enable the 'downfall of the apostate Muslim regimes' (stage 4, countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan). The first four stages would then lead to the 'declaration of the Caliphate' (stage 5), followed by the 'total confrontation' (stage 6, all-out war between Muslims and non-Muslims). By 2020 al-Qaeda hoped to have reached stage 7, 'definitive victory', and the establishment of the worldwide Caliphate.[104]

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[102] A. Y. Zelin, 'The War between ISIS and al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement', in *Research Notes: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (2014) no. 20, pp. 2-3.
[103] J. Turner, 'Strategic differences', p. 209.
[104] M. Rudner, 'Al-Qaeda's Twenty-Year Strategic Plan: the Current Phase of Global Terror', in *Studies in Conflict & Terror* 36 (2013) no. 12, pp. 959-960.

In retrospect, much of this strategic plan can be said to have been more or less successful. The terror attacks on 9/11 led to the American war on terrorism and to the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which were perceived by many in the Middle East to be evidence of modern-day crusades. Additionally, for a moment the popular revolts during the Arab Spring seemed to bring down those apostate governments that had been in power for so long.[105] The civil war in Syria provided an opportunity for al-Qaeda to capitalize on these dissatisfactions and once more take control of territory in a largely ungoverned country. It can thus be argued that al-Qaeda welcomed al-Baghdadi's decision to send one of his close deputies, the Syrian jihadist Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, to the country. In Syria, al-Jawlani set up his own organization which became known as Jabhat al-Nusra.[106]

In Syria, al-Nusra would soon become one of the best organized and successful rebel groups. Moreover, the organization seemed to spend considerable attention to obtaining the support of the local population under its control, by combining military force with responsible governance and charitable operations.[107] In 2013, al-Baghdadi sought to expand his own organizations activities to Syria and even announced a merger between his organization and al-Nusra, and rebranded the organization the IS of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Both al-Jawlani and al-Zawahiri denounced al-Baghdadi's decision, as Al-Jawlani claimed that he had never been consulted about this merger. Al-Zawahiri denounced the merger on the note that al-Nusra and ISI, which he still viewed as local al-Qaeda branches, should both focus on their own respective geographic regions: Syria and Iraq.[108] Al-Baghdadi refused to listen to al-Zawahiri and rapidly expanded his operations in Syria, eventually pitting his forces against other militant groups. In the meantime, al-Zawahiri sought to reconcile ISIS and al-Nusra and to restrain al-Baghdadi. However, the killing of one of his chief mediators forced him to finally disavow al-Baghdadi and to denounce the IS.[109]

[105] M. Rudner, 'Al-Qaeda's Twenty-Year Strategic Plan', pp. 959-960.
[106] Z. K. Gulmohamad, 'The Rise and Fall of the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (Levant) ISIS', in *Global Security Studies* 5 (2014) no. 2, p. 3.
[107] Celso, 'Zarqawi's Legacy', p. 30.
[108] A. S. Hashim, 'The Islamic State: from Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate', pp. 77-78.
[109] Celso, 'Zarqawi's Legacy', pp. 33-34.

4. Analysis

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapters have shown how both al-Qaeda and the IS rose to power, why the two organizations formed an alliance with each other and why their cooperation ended and became a rivalry. The next part of this thesis will analyse this relationship by using the theories on cooperation and competition that have been discussed in the literature review. In order to structure the analysis, it will be limited to three events: al-Qaeda's decision to form an alliance with the IS's predecessor in 2004; the split in 2014; the aftermath of the split 2014-2017.

4.2. Al-Qaeda's Affiliates

In chapter 2.5 and 2.6 it has been described how al-Qaeda became the foremost jihadist organizations in the world. During the 1990s al-Qaeda provided training and (financial) support to individuals and organizations across the globe. This served bin-Laden's initial objective to spread the Afghan jihad to the rest of the Muslim world. During this period al-Qaeda provided training to other jihadist (organizations) or provided them with (financial) support. Although no formal alliances were made during this period, it can be argued that these activities laid the groundwork for what was to become al-Qaeda's worldwide network in the early 2000s.

