

Centre on
Religion &
Geopolitics

INSIDE THE JIHADI MIND

*Understanding Ideology
and Propaganda*

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TABLE of CONTENTS

Executive summary 4
Policy recommendations 6
Introduction 8
Framework for analysis 10

SYSTEM OF IDEAS

Values 15
Objectives 25
Conduct 33
Group Identity 39

SCRIPTURE and SCHOLARSHIP

How jihadi groups use the Quran
and the Hadith 49
How jihadi groups make use of /
reject scholarship 51

Methodology 56

Glossary 60
About the Authors 62
Acknowledgements 62

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONTEXT

The ideology of global extremism can only be countered if it is first understood. This combination of theology and political objectives needs to be uprooted through rigorous scrutiny, and sustained intellectual confrontation.

After the 9/11 attacks, Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda had approximately 300 militants. ISIS alone now has, at a low estimate, 31,000 fighters across Syria and Iraq. Understanding how ideology has driven this phenomenon is essential to containing and defeating violent extremism.

But violent ideologies do not operate in a vacuum. A fire requires oxygen to grow. A broader political culture overlaps significantly with some of the assumptions of the jihadi ideology, without necessarily being extreme or agreeing with its violence.

Within the last decade, polls have found that:

- Over half of Muslims surveyed in nine Muslim majority countries around the world believed that they would live to see the start of the apocalypse. Today, ISIS exploits this belief and fights to hasten the apocalypse.
- Over two thirds of the populations of three large Muslim-majority countries agreed with the need for a caliphate. Today, jihadis claim to deliver on this desire.
- At least 40 per cent of Sunnis in five Middle Eastern and North African countries did not recognise Shia as Muslims. Today, jihadis are killing Shia in their thousands.
- Three quarters of respondents in four large Muslim-majority countries agreed that there was a need to 'stand up to America and affirm the dignity of the Islamic people'. Today, jihadis fight the West and its allies to 'deliver' the 'Muslim world' from a 'Zionist-Shia-Crusader' conspiracy.

We know that this does not make for comfortable reading. But Muslims themselves suffer the most from jihadi violence. And unless we are honest about the nature and appeal of the jihadi ideology, we cannot uproot it.

The Centre on Religion & Geopolitics has analysed a cross-section of 114 propaganda sources ranging from April 2013 to summer 2015 from three Salafi-jihadi groups: ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

This report provides an evidence base for what is already assumed by many, that the ideology of Salafi-jihadism is a vital motivating force for extremist violence, and therefore must be countered in order to curb the threat.

AIM

To identify precisely what ideology is shared by the three groups, as revealed in their propaganda, in order to inform effective counter-narratives from mainstream Muslims, governments and civil society.

KEY FINDINGS

- There is a distinct difference between the ideology of Salafi-jihadism and the Islam practiced by the majority of the world's Muslims. The Salafi-jihadi ideology is built upon Islamic religious principles, which it distorts to produce a single-minded focus on violent jihad.
- The three groups share fundamentally similar ideologies, challenging the concept that "ISIS is more extreme than al-Qaeda".
- Ideological values, which form the moral basis of the groups' actions, are present in 80 per cent of all the propaganda sources; these include Islamic creedal values in 62 per cent, the values of honour and solidarity with the Muslim community in 68 per cent, and explicit references to the end of days in 42 per cent.
- The importance of *tawhid* (monotheism) is revealed in a number of themes throughout the propaganda, in different strands of the ideology: one God, one state, and one *ummah* (the global Islamic community). These themes appear in over 74 per cent of the propaganda.
- An emphasis on the nobility of jihad runs throughout the propaganda, often presenting

it in chivalric terms, with pictures of fighters on horseback, or references to Saladin. Altogether, such references appear in 71 per cent of the propaganda.

- The importance of honour, and the solidarity of the *ummah* is also central, appearing in 68 per cent of the propaganda. The virtue of martyrdom – common to many religions, but here applied deliberately to death in battle – forms a significant part of the value of honour, appearing explicitly in 32 per cent of the propaganda, and implicitly in 68 per cent.
- Altogether, justifications from the Quran, Hadith or from scholarship appear in 87 per cent of the propaganda. One ISIS statement contained 24 references to the Quran, making up 26 percent of the entire statement. Of these 24 references, 13 different surahs (chapters) were referenced.
- While Quranic justifications are usually presented without context, reinforcing the accusation that the groups ‘cherry pick’ passages that support their case, the ideology makes extensive use of scripture: half of the propaganda references the Quran, with 63 out of the 114 surahs referenced.
- Hadith justifications are used much less than Quranic justifications, appearing in only 22 per cent of the sample. The accusation that Salafi-jihadi groups pick Hadith that suit their vision may be bolstered by the ways in which they use them: authoritative Hadith are cited with the full details of their origins; the referencing of those of more doubtful provenance is much more vague.
- When the groups are criticised for their actions by rival Salafi-jihadi groups or others, the Quran and the Hadith are the first reference points that are used for the rebuttal. Hadith in particular are used in bulk when groups are attacked by other followers of the ideology.
- Nevertheless, the vaunted Salafi rejection of much Islamic scholarship as ‘innovation’ (ISIS refers to established scholars as “donkeys of knowledge”) is belied by references throughout the propaganda to 45 different scholars from all the major schools of jurisprudence apart from the Hanafi school.

The ideological themes presented above appear throughout the propaganda, with a clear internal logic, although its application is often inconsistent. The themes – whether found explicitly or by implication –

form a hierarchy, with the ideological values providing a basis for groups’ objectives and ideal conduct, and thus their group identity. The themes come together to form a coherent ideology, representative of Salafi-jihadism.

It is this ideology that drives the groups’ behaviour. When they attack one another, it is not ideological differences that drives the conflict, but differing narratives: the ways in which they apply their ideology to reality. The Salafi-jihadi movement will not be defeated by focusing on these narratives: it will only be defeated if we understand and engage the ideology. This report works to provide that understanding through detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis.

DATA FINDINGS (EXPLICIT REFERENCES ONLY)

All percentages are of total sources (these themes overlap and should not add up to 100%).

Category	
Values (80%)	Creedal values (62%) Honour and solidarity (68%) End of days (42%)
Objectives (66%)	Establishing the caliphate (38%) The enemy (66%) End of humiliation (34%)
Conduct (82%)	Nobility of jihad (71%) Disgrace of enemies (23%) Prophetic methodology (14%)
Group Identity (89%)	The <i>ummah</i> (66%) Allies of Allah (48%) Takfir/sectarianism (24%) The underdog (22%)
Quotations of Scripture/Scholarship (87%)	Hadith (22%) Quran (50%) Scholarship (26%)

TABLE 1.1: Data Findings

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of our research, we recommend:

1. UNDERSTAND AND TARGET THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE JIHADI IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The jihadis' greatest tool is their simplistic and clear framework for Islamic values and principles that is the foundation of their ideology. This makes jihadis particularly susceptible to the use of religious texts to condemn their actions. Jihadi groups thrive on simplicity: the more that they are forced to defend their interpretation of Islamic values, the harder it will be to maintain that simplicity.

Counter-narratives should:

- Expose the weaknesses and contradictions inherent in their use of Islamic values, for example their erratic use of the concepts of *iman* and *ihsan*.
- Target the point at which jihadi propaganda leans upon Islamic creedal values, in order to undermine the whole ideology.
- Exploit the rivalries between Salafi-jihadi groups, often the most adept at identifying gaps between ideology and actions. These include Jabhat al-Nusra's claims that ISIS represents the 'sword' rather than 'shield' of the *ummah*, and ISIS' insistence that Jabhat al-Nusra has contradictory attitudes towards minorities, such as the Druze.

2. CREATE A SIMPLE ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE APPLICATION OF ISLAMIC VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

The Salafi-jihadi ideology claims to provide answers based on Islamic values. These must be met by alternative answers based on Islamic values. An alternative that rests solely on emphasising values such as democracy, without robust and simple theological backing that addresses concepts such as politicised *tawhid* and *shirk*, will not comprehensively address the jihadi lure. The recourse to religious principles gives jihadi ideology its simplicity and strength, so the response needs to draw authoritatively on mainstream Islamic theology and provide alternative options. But quickly, simply and through channels that today's generation understands.

Counter-narratives should:

- Avoid denigrating or ignoring Islamic values, both of which feed jihadi narratives.
- Simply and robustly base all alternative frameworks in Islamic theology, recognising the powerful desire for honour and solidarity with the oppressed.
- Quote from scripture freely and simply to oppose the tenets of the ideology, and provide similarly emphatic and robust explanations as those given by jihadi preachers.

Although more conservative religious views may offend liberal sensibilities, governments and the private sector must fund a range of initiatives by credible Islamic scholars – such as Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayah's Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies. Many more such public projects are needed across Muslim communities globally.

Religious leaders should:

- Work to disrupt the influence of religious literalism, by promoting the application of interpretations such as *maqasid al-shariah* (principles of Sharia) that allow for alternative forms of government to the caliphate.
- Work to disrupt the promotion of a utopian Islamic State from political Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami.
- Support and promote models of government in Muslim majority countries that work against extremism, such as the developing democracy in Tunisia.

