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TRACING STATEHOOD: SALAFI-JIHADISM AND THE CREATION OF AN ISLAMIC STATE

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Abstract: English

The period since the Arab Uprisings has witnessed a proliferation of Salafi-Jihadist state building attempts, most notably by the Islamic State group. This article analyses the concept of the Islamic state within Salafi-Jihadist ideology through the lens of both political sciences and religious studies. The article argues that a dialectic between practice and ideology results in the constant transformation of the Islamic state-ideal. This implies that the Islamic State group is not a new type of movement, compared to the more global al-Qaida of the late nineties and early 2000's. Nor that the Islamic State holds markedly different views on what the Islamic state should look like. Rather, both groups are part of a larger evolution of Salafi-Jihadism, influenced by global and local events. This constant dialectic is traced through time from the earliest roots of the Islamist and Salafi-Jihadist movements in the late nineteenth century, through the influence of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1956) and towards the inception of al-Qaida and its later offshoots. Special attention is given to the significant importance of Iraq as an incubator for various state building attempts. These Islamic states are explored through Tilly's thesis of violence as state building: highlighting the role of power and control. However, recent evolutions in Iraq indicate that local consensus and the population's consent might be equally important factors for the establishment of a state.

Abstract: Nederlands

Sinds de Arabische Opstanden van 2011 poogden Salafi-Jihadisten meermaals aan staatsvorming te doen, het bekendste voorbeeld daarvan is de Islamitische Staat groepering in Syrië en Irak. Dit artikel onderzoekt het concept 'Islamitische staat' binnen Salafi-Jihadistisch gedachtegoed door een dubbele lens van politieke en religieuze studies. Doorheen het artikel wordt duidelijk dat er sprake is van een dialectische relatie tussen praktijk en ideologie, dewelke resulteert in een constante transformatie van het Islamitische staatsideaal. Dit houdt in dat de Islamitische Staat groepering niet gezien kan worden als een nieuwe of unieke beweging in vergelijking met haar meer globale voorloper al-Qaida in de vroege jaren 2000, noch dat de Islamitische Staat er een radicaal verschillende ideologie op na houdt. Eerder, beide groepen maken deel uit van de lange evolutie van Salafi-Jihadisme, en zijn beiden onderhevig aan de invloed van globale en lokale gebeurtenissen. Deze constante dialectische relatie wordt in dit artikel teruggevoerd tot aan de vroege negentiende eeuw, naar de grondleggers van het Islamisme en Salafi-Jihadisme. Van daaruit volgt het artikel de invloed van Sayyid Qutb (1906-1956), en de oprichting van al-Qaida tot aan de oprichting van de Islamitische Staat alsook Jabhat al-Nuṣra. Daarbij wordt vooral gekeken naar Irak, aangezien dit land verschillende pogingen tot Salafi-Jihadistische Islamitische staatsvorming heeft meegemaakt. Deze staatsvormingspogingen worden onderzocht aan de hand van een theorie van Charles Tilly dat geweld en staatsvorming hand in hand gaan: macht en controle zijn cruciaal binnen dit denkkader. Echter, het artikel concludeert dat lokale consensus en instemming van de bevolking eveneens een centrale plaats verdienen om het succes van de staatsvormingspoging te garanderen.

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Introduction

Since 2017, the Salafi-Jihadist group Islamic State has been on the defensive in its heartland of Iraq and Syria. On its heyday, the group controlled the lives of over ten million people, but the loss of key cities Mosul and al-Raqqa seemed a prelude to IS's demise. However, despite local and international military campaigns, members remain resilient and various offshoots still exist in the Sahel, Libya, and Yemen. In light of the continuing struggle to understand and defeat the Islamic State, this article aims to contribute to the knowledge of Islamic State's ideological background and how it relates to the broader Salafi-Jihadist ideal on Islamic statehood. Innovative research has been done to investigate similarities to previous 'proto-states' (Lia, 2015), and comparisons of their ideology to the wider Salafi movement have been undertaken (Wagemakers, 2016b), yet a comprehensive examination of the Islamic state-ideal and the way this ideal relates to reality remained absent.

The main objective of this article is to look beyond the violence that is too often associated with Salafi-Jihadism and instead focus on the concept of an Islamic state. *Wherein lies the origin of the Islamic state ideal? How important is the idea of an Islamic state in Salafi-Jihadist ideology? How did this ideology evolve in relation to the practical circumstances on both the global and local level?* This research will focus on Iraq and Syria, as it is considered the heartland of Salafi-Jihadist endeavors to establish a state. The article will help understand processes of state building by Salafi-Jihadists, and religiously inspired armed groups in general. It also aims to offer insights into future Salafi-Jihadist groups' behavior.

Prior to the research, it is imperative to define Salafi-Jihadism. While conscious of the ongoing debate on the relation of Salafism to the wider Islamist movement, this article is mostly concerned about the practical and as such, a basic, personal definition is given. In essence, Islamism is a contemporary movement, originating in the late nineteenth century period of modernity, imperialism, and colonialism. It encompasses all political projects that are centered on an Islamic polity. Various political groups and movements originated from this idea to put Islam central again. One of these movements was Salafism, which aims to emulate the lives of the Prophet and the earliest Muslims, since they are the purest example (Lauzière, 2015). All Salafists share a similar ʿ*aqīda* (creed), one aspect of this is the creation of an Islamic state, but there are various *manāhij* (methods) to realize the

creed (Wiktorowicz, 2006). One of these methods is through Jihad, which literally means armed struggle but should be understood more broadly as radical contention, employed as a means for alternative politics (Merone, 2017; Hegghammer, 2009). Salafi-Jihadism is then a social movement that participates in –radical- contentious politics (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Within Islamism, there are thus very moderate movements, but also more radical ones like the Salafi-Jihadists. This article is only concerned with the Salafi-Jihadist's views on state building and not the plethora of other Islamic state building efforts that can be found throughout the Muslim world (such as Saudi Arabia or Iran).

There is not one Islamic state-ideal. As this article will show, there have been many views and theories on what this state should look like and how it should be realized. Firstly, there is a historical evolution: global and local events have had an impact on the Islamic state ideal and its realization. The Islamic state in ideology is not necessarily consistent with the practical execution. This article will look at the research questions through the dialectical relation between ideology and practice. Following Hegghammer (2009), ideology is seen here as a combination of both the political and religious beliefs of a group or movement. The ideology of Salafi-Jihadists is centered around their religious beliefs but also includes the political thought. Thus, the Islamic state is central in their ideology both as a religious core tenet of faith, and as a subject of political theorization. Ideology is not fixed but evolves through time due to a constant dialectical relationship with the practical reality around it: both the global and local. The article will trace the origins of the Islamic state ideal and its evolutions: from its theoretical inception through to the latest practical state building attempts. Salafi-Jihadist state building is highly ideological and thus at the same time both religious and political, it is impossible to separate these two realms. Therefore, the article will probe the Islamic state-ideal on both fronts. Firstly, from a religious point of view, what are the theological claims and legitimizations. Secondly, from a political stance, how much is the religious state an actual state in reality.