Nonetheless, during this period some benefits that are associated with cooperation can already be observed. Especially to smaller organizations, their loose affiliation with al-Qaeda provided vital resources (financial and human) which, according to the theories of for example Philips, should have helped them to survive and hence increased their longevity.[110] Additionally, according to the theories of Horowitz and Craign, al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and Sudan furthermore facilitated the spread of al-Qaeda's

[110] B.J. Philips, 'Terrorist Cooperation and Longevity', pp. 337-338.

interpretation of Salafist Jihad ideology and the use of operational tactics.[111] According to the literature, upon their return to their home countries, individuals who trained at these camps are likely to have contributed to increasing levels of lethality of their respective terror groups.[112]

The 2001 attacks against the US further increased al-Qaeda's leadership position among the jihadist movements. However, in the aftermath of the attacks, al-Qaeda was nearly exterminated by the US-led coalition and had to retreat to the mountainous border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan.[113] Al-Qaeda's ability to survive during this period can certainly be attributed to the fact that the area in which they were hiding was hard to penetrate, but it is also evidence of strong organizational ties and commitment to the jihadist cause. Al-Qaeda's survival during this period can also be attributed to the fact that they established a number of local affiliated groups during this period, drawing from the networks that had been established during the 1990s. In chapter 2.6 it has been mentioned how a number of groups started to operate under the al-Qaeda umbrella, attacks by these groups helped the al-Qaeda brand to survive. AQC decision to form alliances can thus best be explained by the need to survive this precarious period and clearly illustrates how cooperation between terrorist groups can increase longevity.[114]

The formalization of alliances allowed al-Qaeda to continue their global jihad, even though the central leadership continued to be under pressure and in isolation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The decision to form an alliance with al-Tawhid wal-Jihad in 2004 can in part be explained by this 'survivalist' strategy as it provided another opportunity to attack Western forces.[115] However, as has been explained in chapter 2.7, the relationship between the two organizations was already characterized with disagreements even before being formalized and al-Qaeda's leadership was reluctant in supporting Zarqawi's indiscriminate insurgency. Instead, it can be argued that AQC's decision to formalize an alliance with Zarqawi was in part also driven by motivations which are typically found between competing groups. For that reason, this thesis proposes to view the alliance between

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[111] M.C. Horowitz, 'Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations', pp. 35-37, K. Craign, *Sharing the Dragons Teeth'.*
[112] See for example: V. Asal, R.K. Rethemeyer, 'The Nature of the Beast', p. 440.
[113] A. Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan,* p. 234.
[114] B.J. Philips, 'Terrorist Cooperation and Longevity', pp. 337-338.
[115] A.S. Hashim, 'The Islamic State: from al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate', p. 68.

AQC and al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (and later the IS), as a 'competitive alliance', which allows for an analysis that takes into account features from both cooperative as well as competitive relationships.

Especially with regards to AQC it can be argued that their motivations to form and maintain an alliance with al-Tawhid wal-Jihad were in part driven by characteristics that are usually associated with competition. Arguably, al-Tawhid wal-Jihad presented a threat to AQC because they both competed over a similar pool of recruits and support. In contrast to Afghanistan, where AQC was still under heavy pressure from the US-led coalition, the (urban) theatre in Iraq allowed al-Tawhid wal-Jihad to carry out its ruthless insurgency. Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad promoted its operations by producing countless propaganda videos of their actions, which they perfected by the time they rose to power as the IS. The IS would make very clever use of social media platforms to get their message across. While at the time AQC still relied on older forms of media, such as delivering videotaped messages to television stations like al-Jazeera.[116] As a result, thousands of foreign fighters were joining al-Tawhid wal-Jihad in Iraq, and AQC likely felt that they were losing their leadership position of the Salafist Jihadist movement.