3. REFORM THE ROLE OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS, ROLE MODELS AND FUNDERS IN INOCULATING AGAINST EXTREMISM

Sixty two per cent of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims are under 30, and 60 per cent of the population of the Middle East is under 25. Celebrities, sportspeople and musicians represent key influencers who are not being effectively utilised in efforts to combat extremism. Counter-narratives must embrace the power of popular culture as well as the authority of religious voices to succeed. Meanwhile, many disenfranchised

returning fighters have an important role to play in debunking the legitimacy of this ideology.

Civil society needs to:

- Leverage slogans, grassroots campaigns and viral media to take away the ‘cool effect’ some jihadi groups work to cultivate.
- Promote initiatives such as the 2006 *Yeh Hum Naheen* (‘this is not us’) campaign in Pakistan, which mobilised famous musicians to distance mainstream Islam from extremism, and which 63 million joined and supported.
- Highlight the public accounts of those who have returned from fighting with these groups in order to discredit the Salafi-jihadi ideology. Many who have joined jihadi groups have captured the public imagination; their experiences of the ideology in action must be more effectively amplified.
- Ensure that counter-narrative responses are not exclusively tailored to young men, in an effort to address the growing phenomenon of women and families travelling as ‘migrants’ to jihadi-controlled territory.

Salafi publishing houses in the Gulf have vast amounts of money and a wide dissemination. However, few have reviewed their literature, particularly that which emphasises the literal necessity of *tawhid al-hakimiyyah* (God’s government), which is spread into education systems around the world.

Governments should:

- Make applying pressure to these groups a key plank of their bilateral meetings with countries of concern, encouraging and incentivising changes to syllabi and revision of textbooks.
- Political leaders must not shy away from identifying ideology and warped understanding of theology as a cause of modern terrorism. The King of Jordan and British Prime Minister David Cameron have led the way.

This battle of ideas will require substantial funding:

- Funding must become more widespread from high net worth individuals and family foundations in the Middle East and Asia, keen to invest in an interpretation of Islam rooted in mainstream religious principles.
- Initiatives such as the Global Community

Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) must be supported, which work to identify and provide private and public funding to high-impact grassroots initiatives working in communities at risk of extremism.

- Institutional donors also have an important role to play, including the UN, World Bank, national aid agencies, and philanthropic bodies such as the Gates Foundation.

4. UNDERMINE THE CERTAINTY THE SALAFI-JIHADI IDEOLOGY INCULCATES, BY OFFERING EASY ACCESS TO PROFOUND ANSWERS

Salafi-jihadi groups depend upon fostering certainty in their followers about the veracity of their outlook through the creation of simple ‘us and them’ narratives. Attacks from the outside often reinforce this binary distinction. Sowing the seeds of doubt is essential to undermining its power and thereby derailing violence.

These alternative narratives should also compete with one another to enable the development of stronger, more powerful messages. The market is too small and full of the same voices. Particularly weak in this regard are overt government responses, which are at best mocked and at worse used by jihadis to back up their own messages.

Space and support must be given to grassroots Muslim responses that directly challenge the Salafi-jihadi ideological framework and provide a positive alternative that is equally forthright in its claims to truthfulness.

Technology companies can help in this regard:

- Rather than simply removing extremist content, which can play into jihadis’ binary depiction of ‘unbelievers’ censoring the sole ‘truth’, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Google could use expert guidance to promote credible religious sharable material that rebuts the jihadi message.
- Search engines, social media, and video sharing websites could use algorithms and positive flagging systems to ensure this content is as visible as possible, as well as providing warnings that certain search terms might lead to extremist material.

INTRODUCTION

When Seifeddine Rezgui Yacoubi pulled the trigger on 38 tourists at a beach resort in Tunisia on 26 June 2015, he did so believing he was not a murderer, but a martyr. He was sure that the cause that they, and he, died for was worthwhile. The attack, like the Paris attacks in January 2015 or the massacre of 1,700 Shia soldiers in Iraq in June 2014, was not the irrational act of a blood-crazed member of a death cult. It was the rational consequence of belief in an ideology that can be found in incidents from Fort Hood in Texas, through Europe, Africa and the Middle East, to Bali.

The past two decades have generated a wealth of research into jihadi propaganda, as groups responsible for brutal violence in the name of Islam, although decidedly separated from the religious mainstream, spread across many countries. But despite the abundance of material, the vast majority has focused on the ‘what’ and the ‘how’, and very little on the ‘why’. Jihadi propaganda has two strands: the narrative and the ideological. The ideology is a core system of religious and political beliefs, largely assumed by its adherents; the narrative is the application of those beliefs to the current situation, viewed through a prism of grievance. It is analysis of the narrative that leads to the common suggestion that “ISIS is more extreme than al-Qaeda”. Analysis of the ideology suggests that the groups are in fact more or less equally ‘extreme’, but tactically distinct.

Counter-narratives and attempts to tackle extremism are bound to fail if they do not work from the ideology. Narratives are highly adaptable, and will respond to counter-narratives swiftly. Ideologies are less flexible, but cannot be tackled unless the way that they fit together, and the ways in which they are applied, are understood. It is to that understanding that this research seeks to contribute.

The vast quantity of English and Arabic language propaganda produced in recent years, combined with its ease of dissemination over the internet, has made the spread of extremist ideologies easier than ever. But it has also provided those who seek to understand, and ultimately undermine, those ideologies with a treasure trove of material to analyse. Our research has taken a selection of propaganda from three groups: the Syrian

and Iraqi part of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), Jabhat al-Nusra (Syria’s al-Qaeda affiliate), and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP, the group’s Yemeni affiliate).

Ranging from April 2013 (when ISIS entered Syria) to the summer of 2015, we have taken 114 sources that we believe represents a cross-section of the propaganda produced by all three groups. With the help of qualitative analysis software, we analysed that material to discover what themes predominated.

There were limitations on our research: we only examined three groups, which have shared histories; we only covered material spanning two years; and the ideology presented in propaganda is clearly targeted at an external audience. Nevertheless, a clear, coherent and interconnected ideology emerged.

Analysing the overwhelmingly qualitative phenomenon of ideology in a quantitative fashion represents a significant methodological challenge. However, we have sought to contextualise our findings by examining both explicit and implicit aspects of the ideology thrown up in the research. This has required bringing to bear an understanding of Islamic religious principles, including how jihadi ideology relates to, and crucially differs from, mainstream Islamic thought.

WHY DID WE CHOOSE THE THREE GROUPS?

Our three groups were chosen because they were all Arabic speaking with a good quantity of English-language propaganda; they all come from the Salafi-jihadi movement; and there has been a good amount of heated rhetoric flying between them. We were keen that both al-Qaeda and ISIS should be recognised in our sample, as the ‘extremism’ of the two is so often compared. At first sight, the aims of the three groups are rather different: ISIS claims to have established the caliphate, and seeks to expand its territory until it encompasses the entire ‘Muslim world’ (and more); Jabhat al-Nusra (which was once an offshoot of ISIS) has limited immediate ambitions, seeking only to establish an Islamic state in Syria (though it ultimately also wants to create a caliphate). Al-Qaeda in the Arabian

Peninsula, in contrast, has only shown an intermittent interest in holding territory (as of writing, AQAP holds the Yemeni port city of Mukallah), and has seemed more focused on targeting the West (which, until ISIS emerged into international consciousness, regarded the group as the most dangerous in the world). All three groups are also representative of ‘global jihadism’, subtly ideologically distinct to the more ‘nationalistic’ version of the movement, represented by groups such as the Taliban.

Given its shocking brutality and prominence in global media, many recent analyses of jihadi propaganda have focused exclusively on the considerable output of ISIS. Though these efforts have been important in curbing the immediate recruitment threat posed by the group, this report aims to provide a framework of jihadism broad enough to provide a useful criteria for the ideology that goes beyond the movement’s latest dominant force.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE IDEOLOGY AND THE NARRATIVE

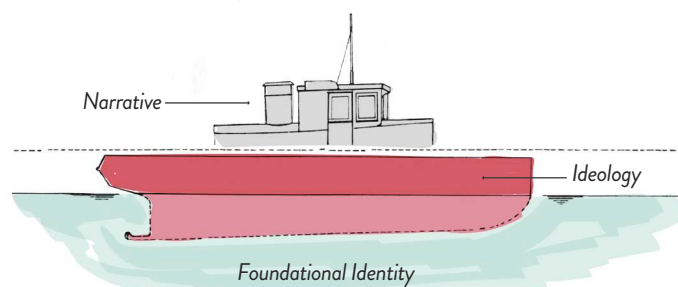
One of the greatest challenges to distilling a distinct ideology from the propaganda available is the way that it combines with narrative to form a whole that is relevant to its intended audience in the context of local and global events. In this sense, the narrative framework provides a superstructure to the propaganda: integral to a functioning whole, but useless without an underlying ideology. The two together form a tailored balance of a group’s ideological tenets with a narration that keeps the ideology alive and relevant.