The first chapter investigates how Islamic governance originated, and how it came to be central for Islamists and later Salafi-Jihadists. The second chapter shows how this initial state-ideal evolved through the influence of the practical reality, side-by-side with the inception of the global Salafi-Jihadist movement. The third chapter revolves around the first practical experience of state building in Iraq, and the repercussions of this real-life experience on ideology. The last chapter discusses the Islamic state established by the

Islamic State group as a practice and ideal, and how this relates to other state-building attempts. Here, it will become clear that there is not one path to the establishment of an Islamic State, but various methods can exist at the same time within the Salafi-Jihadist movement.

State building in Islamist theory

Embryos of thinking on statehood

This section highlights how thinking on Islamic governance developed since the early days of Islam, and how it ended up central in Salafi-Jihadist thought. When tracing the origins of the Islamic state-ideal, it is important to keep in mind that thinking about statehood played a secondary role throughout Islamic history. Theoreticians have historically emphasized the required qualities of the ruler, rather than the actual functions of the state, and in fact, the term 'Islamic state' was not used until Rashid Rida coined it in the early twentieth century. However different these earlier ideas on governance were, they are crucial in order to understand how they influenced later Islamists and Salafi-Jihadist ideology.

Since Salafists aim to emulate the example of the first Muslims, it follows that their ideal state is modelled upon the original example of the first Muslim leaders -the Prophet and the four Rashidun Caliphs. Despite few surviving documents, evidence suggests that state formation was attempted very early on in Islamic history, with institutional and ideological elements found in documents as early as 20AH (Donner, 1986). It is easy to categorize the initial expansion of Islam as a proselytizing attempt by Muhammad and his successors, but from a contemporary perspective, it is impossible to ignore the very real state building implications of the prophetic model. The way the Prophet used both force and negotiation to bring all the tribes of the peninsula under his command shows his political prowess. Therefore, it is logical that later Salafists look back on the prophetic mission as an example, one to be modernized to fit the present.

Salafists base their judgement not on historical evidence found on papyri, but on the Quran and Hadith. The Quran does not command any specific form of 'Islamic' government or mention in detail what the *dār al-ʾislam* (Abode of Islam) should look like, neither do the Hadith (Afsaruddin, 2016). The basic purpose of the 'state' according to the

Quran is to defend the faith and the law (Lambton, 1981).[1] At any given time from the earliest days of Islam until 1924, there has always been at least one formal Islamic form of governance, either as a 'Caliphate' or 'Emirate'. Both are equally valid according to Islamic jurisprudence, albeit that 'Caliphate' has a much more universal claim. Although these institutions had political implications, they were seen and studied by contemporaries mostly on religious grounds (Yücesoy, 2011). Because religion was a central concern, emphasis in the Quran and later texts is placed on moral and ethical concepts, and more importantly, the moral qualities of the ruler (Afsaruddin, 2016). Especially the Caliphate, first established by the Prophet, carried strong religious significance and strict rules were elaborated on when exactly a Caliphate could be lawfully established. For this reason, in the last half century, Salafi-Jihadists have rarely claimed to establish a Caliphate and preferred the term Emirate which was less prone to religious criticism, the Islamic State group is a notable exception.

Multiple Caliphates and Emirates persisted throughout history, and theories on states or state building were very rare in this period. A first new attempt at state building was the Saudi-Wahhabi experience, and although they were not Salafi-Jihadists, some interesting parallels to this experience will be drawn later in the article. The Saudis and Abd al-Wahhab were the first after the Prophet to link religion with a political agenda of state building. Initially, their version of Islam was akin to today's Salafi-Jihadism in its reverence of the first Muslims and zealous fight to expand their Islamic Emirate against the enemy: the Ottoman Empire. Their first two attempts at building a lasting state did not last (1744-1818 and 1819-1891) (Commins, 2006). In 1932, the political landscape had shifted with the end of the First World War. Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, a gifted negotiator, used this opening in political space to successfully establish a Saudi State. A crucial difference in comparison to earlier attempts was that this Saudi state now limited itself to a clearly defined border instead of attempting to unite the whole Arabian Peninsula, or the whole Muslim world in one single state. Subsequently the state gained more international recognition. This territorial limiting of the own state will become relevant again in the present-day, as discussed in the last chapter.

[1] Bear in mind that the word *dawla* (state) is never used in the Quran.

Rise of Islamism and the conception of an Islamic state-ideal

New hopes for (Islamic) statehood and nationalism bloomed in the era of modernity, colonialism, and imperialism thanks to the rise of Islamism. Salafism and Islamism today are different, but from the late nineteenth century until roughly after Sayyid Qutb in the mid-twentieth century, these two movements evolved together. In a wider structural context of Islamic 'decay' during the early Western colonial expansion, al-Afghani (1838-97) and his student Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) sought to modernize Islam by turning to the purest source of religion: the Quran (Keddie, 1968). Religion was seen as the salvation of all Muslims. Abduh saw that religion could unite the people and propagated the idea of one indivisible Islamic community, tied to a specific territory: the historical caliphate, abolished in 1924 (Peters, 2005). Abduh only stated that the *ʾumma* or Islamic community should be protected, he did not elaborate on the structures of this defense. Abduh's student Rashid Rida (1865-1935) can be considered the father of the modern Islamic state-notion, as he was the first to use the word *dawla* (state) to refer to this united *ʾumma*, denoting a territorial claim with clearer functions. As Rida said: '*Muslims cannot truly think that their religion exists without a strong and independent Islamic State based on the laws of Islam*' (Khatab, 2002). From Rida, the idea passed to his student Hassan al-Banna (1906-49), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the Brotherhood's stated goal is re-establishing the Caliphate as a symbol of Islamic unity and power, they soon accepted many Western methods to reach this goal, such as constitutional rule and democracy (Moussalli, 2016). In addition, they reduced their demand for the Caliphate and contented themselves with the creation of various Islamic states within existing nation states (Voll, 2016). This openness to the West soon caused a rift within the Brotherhood after al-Banna's passing, more specifically under influence from Sayyid Qutb (1909-56).

Sayyid Qutb was not only influenced by al-Banna, but also by his contemporary, Pakistani ideologue Abu A'la Mawdudi (1903-79). Mawdudi was neither Salafist nor member of the Brotherhood but had developed a theory on what an Islamic state should look like (Wagemakers, 2012). The latter insisted that all Muslims should be united in one state, based solely on sharia (Adams, 1983). He did not believe in enforcing islamization (as would be applied by the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini), but propagated a gradual islamization of society, which would inevitably lead to an Islamic state (Nasr, 1996). Mawdudi's thought influenced the creation of Pakistan as a separate state. Qutb was interested in Mawdudi's

theory, but after a traumatic prison sentence, he expanded this state-ideal beyond the territorial limitations of just one country.