In an effort to maintain its leadership position, AQC made al-Tawhid wal-Jihad an official affiliate and tolerated its ruthless bombing campaign. As has been noted, AQI would not only target coalition forces but also Shia Muslims, in an attempt to spark a sectarian conflict. AQI in addition targeted Sunni Muslims who they felt were not religious enough.[117] While AQC disapproved such actions, as they ran counter to some of their own objectives, it can be argued that the outbidding thesis too helps to explain why they nevertheless allowed them. According to Kydd and Walter the escalating violence that often characterizes outbidding are often designed to show determination and power.[118] Hence it can be argued that AQC allowed the indiscriminate suicide attacks of AQI because they demonstrated a strong commitment to the Jihadist cause, which they sought to dominate.

[116] D. Byman, J. Williams, 'ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism's Global Civil War', by *National Interest* (March-April 2015), retrieved October 10, 2017 from: http://nationalinterest.org/print/feature/isis-vs-al-qaeda-jihadism%E2%80%99s-global-civil-war-12304.
[117] Ibid.
[118] A. H. Kydd, B. F. Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', p. 77.

4.3. The Split Between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State

In chapter 2.7 it has been described why al-Qaeda broke its ties to the IS in 2014. As has been described, this decision can be said to be the result of direct events such as IS's decision to expand their operations to Syria and announce a merger with al-Nusra. However, explaining this decision through the lens of competition or, as has been proposed in the previous section, a competitive alliance, will likely shed more light on this event.

Baghdadi's decision to send al-Jawlani to Syria to establish a local al-Qaeda chapter was at first welcomed by AQC. It provided the opportunity to take control of territory and to implement their vision of Islamic governance. Arguably this sentiment was also driven by motivations that were similar to AQC's decision to make al-Tawhid wal-Jihad an official affiliate in 2004, by capitalizing on the Syrian civil war it allowed al-Qaeda to once more show that they were the best jihadist organization in the world. In Syria, al-Jawlani's al-Nusra Front would compete with other rebel groups and soon became one of the most lethal organizations operating in the country.

Al-Nusra's successes in Syria can clearly be attributed to the benefits of being affiliated with AQC and AQI as both organizations provided fighters and expertise in addition to financial support. As such the case of al-Nusra illustrates how cooperation can increase the lethality as well as endurance of a group.[119] As has been described by Horowitz and Craign, al-Nusra's actions in Syria also illustrate how cooperation can facilitate the diffusion of tactics. Given the fact that al-Nusra was an AQI affiliate, and AQI was known for its suicide bombings in Iraq, this notion helps to explain why al-Nusra adopted this tactic in Syria, even though other organizations in the country did not use the tactic.[120] Furthermore, the theory of outbidding helps to explain why these Syrian organizations adopted the use of suicide attacks after al-Nusra had carried out several of these attacks in Syria. Nemeth has for example explained how competition between groups will force them to adopt more radical and deadly tactics, in order to maintain group coherence and display determination to aspiring

[119] See for example: N. A. Bapat, K. D. Bond, 'Alliances between Militant Groups', p. 795; B. J. Phillips, 'Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity', p. 337.
[120] See for example: M. C. Horowitz, 'Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations', pp. 35-37; K. Craign, *Sharing the Dragon's Teeth: Terrorist Groups and the Exchange of New Technologies.*

recruits.[121] Furthermore Kydd and Walter's notion of terrorist outbidding further helps to explain how the Syrian civil war experienced escalating levels of violence even before the IS made its way in to the country.[122]

When Baghdadi announced his decision that his organization would move its operations into Syria and would merge with al-Nusra front, both the latter organization and AQC were surprised and dissatisfied.[123] Baghdadi's decision clearly exposed the limits to terrorist cooperation. To some degree the decision displayed what Bapat and Bond have called the commitment problem, which is caused by a lack of transparency and therefore credibility.[124] In the case of the IS, AQC and al-Nusra front it can be argued that the commitment problem reinforced the problems associated with the security-autonomy trade-off.[125] As a result of these factors, Baghdadi's decision was ill-perceived by the other organizations and caused the alliance to crumble.