As such, an attack on the narrative alone, even if successful, is unlikely to undermine a movement for long. A successful attack must be on the ideology itself. If the ideology is undermined, groups will find it much harder to recover.

It is important to note, however, that ideologies require a deeper identity in order to survive. This is known as the ‘foundational identity’: the identity that has the first call on the individual, before their association with the ideology. The Salafi-jihadi ideology’s foundational identity is Islam, although its literalist interpretation is far detached from the religious mainstream. As a foundational identity, Islam equally (and more prominently) supports a vast array

of peaceful ideologies. These ideologies do not replace Islam in their adherents’ identities, but they control and organise their position on certain subjects, and create a belief system that helps to form and guide their worldview. This distinction is crucial in ensuring that counter-narratives are targeted correctly. It is Islamic ideologies that shape and direct the application of Islamic faith; Islam does not direct the formation of ideologies.

FIGURE 1.1
The Ship of Ideology in the Ocean of Identity



In the case of Salafi-jihadism, the ideology monopolises the follower’s Islamic faith. As we show in our research, a central aspect of the ideology is how restrictive it is in recognising that others who disagree with it may still be adherents of Islam, in the process declaring the vast majority of the world’s Muslims apostate.

Understanding the differences between narrative, ideology and foundational identity is important to identifying the shared facets of different groups. Even among the three groups we researched, the regular spats and criticisms between them demonstrate how irregular and competitive the Salafi-jihadi movement has become. But to focus too much on this is to miss the reliance of these spats on a narrative discourse, not an ideological one. For example, Jabhat al-Nusra agrees with ISIS on the *need* for a Caliphate, but disagrees that ISIS has created a legitimate one.

This research seeks to engage with the shared ideology of three prominent Salafi-jihadi groups. We have not stripped out the narrative themes that recur through the propaganda entirely, but we have sought to show how they are applied to the ideological themes, and how, while the ideology may be shared, the narrative allows the groups to fight one another. The narrative will change as the local and global situation changes; while the ideology will also change over time, it will be a much slower process. Unless this ideology is tackled, counter-extremism strategies are likely to fail.

FRAMEWORK *for* ANALYSIS

Ideologies are not monolithic. While the Salafi-jihadi ideology is highly interconnected, it is helpful to think of it as a 'system of beliefs'. These beliefs address different areas that the ideology can be applied to, and as a whole come together to form the essence of Salafi-jihadi ideology.

Our research placed the ideological themes that we found in four classes. Within each class, themes were arranged according to their focus. This meant that while, for example, explicit references to the apocalypse were limited, we were able to class references that indicated a belief in the end of days together.

VALUES

These form the moral basis of the group, justifying, and to some extent dictating conduct and objectives, and providing a nexus around which group identity can form.

Creedal Values: These are explicitly theological principles drawn from the foundational identity of Islam, and applied to the purpose of jihad.

Honour and Solidarity: These are themes that pertain to the driving motivations of individuals and groups.

The End of Days: These are themes that pertain to the impending battles of the end times.

OBJECTIVES

These are what the group strives to achieve, prioritised according to its values, and guiding the group's conduct.

Caliphate: These are themes that relate to a belief in the desirability or inevitability of a universal Islamic state.

Near/Far Enemy: These are themes that relate to the appropriate targets for jihad.

End of 'Humiliation': These are themes that relate to a perceived 'humiliation' of the global Muslim community, with a view to its end.

CONDUCT

This dictates what the group values in its conduct, and what is permissible or necessary to achieve the objectives.

Jihad as an Ideal: While all the themes relate in some way to jihad, these themes relate to the appropriate conduct of jihad corporately and individually.

Prophetic Methodology: These themes relate to basing the actions of the group and its members on its literalistic reading of those of the Prophet, laying claim to be his successors.

Disgrace of the Enemy: These themes relate to the desired outcome of jihad, to bring disgrace to the enemies of the group, and in its mind, the enemies of its religion.

GROUP IDENTITY

This is what defines the extent of the group, including who is in and who is out, according to the characteristics, formed by the values and conduct, that set its members apart.

The Ummah: These themes relate to the group's membership and championing of the 'global Muslim community' – and who is in that community.

Takfir/Sectarianism: These themes relate to accusations of apostasy made about another Muslim.

Allies of Allah: These themes relate to how those fighting for God can only succeed with His help, which is given to the group.

Underdogs: These themes relate to how the group sees itself, and those fighting for the Ummah, as underdogs.

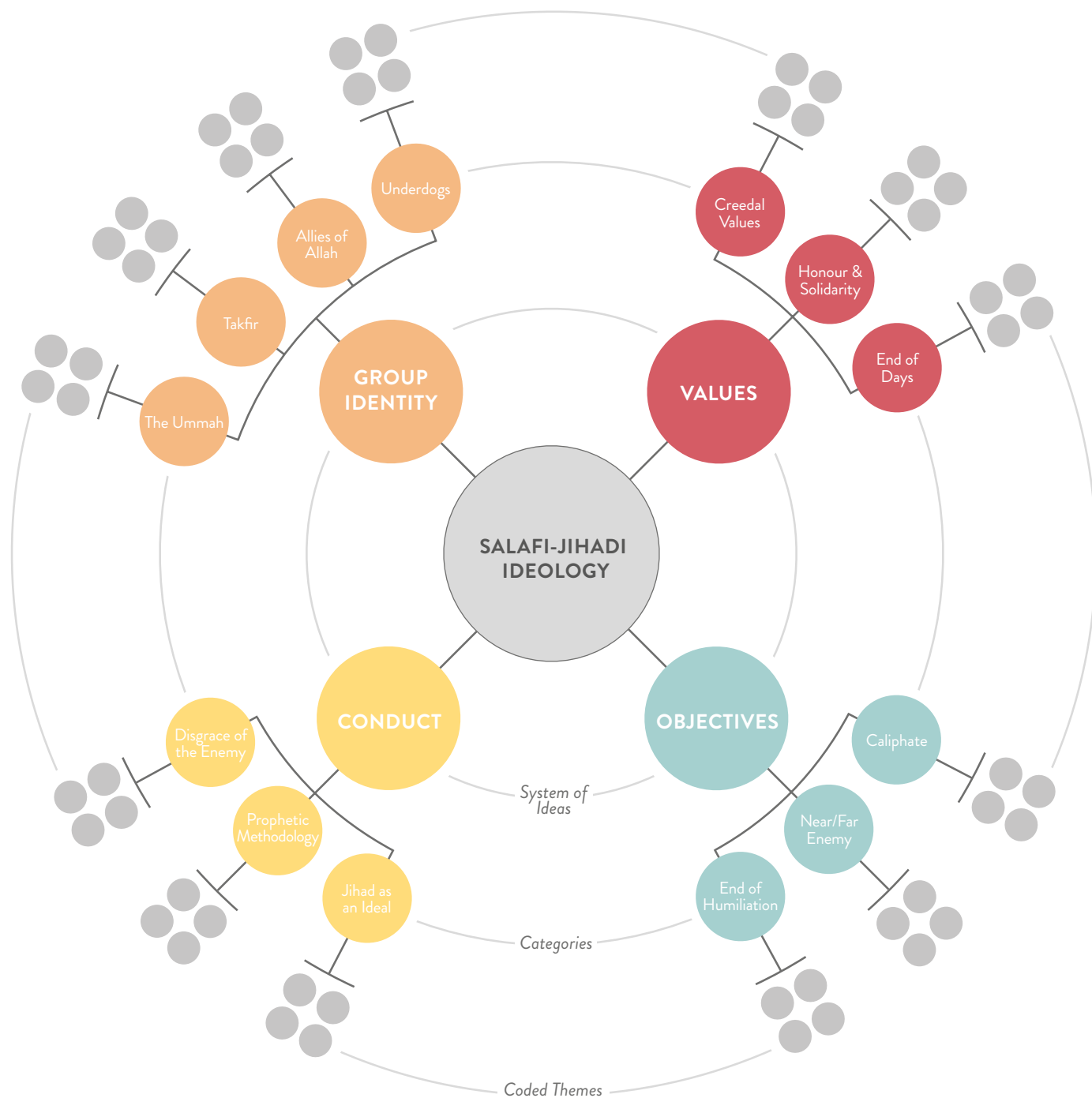


FIGURE 1.2 Framework for Analysis

Values

Of all the ideological tenets identified in our research, values appear dominant across the sample, indicating the foundational importance values and principles play in shaping jihadi ideology. Values form the moral basis of a group, justifying, and to an extent dictating its conduct and objectives, thereby providing a nexus around which group identity can be formed.

The foundational nature of values to the structure of all three jihadi groups is an indication that the global Salafi-jihadi movement is driven more by ideology than violence. The comprehensive nature of this ideology is further revealed in the ways in which the themes interact, both within their broader categories and between them. The values in turn can be roughly divided into three sub-categories; creedal values, honour and solidarity, and the end times.