The 1952 Egyptian revolution and subsequent brutal government crackdown under Gamal Abd al-Nasser against the Brotherhood caused existential doubt with Qutb: he pondered why a truly Islamic entity, as the Egyptian state claimed to be, would repress its own devout subjects (Khatab, 2006). According to Qutb, no state in his time was ruled according to sharia and therefore no state was truly Islamic (Wagemakers, 2012). Although Qutb initially supported a bottom-up approach like Mawdudi, he became more radical during his imprisonment and envisioned a categorical destruction of the old system (Haddad, 1983). For Qutb, the state is defined by the concept of *ḥākimiyya* (sovereignty of God), making the Islamic state distinct from all other forms of government. The form of government does not matter to Qutb, because the Islamic identity is most important (Khatab, 2006). In order to establish the new state Qutb envisioned Jihad as a permanent revolution of the Islamic movement (Qutb, 1964; Peters, 2005). Qutb's elite 'vanguard' theory of Jihad implied that a small group or vanguard would bring about the creation of an Islamic state. This greatly influenced later Salafi-Jihadists.

The Islamic state goes global: ideology and practice in constant dialectic

The evolution of the Islamic state-ideal is intertwined with the evolution of the global Jihadi experience, which in turn is determined by geopolitics and local politics. It is in the global era of Salafi-Jihadism that the first practical experiences with governance occur. This chapter follows how practice and ideology go through a dialectical process. Through this process, the global ideology results in a localized state building mindset. Qutb's ideology became popular in the decades after his execution in 1966, resulting in the earliest Salafi-Jihadists. In the seventies and eighties Egypt witnessed the rise of various groups such as the Military Academy Organization, *takfīr wa-l-hijra*, the Jihad Organization, and *al-Jamāʿa al-ʾIslāmiyya*. Although these groups were rivals, there was some common ground in their ideology. Most importantly, all of them focused on the struggle (Jihad) against the Near Enemy or regime, instead of the Western Far Enemy, which would only later become the target of Salafi-Jihadists (Peters, 2016). Their priority was to defeat the *ṭāghūt* (tyrant, or leader who is not truly Muslim), who stood in the way of the creation of a truly Islamic state (Fahd & Stewart, n.d.). These early groups could be described as nationalist revolutionaries,

attempting to create a religiously inspired state. With the assassination of President Anwar Sadat – a *ṭāghūt* - in 1981, severe repression forced most Salafi-Jihadists to flee Egypt. All over the Arab world, political space closed due to increased repression. The domestic space for radical contention in the form of Salafi-Jihadism had closed, and a new type of Jihad was needed.

In that same year, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan provoking a guerrilla war by the Afghans (Goodson, 2001). While so many Salafi-Jihadists were adrift, new leaders emerged in Afghanistan to guide the renewed Jihad. Among them, Palestinian Abdullah Azzam (1941-89), nicknamed the 'Imam of Jihad' who partnered with the wealthy Saudi Arabian Osama bin Laden (1957-2011) to spearhead the new internationalist Salafi-Jihadist movement (Kepel & Milelli, 2008). In essence, the goal of early Islamists like al-Banna to unite all Muslims in one state remained unchanged as bin Laden wanted Muslims to unite in one pious caliphate (Blanchard, 2007). Although the ideology remained the same, the *manhaj* (practical method) to achieve this drastically changed under bin Laden and Azzam. Due to the lack of local space, their attention shifted to the Far Enemy- the West-, who must be defeated before a true Islamic state can be established. Osama bin Laden seldom hinted at the form of this state, and when he did, he remained vague, for example stating that it should be a caliphate and a true implementation of sharia. Azzam spoke even less of an Islamic State and only referred to an Islamic Society (Kepel & Milelli, 2008). Their immediate focus was on the Afghan battlefield and to that end, bin Laden and Azzam created the Services Bureau to coordinate the Arab volunteers coming to Afghanistan (Kepel & Milelli, 2008).

In the early nineties bin Laden stepped out of the shadow of Azzam and created a new organization *Qāʿidat al-Maʿlumāt* (Base of Information), established in '89 and later popularly abbreviated to al-Qaida.[2] This organization became a household name in the Afghan conflict and after Azzam's death in '89 carried on his legacy of global Jihad and the focus on the Far Enemy (Goodson, 2001). At first sight, it would appear as if the Islamic state-ideal became a vague and long-term goal for all Salafi-Jihadists, yet, this global Jihad was not as global as it might seem. From al-Qaida's practical experience in Afghanistan

[2] See the appendix for an overview of important events since the creation of al-Qaida up until the present. Although it is a simplified visualization, the timeline shows the parallel evolution of al-Qaida, the Islamic State, and Jabhat al-Nuṣra.

came the first signs of governance by Salafi-Jihadists. An important legacy of Azzam was the military 'guerrilla' approach. Although Azzam favored pan-Islamism, he did realize that territorial control was crucial in the war against the West and as a base to regain the Muslim world (Kepel & Milelli, 2008). This solid 'base' became a cooperation between al-Qaida and the Taliban. The Taliban, led by Mullah Omar, took over control over large areas of Afghanistan between 1994 and 2001 and created the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan with support of bin Laden (Mandaville, 2010). The Taliban focused on local control without the motivation to create a pan-Islamic state, although popular at first because of the restoration of peace, their hardline mentality to enforce Islamic morality turned the population against them. Despite being separate from al-Qaida, their destinies were tied and after 9/11, the American invasion ended Taliban rule (Mandaville, 2010). Bin Laden's goal has always been global Jihad against the Far Enemy in the West, but the close connection with the Taliban proves that the global can go hand in hand with the local.

Throughout the nineties, bin Laden grew closer to one of the Salafi-Jihadists who fled Egypt: Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was also influenced by Qutb and was a leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad Group.[3] Al-Zawahiri's initial goal was to overthrow the Egyptian regime –the Near Enemy- and establish an Islamic state. Under bin Laden's influence, al-Zawahiri was gradually convinced by the priority of the Far Enemy. Al-Zawahiri was probably also motivated by the despondent situation of Egyptian Jihad: increasing repression had left no local space for any Jihadi state-building project (Kepel & Milelli, 2008). Although al-Zawahiri focusses much of his ideological writing on justifying global jihad, in his seminal work '*Knights under the Prophet's Banner*', he states that Muslims need to pursue the goal of establishing an Islamic state in the heart of the Muslim world. This work from 2001 represented a break with the movement's discourse, which up until then remained vague about its state building aspirations. In the book, al-Zawahiri gave practical advice on how to achieve this goal; for instance, emphasizing the need for a 'base' at the heart of the Islamic world, for which Afghanistan was not sufficient (McCants, 2012). Notice how the dialectical relation between ideology and practice takes place. The global ideology

[3] Of course, bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and Azzam were not exclusively influenced by Qutb. Global political events and social evolutions also had their effect. For instance, the Saudi Ṣaḥwa movement had a great influence on the wider evolution of Salafi-Jihadism, for this see Stéphane Lacroix's *Awakening Islam* (2011).

developed in light of the lack of local space after Egyptian repression, but soon it was again influenced by the need for basic territorial control in Afghanistan. This need then again enters the realm of ideology through Zawahiri's theoretical book. The dialectical relation never ends and ideology is constantly influenced by the global reality in which it operates.