While the limits of cooperation help explain why Baghdadi's decision led to the split between AQC and IS, it can also be argued that the announcement brought to light the slumbering competition between AQC and IS (AQI, al-Tawhid wal-Jihad). Such an explanation echoes Philips' notion of terrorist cooperation, as he argued that cooperation can lead to dependence or competition.[126] Moreover, it reinforces the suggestion that the alliance between AQC and the IS can be viewed as a 'competitive alliance'. In 2004, AQC struck an alliance with the IS's predecessor in fear of losing its leadership position among the jihadist movements. In 2014, it can be argued that they ended the relationship because they could no longer control their ally, and once more feared losing their leadership position over the global jihad as the IS rapidly expanded in both Syria and Iraq. This would also explain why AQC went to great lengths to denounce and discredit the organization.[127]

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[121] S. Nemeth, 'The Effect of Competition on Terrorist Groups', p. 337. The claim that al-Nusra introduced the use of suicide attacks in the Syrian war is based on information by START's Global Terrorism Database: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?expanded=yes&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=&start_yearonly=2011&end_yearonly=2016&dtp2=all&sAttack=1&success=yes&country=200®ion=10&weapon=6&ob=GTDID&od=desc&page=3&count=100#results-table. Note: the first two suicide attacks are suspected to be carried out by AQI, likely by the network that would turn in to al-Nusra.

[122] A.H. Kydd, B.F. Walter, 'The Strategies of Terrorism', p. 77.

[123] D. Byman, J. Williams, 'ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism's Global Civil War', p. 3.

[124] N.A. Bapat, K.D. Bond, 'Alliances between Militant Groups', p. 794.

[125] T. Bacon, 'Alliance Hubs', pp. 7-8.

[126] Philips, 'Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity', p. 337.

[127] T. R. Hamming, 'The Al Qaeda–Islamic State Rivalry: Competition Yes, but No Competitive Escalation', in *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2017) pp. 7-9.

4.4. The Aftermath of the Split: Competition between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State

In the period after the IS's proclamation of the Caliphate and AQC's decision to disavow the organization, the competition between the two organizations has become visible in the following fields: as a challenge to each other's authority and as a challenge to each other's territorial control. The remainder of this thesis will discuss some noteworthy events which shed light on these aspects of the competition between AQC and the IS.

When it comes to challenging each other's authority, the IS's decision to proclaim a Caliphate in Syria and Iraq and to promote its leader al-Baghdadi to the rank of Caliph has been the greatest challenge to al-Qaeda's leadership position of the global jihad. With this decision, the IS not only claimed great prestige but it also claimed religious authority, and encouraged other groups and individuals to make a pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi. Therefore, the IS put a lot of effort into promoting Baghdadi as the rightful Caliph. For example, they circulated a reconstruction of the genealogy of his tribe, which traced his lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad's direct descendants.[128]

On the other hand, while al-Qaeda had taken pledges from a number of groups and individuals before, including Zarqawi, it never explicitly claimed a leadership role or religious authority. In fact, bin-Laden had made a pledge of allegiance to Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban and the Emir of Afghanistan, during the 1990s. This pledge of allegiance was reaffirmed by al-Zawahiri during the summer of 2014.[129] Besides repeating its allegiance to Mullah Omar, Zawahiri also challenged Baghdadi's legitimacy as Caliph by declaring that the newly established al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent would too work under the leadership of Mullah Omar, who he called "the commander of the faithful".[130]

While al-Qaeda sought to reaffirm its leadership role over the global jihad, by pointing to past successes and past allegiances, or by referring to Mullah Omar as the only

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[128] W. McCants, 'The Believer: How an introvert with a passion for religion and soccer became Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi leader of the Islamic State', by *The Brookings Essay* (September 1, 2015), retrieved November 27, 2017 from: http://csweb.brookings.edu/content/research/essays/2015/thebeliever.html.

[129] J.M. Berger, 'The Islamic State vs. al Qaeda: Who's winning the war to become the jihadi superpower?', by *Foreign Policy* (September 2, 2014), retrieved: November 27, 2017 from: http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/02/the-islamic-state-vs-al-qaeda/.