CREEDAL VALUES

To any religious group, creed is the underlying doctrine that identifies the religion's extent. Salafi-jihadi groups are no exception, and take great pains to establish their adherence to Islamic creedal values, including belief in the one God (*tawhid*), faith, and the good works that stem from it. Where Salafi-jihadi groups differ from the vast majority of Muslims is in the narrow definition they give to these, and their rejection of those who disagree.

The tactics and barbaric violence associated with the global jihadi movement have prompted many to deny that jihadi groups have anything to do with Islam. While branding the movement as a series of 'death cults' expresses the need to distinguish between Islam and its politicised fringe, the total dismissal of the (puritanical) Islamic identity of the groups does not stand up to scrutiny and is not reflected in the findings of this research.

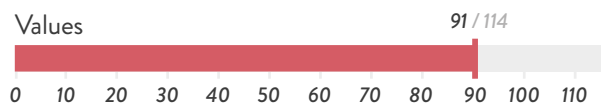
The ideology of all three groups depends upon a reading of the religion of Islam. This is not to say that Islam naturally propagates violence, but simply that without an Islamic foundation, the Salafi-jihadi ideology would

FIGURE 2.1

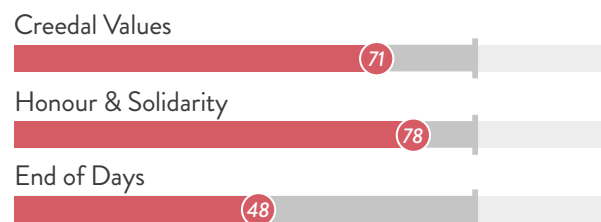
Thematic breakdown for Values

By number of sources in which themes appear explicitly

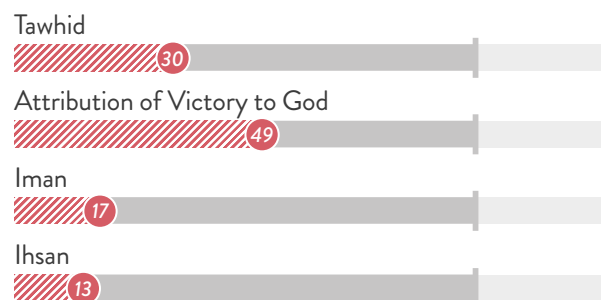
OVERALL



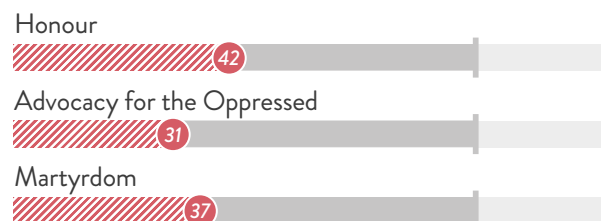
VALUES CATEGORIES



CREEDAL VALUES THEMES



HONOUR & SOLIDARITY THEMES



END OF DAYS THEMES



DEFINITIONS:

CODED THEMES for VALUES

CREEDAL VALUES

Tawhid: The fundamental Islamic tenet of the unity of God. The opposite of shirk, it refers to an unequivocal belief in a single God, omnipotent and without partners. The jihadi concept is an extreme interpretation of a belief generally held by the Abrahamic faiths.

Iman: Conscious belief in the metaphysical aspects of Islam based on a sound, reasoned understanding of the religion. In simple terms, it refers to the belief in the six articles of faith: belief in God, the Prophets, angels, scripture, predestination and the afterlife.

Ihsan: The physical demonstration and manifestation of a Muslim's faith, encompassing worship and, importantly, doing good as an expression of worship. This includes adopting a sense of social responsibility. It is considered the highest level of worship to Allah after submission (Islam) and belief (Iman). It is central to Sufism.

Attribution of Victory to God: A consequence of the emphasis on *tawhid*, and God's control over history, this theme is vividly

shown by the way that jihadis respond to battlefield victories through exclamations of 'God is Great'.

HONOUR & SOLIDARITY

Honour: Both honour for the individual, and corporate honour for the *ummah*, this theme is tied very closely to the way members of the group should conduct themselves. For Salafi-jihadis, honour is given by God as a reward for jihad.

Advocacy for the Oppressed: This theme appeals to a chivalric ideal, but also lends strength to the groups' propaganda by linking their local fights to the global situation, with the 'oppressed' generally referring to Muslims as a whole.

Martyrdom: The action of willingly sacrificing one's life in pursuit of a cause. In jihadi literature the Arabic term for martyr is often not translated into English but instead will be seen in the text as *shahid* or the plural *shuhada* (lit. witness).

END OF DAYS

Apocalypse: Belief in the end of the world and the Day of Judgement, where the life of

every person will be assessed to decide whether they go to paradise or hell, is one of the six articles of Islamic faith. Contextualising its struggle as fighting the battles of the end of days, the entire jihadi ideology relies on the imminence of the apocalypse for its coherence.

Patience: References to suffering and setbacks are common in jihadi propaganda, together with the narrative that as all things are in God's hands, such setbacks must be borne with patience.

Predestination: Denoting God's control over the course of history, a belief in the predestination of all events is a prerequisite to belief in any prophecies in the Quran or the Hadith.

Truth over Falsehood / Good over Evil: Underpinning the many binary themes found in the propaganda, this inevitable victory of the good bolsters the certainty of the ideology by allowing for no middle ground, with the binary necessitating that opponents are followers of evil.

collapse. This demonstrates the necessity of engaging with the ideology in religious terms. The ideology interprets key tenets of the faith, albeit with a focus on violent action, in a way that clearly appeals to a minority within Muslim communities across the world. In all, 62 per cent of all the propaganda refers to themes that we have defined as 'creedal values'.

The first preoccupation of these groups' religious principles is the exclusive contrast between *tawhid* and *shirk* (polytheism). Monotheism is central to Judaism and Christianity as well as mainstream Islam, but in the Salafi-jihadi context this concept is taken to an extreme. By implication in the propaganda, where there is a reference to *shirk*, there is a focus on *tawhid*. Where

tawhid is proclaimed, *shirk* must be absent; where *shirk* is present, *tawhid* must be enforced.

An emphasis on *tawhid* also serves a narrative purpose: it identifies the enemy, by contrasting true Islam with *jahilliya* (ignorance).

But the vast majority of references to *tawhid* are in the context of inspiring jihad, in a pattern that is repeated through much of the ideology. As the ideology explicitly focuses on jihad, this should not be surprising, but it does show that such a focus on religious purity is not so much about piety and true religion for its own sake, as to further the broader aims of the movement.

The assumption of *tawhid* is central, with direct and indirect references appearing in 74 per cent of the propaganda. Explicit references to the theme appear in 26 per cent of the written sources. As a creedal value, *tawhid* is a requirement for many of the other themes found in the propaganda, including God's control over events.

These implicit references include the dominance of pictures of jihadi fighters with one finger pointing upwards: symbolising *tawhid*. As a coherent theme, it runs through every other ideological category. The caliphate represents the unity of God's government (*tawhid al-hakimiyyah*), the imitation of the practice of the Prophet emphasises *tawhid*, and the identification of the group with the *ummah* brings it all together: one God, one Islamic government, one Muslim nation.

The most explicitly dominant theme of all the values is the **attribution of victories to God**. Even more than *tawhid*, this is highly focused on jihad. The attribution of victory to God appears in 43 per cent of the sources that we examined, with a fairly even distribution between the propaganda of ISIS, AQAP and Jabhat al-Nusra.

In some respects, this fits closely with the narrative 'pull factor' of the inevitability of victory (on the basis that no one wants to join a losing struggle). Nevertheless, it belongs with the other creedal values, being a consequence of the emphasis on *tawhid* (referring not only to the unity of God, but also to His omnipotence), and

God's control over history (predestination, explored further on page 21). Such a connection is shown again by the way that jihadis respond to battlefield victories in their visual propaganda: through exclamations of 'God is Great' and pictures of jihadis with their forefinger in the air.



Both of these connections are shown particularly clearly by ISIS in an article in the ninth edition of its English-language propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, entitled 'And Allah is the Best of Plotters'.

The article takes exception to the prevalence of conspiracy theorists amongst jihadi supporters, including that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by the West to justify attacks on the 'Muslim world'. The article protested that believing such a conspiracy theory was tantamount to *shirk*, because such an attack could only have been carried out with the aid of God.

Particularly prominent in attributing victories to God are nasheeds (anthems), used by jihadis as motivational songs, with 67 per cent of the nasheeds that we examined falling into this category. This reflects the purpose of nasheeds within the propaganda: they are designed to encourage and inspire followers and supporters, not necessarily to draw new recruits to the cause. As poetry, they are designed to speak more to the heart than the head, and to inspire a sense of being engaged in some great work.