Global political events such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent US-led Gulf war, the repression of the *Ṣaḥwa*- (Awakening) movement in Saudi Arabia (Lacroix, 2011), and the end of the Cold War and subsequent US-hegemony, meant that there was a continuous lack of space for territorial control. Out of necessity, al-Zawahiri continued his support for global Jihad and the prioritization of the Far Enemy. Despite Al-Qaida's hegemony over the Salafi-Jihadist movement at the time, not all fighters willingly agreed with this ideological emphasis and in practice, the local focus often prevailed. For example, another ideologue, Abu Musab al-Suri, took the command for global Jihad as a cue to support various local Jihadi revolutionaries in their regional struggles for an Islamic state, rather than take the fight to the West as bin Laden interpreted it (Lia, 2007). This approach was aided by the return of many 'Afghan Arabs' to their respective homelands, where they set up Salafi-Jihadist cells. In theory, these cells were to further global Jihad, but in reality, the returnees often addressed local grievances and began targeting the Near Enemy. For example, those Afghan Arabs that returned to Algeria created the GIA, which focused exclusively on the establishment of an Algerian Islamic state.

With the Afghani-emirate defeated in 2001 after the American invasion, Al-Qaida's leaders were on the run and looking for a new Salafi-Jihadist space and a struggle to rally around. Two main possibilities appeared that were located right in the heartland of the Muslim world and with strong ties to their nemesis, the West: Saudi Arabia- treasured US-ally-, and Iraq, invaded in 2003 by the Americans. Initially al-Qaida wanted to focus on Saudi Arabia, leading to the creation of Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). According to them, the divided Iraqi resistance did not have a specifically Islamic program (Thomas, 2016b). Severe crackdowns in Saudi Arabia however, pushed members to Iraq (Thomas, 2016a). The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 only added to the status of Iraq in Salafi-Jihadist circles. In 2004, bin Laden claimed the Iraqi conflict was "a golden and unique opportunity" for jihadists, he even stated Baghdad would become "the capital of the caliphate" (Blanchard, 2007, p. 7). One of the earliest Salafi-Jihadists to identify the importance of the Iraqi battle arena was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Iraq: heartland of Jihad and Islamic state building attempts

Al-Zarqawi and the shift towards violent state building in Iraq

Al-Zarqawi (1966-2006) was a Jordanian national who, pushed by the same regional wave of repression in the eighties that forced out Egyptian Salafi-Jihadists, left for Pakistan in 1989 (Kepel & Milelli, 2008). Even though al-Zarqawi was shaped by similar global events such as the Gulf War, he was pushed less to global Jihad than his al-Qaida acquaintances. While residing in Pakistan he met the highly influential Jihadi ideologue Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (°1959) who can be considered a quietist –or non-violent and non-political-Jihadist due to his sole focus on Jihad-theory and his lack of battle-experience (Wagemakers, 2012). Throughout the last decade of the twentieth century, their paths would often cross and al-Maqdisi had a profound influence on al-Zarqawi despite their later divergence. One of al-Maqdisi's greatest contributions to the maturation of Jihadi state building was the concept of *Jihād-* or *Qitāl al-Tamkīn*. Contrary to *Qitāl al-Nikāya* –warfare to hurt enemy-interests-, *al-tamkīn* stresses the importance of establishing a safe haven for true Muslims, possibly in the form of an Islamic state (Wagemakers, 2012).

The consequence of this strategy is that fighters should choose their battlefield in a location where it would be possible to set up an Islamic state (Wagemakers, 2016a). In 1999, after some travels and a prison-sentence in Jordan, al-Zarqawi created *Jamāʿa al-Tawḥīd wa-l-Jihād* (Group for Unity and Jihad) in Afghanistan. Due to the American invasion in 2001, he moved to Kurdistan, which he considered a more important battlefield than the Arabian Peninsula. His initial focus was on both Iraq and Jordan, but soon al-Zarqawi turned his Jihad resolutely on the Shia population of Iraq (Kepel & Milelli, 2008). By doing so, he played on the sectarian emotions and fears of Iraqi Sunnis, who are a religious minority. Although the Sunni (29%) held all political power under Sadam Hussein, the Shia (69%) who took power after the American invasion are a much bigger group (CIA World Factbook, 2018). Nicknaming himself the "Sheikh of Slaughter" (Jenkins, 2014a, p. 10), al-Zarqawi gained international notoriety due to the cleverly online-distributed videos in which he himself decapitates Americans (Conway, 2012), and widespread utilization of suicide-bombers (Rabasa et al., 2006). Al-Zarqawi received criticism for this violent approach from the scholars who saw themselves as the intellectual guardians of the Salafi-Jihadi movement (for example al-Maqdisi and al-Zawahiri wrote critical letters). Undeterred by

this criticism, al-Zarqawi and others like him valued actual combat experience and practical skills over theoretical knowledge (Jenkins, 2014a).

Despite the critique, al-Zarqawi's Iraqi project also gained renewed attention from the wider Jihadi movement, especially from al-Qaida that, as discussed above, had been pushed towards Iraq around 2003 (McCants, 2011). This interest in the local Iraqi arena also meant that al-Qaida attempted to appropriate al-Zarqawi's independent *Jamāʿa al-Tawḥīd wa-l-Jihād*. In 2004, he yielded to this pressure and reformed his organization to become al-Qaida in Iraq. Despite losing his independence, his *bayʿa* (proclamation of loyalty) to al-Qaida led to some benefits such as access to private donors, recruitment from a worldwide network of Jihadists, and logistic support (Zelin, 2014). Al-Zarqawi's loyalty did not motivate him to curtail his violent tendencies as he continued to target Shia indiscriminately. Apart from this violence, most ideologues and fighters agreed that Iraq was (and remains) the perfect space to establish this Caliphate due to its historical ties to the previous Islamic states and its geographical location in the heart of the Islamic world. Al-Zawahiri for instance, wrote to al-Zarqawi that victory would only come when "a Muslim state is established in the manner of the Prophet in the heart of the Islamic world (…)" (McCants, 2011, p. 27). This, combined with al-Maqdisi's influence on al-Zarqawi from an early stage and his theory on *Jihād al-Tamkīn*, probably helped al-Zarqawi conclude that state building was a necessary part of his Jihad. However, his aggressive way of taking territory could not count on the approval of his colleagues.