[130] E. Karmon, 'Islamic State and al-Qaeda Competing for Hearts & Minds', in *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9 (2015) no. 2, p. 71.

true religious authority, the IS nevertheless received a number of pledges of allegiance. As a result of these pledges, the IS expanded its network beyond its core in Syria and Iraq and even received pledges from groups which before had been (loosely) affiliated with AQC. As splinter factions of AQIM, AQAP and al-Qaeda groups in Afghanistan have made pledges to al-Baghdadi, the IS threatens al-Qaeda's presence in vital areas.[131] Even though the theory of outbidding predominantly explains increasing levels of violence when terrorist groups compete, it can be argued that the theory can also be applied to al-Qaeda's and the IS's efforts to assert their dominance over the global jihadist movement as both groups sought to outdo each other.

In Syria, al-Nusra has also tried to win over public support by presenting itself as less extreme than the IS. It has put great emphasis on charitable events such as the collection of the zakat (charitable donations as required by Islamic law) and its distribution to the needy, the organization and hosting of communal events, such as competitions, iftar meals, group prayers and celebrations during the Ramadan.[132] As part of this charm offensive, al-Nusra publicly announced its dis-affiliation with al-Qaeda, if in name only, a move that was coordinated and welcomed by AQC. Subsequently, Al-Nusra changed its name to Jabhat Fath al-Sham and sought rapprochement to other rebel groups in Syria.[133] As Bacon has argued, being affiliated with other terrorist groups can increase pressure from counterterrorism forces, it's therefore also possible that al-Nusra's disengagement from al-Qaeda was intended to relieve this pressure.[134]

Besides this war of words, al-Qaeda (through its local affiliate al-Nusra) and the IS have also clashed with each other in Syria. Especially in the oil-rich province of Deir Ezzor, the IS and al-Nusra have fought each other, forcing the latter group to retreat to other parts of Syria. While the IS was ruthlessly expanding, not only attacking al-Nusra and government forces, but also moderate and Islamist rebels, al-Nusra has been able to enlist the support of a number of other rebel groups in Syria. It needs no explanation that these clashes are clear

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[131] J.M. Berger, 'The Islamic State vs. al Qaeda', pp. 3-4; A. Y. Zelin, 'The War between ISIS and al-Qaeda', p. 6.
[132] C. Anzalone, 'The Multiple Faces of Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fath al-Sham in Syria's Civil War', in *Insight Turkey* 18 (2016) no. 2, pp. 43-45.
[133] Idem pp. 49–50.
[134] T. Bacon, 'Alliance Hubs', pp. 7-8.

examples of the competition between al-Qaeda and the IS.[135] Moreover, shortly after their falling out, members from both al-Nusra and other al-Qaeda affiliates defected to the IS or the other way around.[136] According to Staniland's theory, the case of al-Qaeda and the IS thus clearly shows signs of fratricide as the groups not only competed with each other in a war of words but also on the ground over members, territory and resources.[137]

Still, even though Staniland predicts that this can have a negative impact on organizations, and lead to their demise, this theory arguably does not (completely) apply to al-Nusra and the IS. While the two organizations have been fighting throughout much of 2014, fighting largely ceased when the two had consolidated their (new) territories. While this could be part of a 'live and let live' strategy adopted by both groups, it's more likely that this is due to increased pressure from third parties. After September 2014, the IS started to face difficulties as the Obama administration created an international coalition to fight the organization.[138] Soon, airstrikes would hit the IS at a daily basis, hampering its expansion and eventually reversing much of its territorial gains. On the other hand, al-Nusra, or Jabhat Fath al-Sham, again changed its name in the summer of 2017 after having merged with other rebel groups. The newly established Hayat Tahrir al-Sham again sought to distance itself from al-Qaeda in order to (re)gain popular support. Still al-Qaeda and al-Nusra elements remain active in the group and while they have been able to maintain a stable presence in Syria's north-western regions, pressure might soon amount as Assad's forces are freed up after defeating the IS.[139]

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[135] The Economist, 'Two Arab Coutnries Fall Apart', *The Economist* (June 12, 2014) retrieved November 27, 2017 from: https://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21604230-extreme-islamist-group-seeks-create-caliphate-and-spread-jihad-across.