*"A life of humiliation no, I am not content with it.
But love of death in glory is an aspiration.
For no, by God, I do not fear the fate of death.
For the slave has no place in the material world.
And indeed death is in the path of Jihad,
Verily God's favour is bestowed on whomsoever He wills.
Oh path of jihad, arise!
Verily I do not become tired or sleep for love of you.
I will remain loyal to the pledge,
Whatever setbacks I have suffered from creation,
or I will be blamed.
And whenever I will afflict the enemies with defeat,
I will remain steadfast whatever they let loose.
For no, by God, there is nothing better in life.
In the walls do free men gather.
So be patient, servants of God.*

***For the calls of the nights are your arrows.
You have in the land of al-Sham an army like lions.
And an army in Iraq having an outburst.
The victory of God is coming, not impossible,
And the soldiers of God have established [it] for
religion". (ISIS)***¹

The attribution of victory to God is also important for establishing group identity: divine blessing on the group's activities can be demonstrated through its victories, helping to distinguish the group from others. While ISIS, AQAP and Jabhat al-Nusra all share this ideological tenet, they are able even to use it against each other: if one is defeated at the hands of another, the victor can attribute its victory to God as evidence that the rival group does not have this support.

"Just days after the successful Ariha and Hanbal operations in Idlib, Mujahideen and rebel held positions in Reef Halab were attacked by the Islamic State (IS) group....Allah is sufficient for us and he is a good protector from them and what they are doing". (JABHAT AL-NUSRA)²

Crucial to gaining God's support are *iman* and *ihsan*. Similarly to the doctrine of *tawhid*, *iman* and *ihsan* are fundamental and mainstream Muslim values. The three of them together represent three fundamental criteria of a Muslim: submission to the will of the one God, belief in the central aspects of the faith, and the performance of good deeds, or actions that demonstrate one's adherence to the faith. The presence of these aspects are convincing evidence that the ideologies of these groups are based on faith. Together, references to *iman* and *ihsan* appear in 21 per cent of the propaganda of the three groups.

References to *iman* appear in 15 per cent of the propaganda we examined, of which 59 per cent were in ISIS propaganda, 29 per cent in AQAP material, and 12 per cent in Jabhat al-Nusra sources. The framing of *iman* allies with an Islamist emphasis on *yaqeen*, or certainty of one's course. The group's application of *iman* is entirely focused on jihad, with the implication

that only those prepared to join the cause have true *iman*. Despite this common focus, the term is never defined precisely by any of the groups. The focus on jihad, together with a rather loose definition is revealed in quotes from the groups:

"He was devoted to perform the Imān obligation of fighting evil in the world..." (AQAP)³

"And if your Imān has become weak... and you have left of and abstained from jihād..." (ISIS)⁴

Iman tends to run hand in hand with *ihsan* throughout the propaganda, generally in the context of translating *iman* into actions, which in turn means that it is very closely tied to jihad by all three groups. References to *ihsan* appear in 11 per cent of the sample, again with ISIS dominant (54 per cent of references), followed by Jabhat al-Nusra (31 per cent), and then AQAP (15 per cent). As with *iman*, it is not used systematically or precisely by any of the groups. One such example comes in an article in the tenth issue of Dabiq, which deals with the duty of Muslims to their parents. Obedience to one's parents is regarded as good *ihsan*, but only insofar as it does not prevent one from joining the jihad.⁵

All of these creedal values are vital for the ideology as a whole to survive. Unless the groups can claim to represent Islamic orthodoxy, their pool of potential recruits will empty. This means that it is in their interpretation of creedal values that such groups may be vulnerable: the ways in which such values are understood or applied are erratic and frequently sloppy, besides being wholly focused on jihad. Counter-narratives should emphasise their much wider application, disseminating a rigorous understanding that can be clearly grasped.

HONOUR AND SOLIDARITY

The focus on jihad among the religious principles is in part because of its placement as the greatest action that a Muslim can carry out in response to their

1 'I am not content with a life of humiliation', ISIS Nasheed, Ajnad Media, October 2014.

2 Al-Risalah, 'Halab Under Fire', Issue 1, July 2015, pp. 31-32.

3 Abdulilah Shaye, 'City Wolves', Inspire, Issue 12, pp.30-31.

4 Statement by al-Adnani, ISIS spokesman, titled 'Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah', 23 June 2015.

5 'Tawhid and our duty to our parents', Dabiq, Issue 10, pp.14-17.

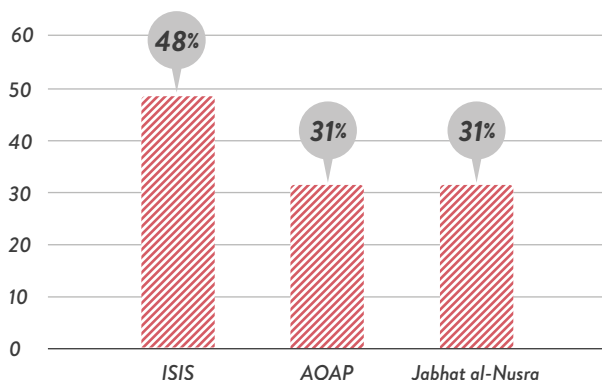
faith. But this in turn relates to fairly basic appeals to a chivalric ideal, in which honour, advocacy for the oppressed, and the chance to die for the cause are central. While such motivations can likewise be found in many movements' ideologies, within jihadi ideology they are derived from the creedal values. Altogether, themes related to honour and solidarity appear in 68 per cent of the propaganda.

The central placement of **honour** in jihadi propaganda – both honour for the individual, and corporate honour for the *ummah* – ties very closely in to the way in which members of the group should conduct themselves. This translates chivalric values (honour, service to the cause, and the embrace of death) into chivalric conduct (see page 33). In this respect, it also demonstrates an emphasis on imitating the ways of the Prophet, as understood by the groups (this is explored further on page 35). Its importance is indicated by its prominence in the propaganda: it featured in 37 per cent of the sources we examined.

FIGURE 2.2

Presence of *Honour* in propaganda

Percentage of group's sources referencing theme



*“...the Islamic State has known the path of honor [sic], the path of our Prophet...” (ISIS)*⁶

ISIS places a somewhat greater emphasis on honour (48 per cent of its sources) than AQAP or Jabhat al-Nusra (both on 31 per cent), possibly because of ISIS' focus on securing honour by migrating to its caliphate, and the consequent dishonour of those who do not. Nevertheless, for all three groups, the propagan-

da indicates that honour is given by God as a reward for jihad.

*“When Muslims return to their religion, they live in peace, security, honor [sic], and glory. And this will not be achieved except by those ‘missiles’: sacrifice, generosity, endeavor [sic] and Jihad...” (AQAP)*⁷

*“...support the people of Sham [Greater Syria] against the new crusade, and defend the honor [sic] of their sons, the Mujahideen”. (JABHAT AL-NUSRA)*⁸

Closely associated with the attainment of honour as a reason for jihad is **advocacy for the oppressed**, which appears in 27 per cent of the material examined. As with honour, this appeals to a chivalric ideal, but also lends strength to the groups' propaganda by linking their local fights to the global situation.

In general, the 'oppressed' refers to Muslims as a whole, and so the ideological theme is connected to the establishment of a group identity as a part of the *ummah*. This is also crucial for attracting support and recruits from abroad.⁹

While this theme bears a close relation to that of defensive jihad (see page 35), its ideological purpose as a value comes because the propaganda presents its respective groups as the ones who will end the oppression. As such, it is a key plank in what justifies the group's actions and validates its existence, as well as determining conduct.

The central value most directly tied to jihad as physical warfare is that of **martyrdom**. As a theme, it runs extremely strongly through jihadi propaganda, both official and unofficial, from the three groups examined here and beyond. It is tied intrinsically to honour, as to be martyred *fi sabilillah* (while on the path of God) is considered to be the ultimate honour. Indeed, many

6 Statement by al-Adnani, 'O Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah', 23 June 2015.

7 Inspire, 'I am confused', Issue 13 (Winter 2014), p.37.

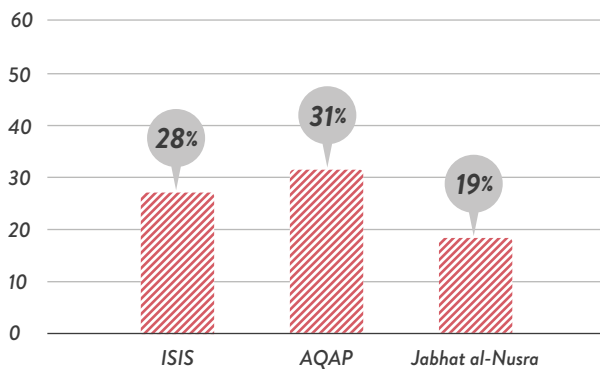
8 Statement by Jabhat al-Nusra leader, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, 'For the People of Integrity, Sacrifice is Easy', 28 September 2014.

9 Western jihadis often give Western attacks on 'Muslim lands' as reasons for joining jihadi groups or for attacking their home countries.

FIGURE 2.3

Presence of Advocacy of the Oppressed in propaganda

Percentage of group's sources referencing theme



western fighters travelling to join the groups will talk of their desire to be martyred.