It is my assertion that this first attempt of state building in Iraq can be seen through a Tillyan lens of 'violence as state building' (Tilly, 2002). This theory, originally formulated by Charles Tilly about medieval Europe, contends that violent conflict when used as a form of coercion or racketeering is potentially state building (Ayoob, 1995). In this sense, violence can be used to transform a society. Oftentimes, this is the case in the absence of alternative strong state-structures or the absence of a monopoly on violence, as was the case around the time of the American invasion in Iraq. Al-Zarqawi wrote to the al-Qaida leadership that he wanted to take advantage of the security vacuum left by the invasion (Kepel & Milelli, 2008). Power and violence are needed for the creation of new structures such as administration and taxation (Hoffmann, Vlassenroot, & Marchais, 2016). The use of violence is often associated with chaos but in this context can be seen as a way of structuring society according to new structures and morals. Al-Zarqawi came close to

realizing the Islamic state in 2006 when he established a *Shūra*-council (advice council) (Bunzel, 2015). This council is an Islamic form of governance (Badry, 2013). Additionally, al-Zarqawi could justify his violence religiously as a form of armed *daʿwa* (preaching) (Meijer, 2009b).

Unfortunately, not all of his leaders and former mentors agreed with this approach to establishing a state. In an effort to change al-Zarqawi's mind, al-Zawahiri wrote that Jihadists needed "popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq, and the surrounding Muslim countries" which would require avoiding sectarianism and gratuitous violence (McCants, 2011, p. 27). He called on al-Zarqawi to cooperate with all Muslims, as long as they shared the goal of establishing a state (al-Zawahiri, 2005). At the same time, on al-Maqdisi's online forum and Salafi-Jihadist library www.tawhed.sw (now offline), theoreticians started discussing the importance of local consensus beyond the case of Iraq (Merone, 2017). This was not in explicit critique of al-Zarqawi but it was clear that no local consensus would be reached through his violent approach. Al-Maqdisi also criticized his former pupil more blatantly in an interview with Al-Jazeera, commenting on his timing and approach:

> *My project is not to blow-up a bar, my project is not to blow-up a cinema, my project is not kill an officer who has tortured me...My project is to bring back to the Islamic Nation its glories and to establish the Islamic state that provides refuge to every Muslim, and this is a grand and large project that does not come by small vengeful acts. It requires the education of a Muslim generation, it requires long-term planning, it requires the participation of all the learned men and sons of this Islamic Nation, and since I do not have the resources for this project then I will not implicate my brothers... (…)* (Kazimi, 2005, p. 66)

Both al-Zawahiri and al-Maqdisi advocated a more gradual approach in state building, taking into account local sentiments. Al-Zawahiri outlined a four-stage strategy for Iraq: in the short-term (1) expelling the Americans and (2) establish an Islamic state based on sharia, from where later (3) to expand Jihad beyond Iraq to eventually (4) attacking Israel (Bunzel, 2015). Al-Zawahiri was backed by other prominent al-Qaida ideologues Sayf al-Adl and Attiyat Allah al-Liby (Bunzel, 2015). Sayf al-Adl encouraged al-Zarqawi "to reintroduce the Islamic way of life by means of establishing the state of Islam that will solve the entire

problems of the nation" and wrote that this should be supported by "a circle of judicious men and scholars" (Blanchard, 2007, p. 13). Al-Zarqawi followed this advice by establishing a *shūra*-council, but he did not live long enough to effectively establish any formal structures beyond this. In June 2006, a targeted American airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Kepel & Milelli, 2008). While he may not have left any physical evidence of his violent Jihad, the Iraqi state-building experience did have a profound impact on the formation of a concrete state building ideology within the Salafi-Jihadist movement.

Theory and practice: a continued dialectic

Salafi-Jihadists are often accused of remaining too vague about the practicalities of establishing their state, and that before 2011 the Islamic state was nothing but an ideal (e.g. Hegghammer, 2009). Two texts, published around the time of al-Zarqawi's Iraqi experiment, prove the opposite, namely Abu Bakr Naji's book '*Management of Savagery*' published around 2004, and Abu Musab al-Suri's '*The Global Islamic Resistance Call'* published in the same year. Again, practical experience informs the further development of Salafi-Jihadist ideology. *'The Management of Savagery'* offers a detailed plan for how a group of Salafi-Jihadists could violently take control over an area and establish their Islamic State (Naji, 2004). In this work, it becomes apparent that the Near and Far Enemy are not mutually exclusive but both can be attacked at a same time: the establishment of a base of operation can help in staging attacks against Western targets and at the same time become part of a larger Islamic state (McCants, 2012). Naji breaks down the establishment of a Caliphate in three phases (1) the power of vexation and exhaustion, (2) the management of savagery, and (3) the power of establishment– establishing the state (Naji, 2004). The first stage focusses on 'classical' Jihadi violent aspects such as attacking the enemy and attracting new fighters. Furthermore, Naji emphasizes the importance of attacking infrastructure in order to create a power vacuum, which will lead to the following phase. The real innovation of Naji comes with the emphasis he places on the post-violent phase: the Management of Savagery (Lia, 2008). At this stage, in order to curtail the chaos in the Jihadi-controlled areas, structures are put in place. Some of Naji's twelve requirements in this stage are the provision of internal security (a monopoly of violence), provision of food and medical care, application of sharia and spreading of faith. The last phase "establishing the state" is complete when the entity is completely governed by Islam (Naji, 2004).

The academic debate is inconclusive on whether Naji or al-Suri had a bigger impact on later generations of Salafi-Jihadists, but it is certain both have been widely read in these circles (Jackson & Loidolt, 2013). Both agree that the ultimate goal is the establishment of a state but while Naji believes a structured and centralized organization will reap the biggest success, al-Suri proposes a decentralized approach where tactical decisions are made on the ground by battle-hardened commanders (Gartenstein-Ross & Dabruzzi, 2008). Al-Suri's '*Global Islamic Resistance Call*' also emphasized, more than Naji's book, the importance of popular support before being able to establish any type of state (Cafarella, 2014). Therefore, according to al-Suri, the goal of establishing a state is much more long-term than the short-term practical approach of Naji. It appears that both Naji and al-Suri's work were crucial guidelines in the following period, although it took eight more years for Salafi-Jihadists to get close to their goal.

After al-Zarqawi's death a new leader emerged, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, who soon rebranded the organization as 'Islamic State of Iraq' (ISI) in Western Iraq. Although apprehensive of the group's continuous targeting of Shias, al-Zawahiri has offered support for this new 'state' while at the same time still encouraging cooperation with local population (Blanchard, 2007). Despite this support, ISI was never fully subordinated to al-Qaida because its leaders never submitted a *bayʿa* (oath of loyalty) like al-Zarqawi had done (Bunzel, 2015). Perhaps the disagreement was due to their more nationalist approach. The new leaders had integrated many members of the Iraqi Sunni Nationalist *Baʿth* Party, who pressured the group into a local Iraqi agenda (Zelin, 2014). A strict implementation of religious punishments according to sharia alienated the local public and the organization of the supposed state was chaotic and lacked any form of legitimacy (Jenkins, 2014b). Therefore, ISI might have claimed that its political success allowed it to form a state, but in reality their state existed only on paper with limited territorial control or any other state-like features (Bunzel, 2015).