[136] G. Miller, 'Fighters abandoning al-Qaeda affiliates to join Islamic State, U.S. officials say', *The Washington Post* (August 9, 2014) retrieved November 29, 2017 from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/fighters-abandoning-al-qaeda-affiliates-to-join-islamic-state-us-officials-say/2014/08/09/c5321d10-1f08-11e4-ae54-0cfe1f974f8a_story.html?utm_term=.5ff268ce3f9b.

[137] P. Staniland, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place', pp. 20-23.

[138] H. Cooper, 'Obama Enlists 9 Allies to Help in the Battle Against ISIS', *The New York Times* (September 5, 2014) retrieved November 30, 2017 from: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/06/world/middleeast/us-and-allies-form-coalition-against-isis.html.

[139] BBC Monitoring, 'Tahrir al-Sham: Al-Qaeda's latest incarnation in Syria', *BBC* (February 28, 2017) retrieved November 30, 2017 from: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38934206.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explain why al-Qaeda ended its alliance with the IS in 2014, at a time when the latter organization was becoming increasingly more powerful. While a narrative of this split has been constructed through statements and actions from both organizations, such an explanation is naturally politicized. Instead, this work has sought to explain al-Qaeda's and the IS's break up through the lens of terrorist cooperation and competition. Theories about these types of relationships have described why terrorist organizations engage in these kinds of affairs and what the benefits and risk of them are.

This work has described how al-Qaeda established itself as the central jihadist organization throughout the 1990s, but was nearly exterminated after its attacks against the US in 2001. Forced into hiding al-Qaeda started to formalize alliances and established affiliated groups. It has been argued how al-Qaeda established these relationships in an effort to maintain momentum and keep its leadership position over the global jihad. Hence, it has been noted that al-Qaeda employed cooperation as a strategy of survival during this period. However, when al-Qaeda formed an alliance with al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, the IS's predecessor, it has been argued that other motivations too played a role.

In 2004, when the insurgency against the US-led coalition in Iraq started to gain momentum, al-Tawhid wal-Jihad was fast becoming the most feared organization in the country. Apart from motivations that are associated with cooperation, this thesis has argued that al-Qaeda's decision to make this organization an affiliate was also driven by motivations that are typically found with competition between groups. As it has been argued that al-Qaeda felt they were losing their leadership position to al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. Hence, this thesis has proposed to view this relationship through the lens of a competitive alliance, which draws characteristics from both cooperation and competition between groups. Apart from explaining why al-Qaeda decided to turn al-Tawhid wal-Jihad into an affiliate, even though they already disagreed on major ideological points and methods of operation, the notion of a competitive alliance also helps to explain why the two groups broke off ties in 2014.

In 2014, the IS was not only becoming more powerful, at a time when the leadership of al-Qaeda still was in hiding, the IS also started to ignore commands from al-Qaeda's leadership. The IS declared an unannounced merger with Jahbat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's

(or AQI's) affiliate in Syria. Both AQC and al-Nusra refuted this move and the IS was told to confine its actions to Iraq. After mediation in this conflict failed, since the IS refused to give in to AQC leadership, al-Qaeda was forced to break of ties with the IS and denounce the organization. This incident clearly illustrated the limits to terrorist cooperation, as has been described by Bapat, Bond and Bacon. The conflict between al-Qaeda and the IS thereafter showed clear signs of terrorist outbidding as have been described by Nemeth, Kydd and Walter. In a war of words both organizations sought to promote themselves as the foremost jihadist organization. On the ground in Syria, the clashes between al-Nusra and the IS, and attacks on other rebel groups, led to escalating levels of violence in Syria's civil war.

The thesis has found that even though Staniland's theory about fratricide would predict that the competition between the two organizations could severely damage them, this notion fails to completely address the situation. Major clashes between al-Nusra and the IS ended in 2014, after which the former organization consolidated itself in regions that were separated from the IS's territories. At the same time, the IS was increasingly being pushed back as a result of an international coalition fighting them. The IS's loses can therefore better be attribute to this third-party intervention, instead of being ascribed to fratricide.

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