Of the sources that we examined, 32 per cent explicitly reference martyrdom, with all three groups showing approximately the same focus. Six per cent of sources also refer specifically to the afterlife, which appears exclusively in relation to martyrdom in the propaganda. However, when other themes including the value of self-sacrifice and the honour of those killed in battle are taken into account, references appear in 68 per cent of the propaganda.

CASE STUDY

MARTYRDOM VS. SUICIDE

Suicide bombings are a controversial tactic for jihadi groups that require precise justification in the propaganda. Consequently, the term 'suicide' is never used, but rather has typically been replaced with the more noble association, 'martyrdom seeker'. However, more recently, a further nuance has been added that distinguishes an act of suicide from an act of bravery and honour. The new term is 'Inghamaasi' and is featured in ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and AQAP material. The term is a relatively new application within jihadi propaganda and appears to have sprung from within the Syrian battlefield, and spread to Yemen. It does not have a direct translation into English when placed in this context, but is applied in the context of martyrdom. Jabhat al-Nusra has begun regularly referring to its 'martyrs' on social media as 'Inghamaasi martyrdom seekers'. However, the word has been

generally applied as an antonym to 'Intihani', meaning 'suicidal.'

In efforts to rebuke criticisms that suicide missions do not constitute true martyrdom, AQAP issued an article titled 'The Virtues of Inghamaasi' in the 13th issue of Inspire. In the article, the writer examines the military behaviour of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad and through anecdotal evidence from various Hadith and references within the Quran, concluding that a Muslim is not only permitted to, but rewarded for, 'throwing himself into the enemy's army alone....even if he knows that he would be killed.' The introduction of the term Inghamaasi (broadly meaning to submerge, or to go deep into something) is an effort to reclaim the negative connotations of suicide in this context and replace it with attributes of honour and bravery that allude to a sense of selflessness, thereby making it permissible and honourable:

"Abu Hāmid Al-Ghazālī said in the Ihyā: There is no difference in opinion that an individual Muslim can attack the ranks of the nonbelievers and fight them alone, even if he knows that he would be killed. And just as it is allowed for him to fight the nonbelievers until he is killed, it is also allowed to do that in enjoining good and forbidding evil. But if he knows that his action won't harm the enemy, such as a blind or incapacitated man throwing himself into the enemy, that is prohibited. It is allowed for him to commit such an action when he is sure that he won't be killed until he himself kills; or he realizes that his action would weaken the hearts of the nonbelievers by showing them Muslim courage, and proving to them Muslims have no concern for life and that they love martyrdom in the Sake of Allāh. That would weaken them". (Inspire, 'The Virtues of Inghamaasi', Issue 13, Winter 2014, pp. 42-45).

Many obituaries in the propaganda embody the romanticised rhetoric of martyrdom without making direct reference, with the nobility of sacrifice for the cause referenced more explicitly when reflecting on the deceased. In one ISIS obituary, not a single direct reference to martyrdom is made, whilst the jihadi was described as a ‘brave leader’, a ‘warrior’ and a ‘brother’.¹⁰ The fighter’s role as a martyr is taken for granted.

The high status of martyrdom is both mainstream and common to many world religions. Within Islam, it has a long pedigree, to the religion’s earliest days.¹¹ Nevertheless, in recent times it has become associated more with jihadi movements. Variations on the phrase “we love death as you love life” have been associated with a number of jihadi figures and groups, including Osama bin Laden.¹² While the presence of martyrdom as a value also speaks to a romantic desire found in all ideologies, religious and not, to die for the cause, such a desire is given extra impetus in the religious context by the prospect of the afterlife. A common theme among the social media accounts of supporters of jihadi groups is to post pictures of dead jihadi fighters, with an apparent ‘smile’ (perhaps more of a grimace) on the face, supposed to represent the joy of the ‘martyr’ at entering paradise. The confidence to be a martyr is also bolstered by the attribution of victory to God, and belief in God’s control over the course of history.

THE END OF DAYS

The desire for martyrdom relates to an idea that the groups hold a special status in relation to the course of history. This is central to the third great theme that runs through the values of the three groups under examination: that of the impending end of days.

As with the creedal values, and those of honour and solidarity, the **apocalypse** as a theme is assumed in much of the propaganda, underpinning and heavily

interconnected with other major ideological themes.

The entire jihadi ideology relies on the imminence of the apocalypse for its coherence. Binary distinctions between good and evil, the inevitability of victory, and the urgent need for the caliphate are all imbued in ‘end days’ rhetoric. When these factors are taken into account, references to an apocalyptic world-view can be found in 48 per cent of the propaganda.

Our analysis suggests that the belief in the end times is of central importance: it is the milieu in which much of the groups’ other activities take place. An example of this is in the name of ISIS’ magazine, *Dabiq*, which refers to a town north of Aleppo in Syria. According to Hadith literature, Dabiq will be the site of a battle in the end times in which the armies of Islam will defeat the armies of Rome, which is identified with the West by many jihadis.¹³ This is further reinforced by the quote inside the front cover of all issues of the magazine, from the founder of one of ISIS’ predecessor groups, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi:

“The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah’s permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dābiq”.

Such factors give the lie to the impression given by the limited number of explicit references to the apocalypse, which only make up five per cent of the sample. But whether explicit or implicit, such references speak to two core beliefs about the end times: first that while they are inevitably coming, the timing is unclear; and second that the battles that will introduce the end times are happening now. The two beliefs are not contradictory, and are shared by all three groups. These assumptions build upon more widely held beliefs, not in themselves extreme: a 2012 survey found that over half of Muslims in nine countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa believed that the apocalypse will commence in their lifetime.¹⁴

A generalised belief that the end will come is closely tied to the values of **predestination**, and **patience**.

10 Dabiq, ‘Abu Umar at-Tunisi’, Issue 10, pp. 41.

11 According to the 9th century Persian historian Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, when the armies of the first Caliph Abu Bakr were in Persia, the commander sent a letter to his counterpart that read “Now then, embrace Islam so that you may be safe... otherwise do not at all blame anyone but yourself for I have brought you a people that love death as you love life”.

12 <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,189648,00.html>

13 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-30083303>

14 Pew Research Center, ‘The World’s Muslims: Unity and Diversity’, 9 August 2012, p.65. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/08/the-worlds-muslims-full-report.pdf>

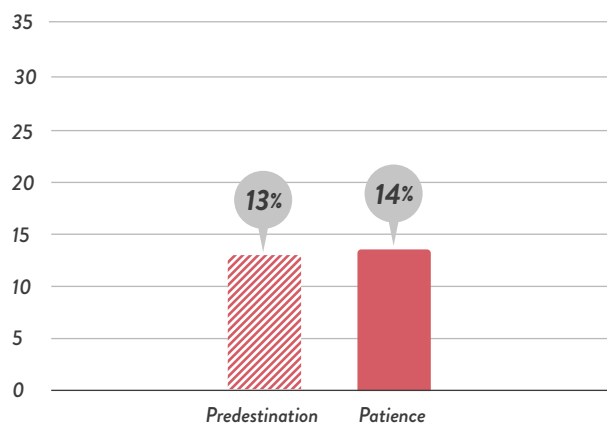
Predestination denotes God’s control over the course of history (a central facet of belief in *tawhid*, the attribution of victory to God, and *iman*: see page 18), which includes control over the end of history. This is a fundamental Islamic belief, regarded as a part of *iman*, and is a prerequisite to belief in any prophecies in the Quran or the Hadith. More fundamentally for the jihadi ideology, it is a prerequisite for the belief that their battles, which they see in cosmic terms of good over evil, will see their eventual victory.

Nevertheless, the belief in predestination goes hand in hand with the value of patience. References to suffering and setbacks are common in jihadi propaganda, together with the narrative that as all

FIGURE 2.4

Predestination and Patience

Percentage of sources that reference theme



CASE STUDY

APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY

Apocalyptic imagery is widely exploited in the propaganda, and features particularly heavily in ISIS’ output. Reminders of the end times and a ‘finish-line’ add a sense of purpose to the cause and seeks to make modern jihad appear a far more constructive and rewarding endeavour than simply that of hurting the enemy. Indeed, the belief is that with the establishment and rise of a caliphate, the Day of Judgement looms nearer and thus too, the rewards of those sacrificed on its behalf, explaining the predominance of ISIS references. When Jabhat al-Nusra alludes to an apocalypse, on the other hand, it is more loosely attributed, such as that on a billboard in territory under the group’s control, quoting from relevant sections of the Quran:

“Oh you who believe, fear God, indeed the earthquake of the hour is a great affair.” (Quran 22:1)

In contrast, ISIS and AQAP propaganda is more explicit, indulging in the imagery in greater depth. In a reference made in ISIS’ ninth edition of Dabiq, a Hadith related to the end of times is extensively referenced:

“He [Prophet Muhammad] explained that the Muslims would not cease to fight parties of the kuffar until ‘Isa (‘alayhis- salam) descends and leads the Muslim armies. He said, “Indeed, fighting the kuffar, hijrah, and jihad will remain until the establishment of the Hour. Allah’s Messenger (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, ‘Hijrah will not cease to exist until repentance ceases to be accepted, and repentance will not cease to be accepted until the sun rises from the West’ [Reported by Abū Dāwūd from Muawiyah]” (Dabiq, ‘And Allah Is The Best Of Plotters’, Issue 9, pp. 50-59)

The tone and approach is similar to that used in an Inspire article titled ‘The Glad Tidings of Victory’ in the thirteenth issue, where

once again a Hadith is quoted of the Prophet Muhammad describing a battle in the ‘Arabian Peninsula’, in ‘Persia...and then in Rome before the battle with ‘Al-Dajjal’, the false messiah. For each battle, ‘Allah will conquer it’.