A new chapter for Iraq: Arab Uprisings and new figures

Change came with the death of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi in 2010; he was succeeded by the now infamous Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who revitalized ISI and guided it through the Arab Uprisings. He centered the Jihadi efforts not on anti-Shia violence, but on explicitly Sunni state building which inherently is anti-Shia but also anti-Yezidi and anti-Christian. He did

not reorient an entire organization by sheer will; rather it was the consequence of global events, most notably the Arab Uprisings. Various secular leaders were overthrown in the heartland of the Muslim world, which created new opportunities for Salafi-Jihadists (McCants, 2011). Brynjar Lia (2015) showed that the Arab Uprisings brought about a surge in what he calls Jihadi proto-states, some short-lived such as the Islamic Emirate in Mali, others slightly more successful such as Boko Haram in Nigeria. None however, has been as successful as the projects in Iraq and Syria. Why were the Arab Uprisings so influential for Salafi-Jihadists even though they appeared largely absent from the initial protests that had a markedly secular character? It was through the failure of these uprisings to provide solutions for society's socio-economical grievances that the Islamist option became relevant again (Thomas, 2016b). The uprisings did force Salafi-Jihadists to re-invent themselves because they had demonstrated that not only a 'solid base' or Vanguard could topple a regime, but that popular revolt could lead to the same result (Pierret, 2016). The debate on al-Maqdisi's online forum on the importance of popular support became more relevant. Meanwhile, the Uprisings had also pushed other, non-Jihadist Salafists, to enter the political arena (Thomas, 2016b). Jihadists distinguished themselves through the violent radical pursuit of establishing a true Islamic state. In the same period, the death of bin Laden caused a temporary lack in centralized control, allowing all local affiliates to move away from the Far Enemy and global Jihad (Thomas, 2016a). Al-Qaida's new leader, al-Zawahiri, was not able to revert this evolution completely.

One of the first notable decisions of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was to take advantage of the chaos in Syria due to the Arab Uprisings, and send a group there that became known as Jabhat al-Nuṣra (Bunzel, 2015), which became the bone of contention between al-Qaida and ISI only a year later. In April 2013, ISI claimed ownership over Jabhat al-Nuṣra (JN) and renamed itself Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), yet al-Nuṣra's leader remained loyal to al-Qaida although many fighters chose to join ISIL (Zelin, 2014). From here on, al-Qaida disavowed ISIL's tactics while al-Baghdadi fully committed to the violent and radical construction of the 'Islamic State'. One step has been the establishment of a Caliphate in June 2014, shortening the group's name to *the* Islamic State. As discussed in the introduction, the Caliphate is one possible form of Islamic governance, but is rarely chosen by Salafi-Jihadists because it is much easier to criticize its establishment on theological grounds. The rift between IS and al-Qaida was complete when the latter responded by

introducing a counter-caliph, mostly in name: the leader of the Taliban Mullah Omar who was head of the largely defeated Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Bunzel, 2015).

The 'Islamic State': Violence as state building

Enough has been written about ISIL/IS's violence, their multitude of foreign fighters, and their military tactics, but articles on their actual 'stateness' are scarce (some exceptions include Mecham, 2015; Zelin, 2014 and Wagemakers, 2014, 2015, 2016a). This article has already answered the question of origin of the Islamic state ideal and traced it through time as both an ideological ideal and practice. The accumulated historical experiences of the wider Salafi-Jihadi movement and the specific struggles of al-Zarqawi and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi have shaped the way Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi eventually established the Islamic State. More than the name of a group, or a specific territory, the Islamic State (IS) is an expression of political idea. This chapter explores the ways in which the Islamic State goes about the construction of a state, both practically and ideologically.

The practical experience of state building

Since the Islamic state is the first Islamic state to survive longer than a year despite enormous pressure, it should be clear that the state is more than just a religious ideal but in fact, in many ways it fulfills secular state-criteria. To understand the construction of a state from this secular point of view, one needs to understand the constitutive elements that make a state. Certain criteria for statehood are formulated in the declarative theory (Worster, 2010); (1) a permanent population, (2) a clearly defined territory, (3) a government, and (4) capacity to enter into relations with other states (Montevideo Convention, 1933). In addition to these four, other criteria have been formulated; independence (Crawford, 2006), declaring statehood (Grant, 1998), legality (i.e. following international laws) (Devine, 1971), and democracy (Coleman, 2014). Looking at various state-building attempts throughout the world in the past fifty years –religious and secular- many attempts go unrecognized by international institutions. The lack of recognition does not diminish their capacity to govern (examples include entities such as Taiwan and Catalonia). Therefore, it is more productive to approach statehood through a functional lens (Ghani & Lockhart, 2008): a state is 'a state' when it arranges society according to rules and values through the creation of political institutions that allow it to provide security,

protection, social services, but also taxation. As such, a state is a political construction (Donner, 1986).

Quinn Mecham (2015) did a short study on the functional capacity of the Islamic State through six categories: (1) tax and labor acquisition, (2) defining and regulating citizenship (3) providing international security and managing international relations (4) ensuring domestic security (5) providing social services, and (6) facilitating economic growth. She writes that IS is most successful in the first category, through a variety of resource-extracting tactics such as kidnapping, protection taxes, *zakā* (religious tax). IS acquires labor through international recruitment of foreign fighters. This does not mean IS is capable of facilitating economic growth (last category), because it favors short-term oil revenues to long-term productive investments. The second category is fulfilled on ideological basis since IS caters exclusively to loyal Sunni. According to Mecham, IS performs most poorly in the third category since it a priori rejects the validity of the contemporary state system, state boundaries, and even rival groups on the grounds of its own religious superiority. The group is more successful in ensuring domestic security through a rigid monopoly on violence and the establishment of sharia-courts. Its religious nature also makes IS quite successful in the provision of social services since it is inherent to Islam to invest in social welfare such as health care, education, and support for the vulnerable. (Mecham, 2015; Ghani & Lockhart, 2008).

By looking at IS's statehood claim not only through the lens of international politics but through functionality, it opens opportunities to investigate the relation of the state to the population. The anthropological approach to statehood is common in African conflict zones, the added factor of IS's religious justification should not obscure the fact that these processes are similar. The Islamic State is not unique in the way it performs statehood and with or without its ideological foundations, there would still be abundant state-like features. In previous research into IS, no emphasis has been placed on the reciprocal relation the group had (or has) with the population it controlled. A state does not exist without a population that perceives it as real and as such, a state is like a performance (Stepputat & Nuijten, 2018). Public authority cannot simply be imposed but has to be recognized as well (Hoffmann et al., 2016). In this light, it is interesting to see how IS levies taxes on its subjects in the form of the Islamic *zakā*, while most revenues actually come from oil and international donations (Mecham, 2015). These taxes can be interpreted as a

performance of statehood in which compliance with taxation is a form of recognition of the authority of those in power, and of one's own citizenship within the community; it is indeed a social contract with the government (Hoffmann et al., 2016). Taxes -one of the defining features of citizenship-, providing social services, and other state-like functions also facilitate a language of 'stateness', meaning that they allow IS to portray themselves as a state to both their subjects and outside observers (Hansen, Stepputat, Adams, & Steinmetz, 2001).

It is clear that the idea of a state, and the intention to create one through state-like functions, is not in itself sufficient and that the social contract with the population is crucial. The population does not necessarily agree voluntarily with this social contract: power and control play a decisive role in this process. Here, I refer back to my hypothesis that al-Zarqawi's 2003-2006 Iraqi project was a case of 'violence as state building'. Through similar methods of instilling fear in the population, the Islamic State used violence as a tool in the creation of a state. The ubiquitous images of beheadings, stoning, casting –suspected- gays from towers *et cetera* have formed the public's opinion of IS. They also inform the choice of the local population to comply with IS's rule. Compliance is not necessarily voluntary, but often a forced recognition (Vlassenroot, 2017). Thus, looking past the gruesome images, the violence serves a function of control and power in the Weberian sense. However, as Kate Meagher (2012) convincingly argues, violence alone is not sufficient for long-term success. She identifies three key factors overlooked by Tilly, namely (1) the basis of the claim, (2) local social legitimacy, and (3) the source of power behind a non-state claim to public authority.

IS and state building: a strong ideological claim

The previous section has shown that IS's Islamic state can in many ways be seen as a state, even though it does not conform its statehood to the internationally accepted standards such as territoriality and international relations. IS simply does not accept the existence of any other state besides its own (Nielsen, 2015). International law has a Eurocentric and Westphalian bias towards statehood and as such, fails to recognize that the functional aspects as described by Mecham can also result in a successful state building experience. Nevertheless, Meagher's critique of Tilly about a state's claim and legitimacy shows that at the same time state building is highly ideological. Ideology, as discussed in the introduction,

is both the religious inspiration and the political theory of a group or movement. For Salafi-Jihadists, the ideology revolves both around Islam and the political theory they developed around Islam. Establishing a state in real life needs both the functional aspects as discussed by Mecham, and the ideological framing as discussed by Meaghar: a legitimate claim to power.

The Islamic State's claim and legitimacy came, at least initially, from its religious credentials. Their strict Salafism attracted Sunni who felt marginalized in their Shia community and offered a religious framework for sectarianism. Not only the Islamic religion but also the wider ideology of IS as anti-Western catered to the socio-economic concerns of the local population, which had witnessed the destruction of their land and infrastructure by several American invasions. Indeed, their legitimacy also stemmed from their effective forms of government and the creation of order in chaos. It is clear that the functional aspects of governing a state cannot be seen as separate from the wider ideological framework. IS provides social welfare from an ideological point of view (care for the poor, widowed and orphaned as provisioned in Islam), but equally so in order to receive legitimacy in the form of a social contract.

A critique could then be that the Islamic State's project of state building haphazardly appeared, and that they simply executed their version of Islam, out of which a state emerged with a certain degree of public authority. This article argues that state building by Salafi-Jihadists is a conscious project, informed by half a century of evolution in light of the dialectical relation between its ideology and practice. Through trial and error, internal and external pressure, its ideology adapted and started to incorporate functional aspects of statehood. Where Qutb and the early Islamists vaguely referred to the Islamic State that is solely based on sharia, later Salafi-Jihadists saw the need to specify this process. The practical Iraqi experience of the early 2000's is crucial for inspiring ideologues like Abu Bakr Naji to write '*The Management of Savagery*' as a type of post-factum critique on the initial project by al-Zarqawi. Naji, al-Zawahiri and al-Maqdisi realized that the Jihadi state building experience could not solely rely on religion but needed to include functional aspects as well. Naji's twelve points for the second stage (Management of Savagery) include various aspects Mecham also used in her functional approach: Provision of internal security, provision of food and medical supplies, protection of the region against external enemies, create a security service, enter into coalitions –when religiously permitted- to further the

cause, forming leadership-groups *et cetera*. Naji legitimizes these functions through religion and couples them with more overtly religious demands such as the installation of sharia, stimulation of faith in society, disavowing hypocrites (secret heretics) and so on.

Establishing and maintaining a state

The creation of a State is the end goal for Salafi-Jihadists, but once established it also provides a 'cover' or justification for certain acts. Heinous acts such as decapitations, brutal crackdowns on locals, extraction of resources, are all justified by IS's statehood (Wagemakers, 2016a). Especially since 2014, when IS decided to 'rebrand' itself as a Caliphate -the ultimate Islamic State- al-Baghdadi regarded himself as all-powerful. Perhaps, in this overzealous belief in the power of statehood, lies IS's biggest weakness. In order to be able to claim the title of Islamic state or Caliphate, IS has had to invest in extreme ideological purity to distinguish itself from competitors and critics. In that sense, the term 'Samson state' (Lia, 2015) is especially fitting: IS's rigid ideological agenda tied it to suicidal policies that would eventually lead to the state's demise, leading it to lose its claim to public authority in the areas it controlled (this of course coupled with a well-funded international military campaign targeting IS exclusively). IS's religious claim to legitimacy was eventually not strong enough to hold it in power and for now, the group has retreated to its *wilayas* or governorates, especially in Libya (Byman, 2016).

Jabhat al-Nuṣra's local approach

All Salafi-Jihadists share the similar goal of establishing an Islamic State, and for a long period after Sayyid Qutb, they were influenced by the same geopolitical evolutions such as the global War on Terror. However, from these past experiences, different lessons were drawn and different *manāhij* or methods of applying the *ʿaqīda* (creed/ideology) developed (Cafarella, 2014). It is not productive to constantly contrast al-Qaida and IS and ignore their shared heritage, yet it should be acknowledged that they did not apply the same tactics on their territories in Iraq and Syria. Therefore, the only critique IS received from other Salafists was not on their ideological conviction (the establishment of a Caliphate, ruled by sharia *et cetera*), but on the practical execution of this ideal (Wagemakers, 2015).

IS's biggest contender for power was Jabhat al-Nuṣra. As described in the previous chapter, Jabhat al-Nuṣra (JN) developed out of a contingent of Jihadists sent to Syria by

Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) in 2012, which was still close to al-Qaida at the time. In 2013, when IS claimed ownership over JN, the latter chose to remain loyal to al-Qaida until July 2016 when it separated at least in name. Since its inception, JN followed a different approach and more cautious than IS, strongly supported by al-Maqdisi and al-Zawahiri (Wagemakers, 2016a). JN engages in a much more gradualist and long-term state-building effort, which I argue, is much more sustainable. This patience is exhibited on multiple fronts, perhaps most obvious in the fact it has yet to proclaim a Syrian Islamic state. Another prominent distinction is JN's willingness to cooperate with various other groups –both Salafi-Jihadist and sometimes secular- such as ʾAḥrār al-Shām, Army of Islam, and Ṣuqr al-Shām (Zelin, 2014). For example, when JN was not able to control the city of Deir Ez-Zor on its own, it renegotiated power over the sharia-court with other armed groups (Khalaf, 2015). This diplomatic approach to control stands in stark contrast to IS's exclusivist view that as the one true Caliphate it should not negotiate with any other group in the region. Moreover, JN's willingness to cooperate with other groups shows it is embedding itself within the broader revolutionary dynamics and as such, the group calls openly for the end of Assad's rule, even employing a nationalist rhetoric (Lister, 2016).