Consequently, in an effort to remind the *ummah* of the approaching Day of Judgement, jihadi propaganda is keen to portray a message that jihadis today are the facilitators of what has already been decreed. Patience becomes a central pillar to reaching this end goal, as followers are reassured of victory, but how far or how near that victory is, is unclear. That victory is certain is a crucial reason for emphasising the end of times in the propaganda. While a ‘caliphate’ based in Syria may be uniquely beneficial for ISIS, for all three groups the imagery justifies and necessitates that jihad lives on until the apocalypse, thereby making the ideology, and the cause itself, a timeless endeavour.

things are in God's hands, such setbacks must be borne with patience. This is closely connected to the emulation of the practice of the prophet (see page 35): the attributes of patience in the face of suffering, and suffering as a consequence of jihad, are both clearly given to the Prophet.

“The people of Islam suffered through bitterness in their battle with the disbelievers of Quaraysh [sic] (in the time of the Prophet). Then Islam spread throughout the world... Therefore, if you are patient in this war... Allah will grant you victory, and you will restore the honor [sic] and glory of Islam”. (JABHAT AL-NUSRA) ¹⁵

“After patience and Jihad, the best outcome is in the Hereafter”. (AQAP) ¹⁶

“Be patient, because the Crusaders are bleeding to death, the Rafidah [pejorative for Shia] are faltering, and the Jews are horrified and in dread”. (ISIS) ¹⁷

But the value of patience does not negate the groups' belief that they are fighting the battles of the end times. This is seen particularly clearly in the binary themes of good over evil, and truth over falsehood, with the inevitable victory of the good due to God's favour. This victory of the good cannot be separated from the end times:

“Indeed, fighting the kuffar [unbelievers], hijrah [migration], and jihad will remain until the establishment of the hour”. (ISIS) ¹⁸

This binary narrative serves to bring forward the importance of the values, particularly in the eyes of the group's supporters. It bolsters *yaqeen* (certainty) by allowing for no middle ground, and emphasises that those fighting for the group are on the side of the good, necessitating that those who fight it are followers of evil. This binary narrative is also found in the contrast of truth

and falsehood, which also feeds the end-times narrative:

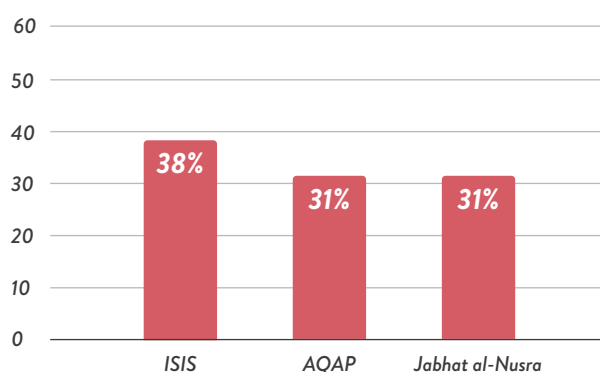
“There will not cease to exist a group from my nation fighting upon the truth, manifest until the day of Judgement”. (ISIS) ¹⁹

This theme runs throughout the propaganda, appearing in 23 per cent of what we examined, and distributed fairly evenly between the three groups. It suggests to its audience that the particular jihad of the group is part of a broader battle of truth over falsehood, on the basis of the creedal values examined above, with the 'mujahideen' as the 'protectors of truth'. Such a theme is bolstered by media commentary. The media, as a mouthpiece of the West or of 'apostate' Muslim governments propagates falsehood, while only the group concerned propagates the truth. In fact, the media is often referred to in ISIS propaganda as 'the screens of falsehood.'

FIGURE 2.5

Breakdown of Truth over Falsehood

Percentage of total sources coded to theme, by group



Such a narrative presents a particular challenge for counter-narratives to the ideology: as the groups present themselves as the forces of truth, anyone who disagrees with their narrative must be, in the eyes of those sympathetic or vulnerable to their propaganda, peddling falsehood. Nevertheless, this position is weakened by the fact that the theme of truth over falsehood and good over evil is presented roughly equally by all three groups. Given Jabhat al-Nusra and AQAP have separately fought ISIS at different times, their claims are undermined.

15 Statement by Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, 'Victory from God and Conquest is Close', April 2015.

16 Inspire, 'The Glad Tidings of Victory', Issue 13, Winter 2014, pp. 22-24.

17 Dabiq, 'And Allah is the Best of Plotters', Issue 9, Spring 2015, pp.50-59.

18 Dabiq, 'And Allah is the Best of Plotters', Issue 9, pp.50-59.

19 Dabiq, 'And Allah is the Best of Plotters', Issue 9, pp.50-59.

The values are further linked by the narrative function of the propaganda in presenting a 'pull factor' to those who might be tempted to fight. They seek to answer the question of why one *should* go and fight, and if one is already decided, why to fight with a particular group. The propaganda is strengthened by its persistent application of values to jihad. However, it is weakened by the fact that the doctrinal values of *iman*, *ihsan*, *tawhid*, and predestination are loosely defined and applied, in order to push the audience towards this single goal. This inconsistent application is perhaps a particular area on which counter-narratives can focus, by offering a more concrete definition of these values and principles and reclaiming them away from jihad.

All of the themes that we have placed in the values section are closely tied to one another. While we have classified one set of themes as 'creedal values', this is only in the sense that they present an element of doctrinal basis. All of the values are religious, inextricably tied to one another, and although the Salafi-jihadi interpretations of these religious values is far removed from the interpretation of the majority of Muslims, it is nevertheless this that ties the movement to Islam. As such, the ideology is most vulnerable to attacks from the Islamic mainstream on its focus and interpretations.

However, if a counter-narrative is to be successful, it must recognise the interconnectedness of the values. Attacking one is a fruitless task: it is supported by the others. Indeed, attacking the values alone is unlikely to succeed, as they are in turn interconnected with the other categories explored below.

Objectives

The ideological values of jihadism are perhaps best seen embodied in the movement's objectives. Although jihadi groups share the same broad ideological mission, it is at this level of the propaganda that we begin to come across consequential differences in communication strategy, as individual groups choose to paint subtly distinct narratives that best suit their individual struggles, and often express full scale disagreements over jihadi best practice.

It may be surprising that references to the greater objectives of the jihadi movement, such as the ultimate aim of building a caliphate, did not feature more prominently in the propaganda we analysed. This seems to suggest that the constructive aspects of jihad are secondary in groups' outward-facing messaging, perhaps because they risk alienating the parts of their intended audience who are more concerned with the process of jihad, and short term glory, than the overall long-term objective of the cause. However, much of the significance of these ideological objectives in the propaganda is contained in their inter-relationship with other themes, particularly the concept of 'the enemy' and 'the other,' as forged through a shared jihadi group identity.

In this section we explore what jihadi groups strive to achieve, and what their priorities are. These objectives are bound together by a narrative that is in parallel both destructive and constructive, tearing down the 'apostate' geopolitical order, whilst building up a utopian system, based on a romanticised and (at least partly) imagined history.

CALIPHATE

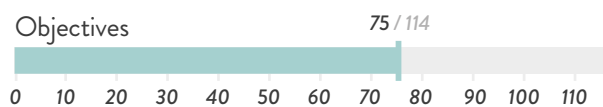
The 'caliphate' declared by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in June 2014 captured the imagination of thousands of jihadis across the world, as well as the global media, and the term has come to be emblematic of ISIS' reign of

FIGURE 3.1

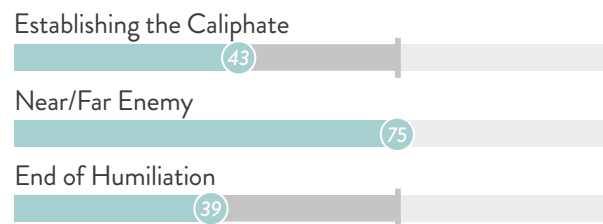
Thematic breakdown for *Objectives*

By number of sources in which themes appear explicitly

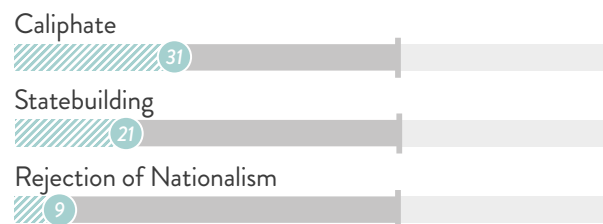
OVERALL



OBJECTIVES CATEGORIES



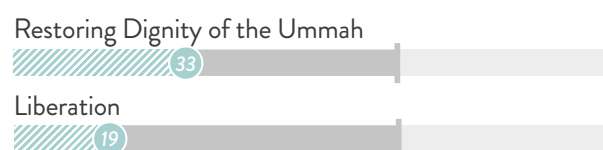
ESTABLISHING THE CALIPHATE THEMES



NEAR/FAR ENEMY THEMES



END OF HUMILIATION THEMES



DEFINITIONS: CODED THEMES for OBJECTIVES

ESTABLISHING THE CALIPHATE

Caliphate: A form of Islamic governance that emerged after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The leader, known as the ‘caliph’, must be appointed by consultation according to Sunni thought, and should represent the interests of the entire Muslim community.