More notable than its cooperation with other armed groups is JN's behavior vis-à-vis the local population. Initially, JN kept its alliance to al-Qaida secret in order not to alienate locals. (Cafarella, 2014). Not long after, in July 2016 it severed these external ties, and with them the internationalist objectives of global Jihad, in order to focus exclusively on Syria. For this, JN received al-Zawahiri's permission, showing that this was a pragmatic and strategic move in pursuit of a long-distance objective (Lister, 2016). JN's efforts also emphasize social welfare through a relief department that manages the distribution of food and other necessities while simultaneously preaching Salafist Islam to the local population in order to transform the social fabric of society in the long-term (Cafarella, 2014). In fact, JN even went so far as to compromise on enforcing sharia law. This patience in convincing the local population echoes al-Maqdisi's calls to prioritize *daʿwa* (preaching) over Jihad (Wagemakers, 2012). Another important anti IS ideologue, Abu Qatada, has written that leadership of Muslims is a contract between the Muslim community and the ruler (Wagemakers, 2016a). This relates back to the discussion on IS and its overtly violent approach to state building whilst the basis of their claim and legitimacy is solely based on its religious credentials. JN on the other hand, has realized that this legitimacy also stems

from a social contract with the population that is not exclusively based on power. This does not mean that JN does not use violence or power to control the population, but that they do so while also being mindful of the local consensus of the population.

The experience of Jabhat al-Nuṣra in Syria, while still ongoing, teaches us that al-Qaida is quite capable of learning from its mistakes taking away critical lessons from Afghanistan, al-Zarqawi, but also later short-lived Islamic states such as Yemen and Mali (Thomas, 2016b). Although IS has been severely pushed back in Iraq and Syria, it can count on a higher number of foreign fighters and still wields considerable power. The future will show whether the added emphasis on local consensus and support from the population can be sustainable in the long-term. The past and the present offer some clues for the future. If one looks back at the earliest successful state building attempts, they appear closer to Jabhat al-Nuṣra's approach. The creation of Islam itself was done through a combined use of force and negotiation, just as JN is able to negotiate and cooperate with other rebel groups. In addition, the creation of the Saudi state only resulted in success after the recognition of its own borders. An overly international approach like IS only appears to attract foreign interventions while a slow long-term approach on the local scale remains under the radar. Looking at the present, today's constellation of the global Salafi-Jihadi movement already holds some clues for the future of Salafi-Jihadist state building attempts. In comparison to Azzam and bin Laden, al-Zawahiri seems more inclined towards a focus on the Near Enemy, although he has firmly adopted the perspective of global Jihad. From his communications in recent years, it is evident that he will always couple the local with an international campaign of terrorism. This is not only an obligation from an ideological point of view, but also organizational; al-Qaida needs conflict with the West to boost its reputation and resources (McCants, 2012). Although the Global Enemy will probably remain prominent for al-Qaida, at least in its rhetoric, the period after the Arab Uprisings has made clear that the local arena cannot be ignored by Salafi-Jihadists. It is in this arena that their eventual Islamic state will come to fruition and they have shown to be capable of adapting to these local conditions at least on the short-term in Mali, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria.

Conclusion

This article has traced the origin of the Islamic state-ideal of Salafi-Jihadists from the early Islamists like Rashid Rida, to Sayyid Qutb and al-Qaida until the present-day rivalry between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nuṣra. It has become clear that the Islamic state-ideal has always been present in ideology, but its role greatly changed due to the influence of practical experiences. Without the influence of repression, wars and invasions, failed attempts, and the Arab Uprisings among other things, Islamic state building would not have matured into what we see today in Iraq and Syria. The constant practical experiences informed the transformation of a basic ideological ideal –a state to unite all true Muslims under sharia- into a well-rounded political experiment at governance. The experience of IS shows that violence, power, and control are important elements for state building. Nevertheless, they are not the only requirements for a state. Jabhat al-Nuṣra proves that there is not one Salafi-Jihadist path towards state building. Different local situations and distinct lessons-learnt from past experiences result in different approaches towards state building. The future will show whether the emphasis on violence or on popular support proves more successful, but past experiences indicate that a focus on local consensus might be the more enduring model.

Further research is needed on the social implications of these Islamic state building attempts. Vast areas of Iraq have been under IS's control and large swathes of territory in Syria are still controlled by IS and Jabhat al-Nuṣra. Data from field research could corroborate the theory of this article about the importance of violence in the Salafi-Jihadist state building. Furthermore, such research could prove that an emphasis on local consensus leads to stronger support from the local population and in turn the durability of the state building attempt. Additionally, this article aims to inspire researchers to look beyond the surface and recognize that Salafi-Jihadist groups are diverse and capable of evolution and adaptation. Bringing more nuance to the debate on Salafi-Jihadism will result in a better understanding of the ideology that has cost so many their lives but also continues to attract thousands of foreign fighters worldwide. I also hope to inspire more research on the links between secular and religious state building attempts by armed groups, since both realms appear to be so closely connected.

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Appendix: Timeline

See following page

Timeline of movements

Creation group | Namechange | Event | Global event

1989
Al-Qaida
- Global/Afghanistan
- Osama Bin Laden

June 2001
Fusion with Islamic Jihad
= Qaedat al-Jihad
+ Al-Zawahiri

October 2004
Active in Iraq

May 2011
Death Bin Laden
New leader = Al-Zawahiri

January 2012
Jabhat al-Nusra
Syria -al-Julani

April 2013
Both IS & AQ claim ownership
JN is loyal to AQ

July 2016
Jabhat Fatah al-Sham
Independent from AQ

January 2017
Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

1999
Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad
Afghanistan- Al-Zarqawi

september 2001
9/11 + US invasion of Afghanistan

2002
Focus on Iraq

march 2003
US invasion of Iraq

October 2004
Al-Qaida in Iraq
Loyal to AQ

January 2006
Mujahedeen Shura Council

June 2006
Death al-Zarqawi
Islamic State of Iraq
Abu Omar al-Baghdadi
& al-Masri

May 2010
New leader:
Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

january 2011
Beginning Arab Uprisings

January 2012
Begin focus on Syria

April 2013
Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
Attempted merger Jabhat al-Nusra & ISI

June 2014
Islamic State
Proclamation of Caliphate

2014
US interventions in Syria and Iraq

december 2017
IS defeated in Iraq

SOURCE: OWN WORK