State-building: An emphasis that operates as a ‘pull factor’, designed to encourage *hijrah* (migration) from abroad. Depictions of statebuilding

include the presentation of a functioning education system and health service.

Rejection of Nationalism: Typically equating nationalism to idol worship and *shirk*, Salafi-jihadi groups reject the nation state, calling instead for the religiously legitimate governance of the caliphate.

THE ENEMY

Near Enemy: Derogatory rhetoric typically referring to proximate Shia Muslims, as well as ‘apostate’ regimes including Assad’s as well as Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and others.

Far Enemy: References to a distant adversary, often blamed for the systematic and historic oppression of the Muslim world. America in particular is singled out as the ‘Great Satan’, whilst the French are described as ‘spiteful and filthy’.

END OF HUMILIATION

Restoring Dignity of the Ummah: The objective of ending the supposed concerted ‘humiliation’ of Islam by outside powers, and restoring Islam to its former glory.

Liberation: Propaganda referring to a struggle against oppression, framed around a seamless connection of a glorious past to the present.

terror across Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, as a goal, the creation of such a state is shared by AQAP and Jabhat al-Nusra, and references to the theme appear in 38 per cent of the propaganda. Explicit references to the **caliphate** appeared in 27 per cent of the propaganda, unsurprisingly dominated by ISIS, which takes 71 per cent of all references. The group is adamant about demonstrating the legitimacy of this ‘Islamic State,’ the creation of which it presents as being a religious obligation, citing the example of the ‘rightly guided’ caliphs of early Islam.

As with the apocalypse (see page 21), the importance of the caliphate is widely assumed in the propaganda, and again this draws upon views held more broadly. A 2007 study found that more than two thirds of respondents in Egypt, Pakistan and Morocco believed that a caliphate should be established.²⁰

Interestingly, this focus on the more constructive aspect of jihad (what is being fought for, rather

than what is being fought against) is quite low-key in the propaganda, and highly interlaced with other ideological themes, particularly jihadi values, conduct, and aspects of group identity. The significance of the caliphate within jihadi ideology is beyond doubt, but narratives vary significantly as to the legitimacy of Baghdadi’s declaration in June 2014 in particular.

Aside from ISIS’ self-marketing, many references to the caliphate in jihadi propaganda come as part of dense theological rebuttals by other groups of the legitimacy of ISIS’ claims. Jabhat al-Nusra in particular argues that the pre-conditions for the restoration of the caliphate have not been fulfilled by ISIS. Although much recent al-Qaeda-related material on this topic is used to condemn ISIS’ claims, both AQAP and Jabhat al-Nusra do occasionally refer to the long-term goal of establishing a caliphate, alongside a more dominant concern with applying Sharia in their strongholds.

“Don’t you want to be a part of the armies that raises the banner of Tawheed and will, InshAllah, reestablish the Khilafah [caliphate]?” (AQAP)²¹

20 WorldPublicOpinion.org, ‘Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda’, 24 April 2007, p.15. http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf

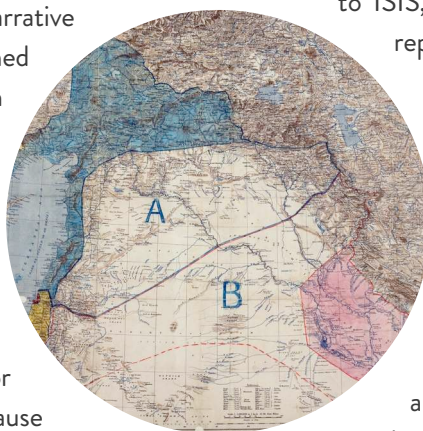
21 Inspire, ‘Sincere advice from a muhajir’, Issue 12, p 15.

A clear example of this highly theological rejection of the legitimacy of ISIS' 'caliphate' can be seen in *al-Risalah*. Here an article titled 'Khilafa: One Year On', headed by a cartoon of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is dedicated to discrediting ISIS' claims to be an Islamic state, and in particular the leader's assertion that he is *emir al-momineen* (the commander of the faithful). In its rejection of the 'caliphate', Jabhat al-Nusra not only criticise the so-called Caliph's legitimacy, saying many "gave Bay'ah [declared allegiance] to Baghdadi based on emotions" during a "confusing time" for global jihadism, but also ISIS' tactics:

"They [have] painted the religion and the jihadi movement with red blood until all people began to think that Jihad only consists of slaughter and killing". (JABHAT AL-NUSRA) ²²

In another accusation that ISIS has misunderstood the premise of the caliphate, an image in the magazine, heavily stylistically influenced by the film *300*, prescribes that the "[Caliph] should be the shield of the Ummah, not the sword against it".²³ The language and imagery demonstrates that inter-group disagreements over the status of the caliphate are largely rooted in narrative and strategic differences rather than fundamentally ideological quarrels.

Alongside the grander philosophical ideals of the caliphate, a sub-narrative of proactive **state-building** does play some part in ISIS propaganda, including the presentation of a functioning education system and health service. This theme is found in 18 per cent of the propaganda we examined, of which ISIS accounts for 57 per cent. In the propaganda this narrative is largely styled as a pull-factor, designed to encourage *hijrah* (migration) from abroad. Interestingly, references to state-building are also found in 19 per cent of Jabhat al-Nusra propaganda, perhaps indicative of Jabhat al-Nusra's desire to create an Islamic state in Syria. This is a considerably lesser concern for AQAP, however, which, perhaps because it is much less a territorial organisation (though



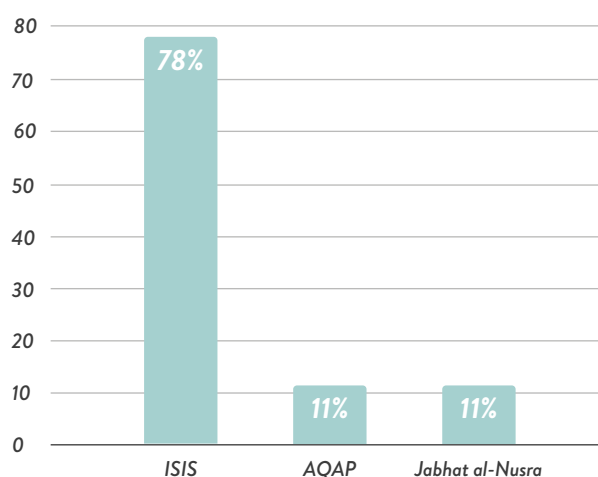
22 *Al-Risalah*, 'Khilafa: One Year On', Issue 1, p 24.

23 *Al-Risalah*, Issue 1, p 33.

FIGURE 3.2

Breakdown of *Rejection of Nationalism*

Percentage of total sources coded to theme, by group



events in Yemen in 2015 may change this), does not seek to entice migrants to its 'state'.

Also significant to the ideological centrality of the caliphate is the narrative of the **rejection of nationalism**. This theme is found most commonly in ISIS propaganda, which encompassed 78 per cent of the references, with Jabhat al-Nusra and AQAP generating 11 per cent each.

In the source material, rejecting the concept of the nation state was typically extended to equating nationalism to idol worship and *shirk*, with groups making common reference to 'nationalist' leaders as *tawaghit* (those who rebel against or worship those other than God). Drawing this clear binary allows jihadi ideology to reduce the world into the camps of the global *ummah* and its opponents. According to ISIS, it is shared religious principles that represent the key unifying force for its 'caliphate'. This transnational aspect of the ideology will be discussed in greater detail below.

Much of the propaganda material on this theme refers to the dividing up of the Middle East by European powers following World War I into artificial states (through, among others, the Sykes-Picot agreement), and the subsequent collapse of the Ottoman Empire, supposedly encapsulating how the Westphalian concept of the nation state was a foreign import,

imposed by Western nations in order to divide up the Islamic world.

References like these to a glorious past (seamlessly connected to the present) represent another major narrative used by jihadi groups in the affirmation of both their objectives and actions. The title of a 45-minute Jabhat al-Nusra film, 'Heirs of Glory', makes this clear; jihadi ideology places itself within a legacy of military success and religiosity. While explicit references to a glorious past only appear in eight per cent of the propaganda material examined, it is found implicitly in much of the ideological focus.

Although this 'glorious past' could refer to the direct example of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions, as interpreted by the groups' ideologues (for more on this see prophetic methodology, page 35), many items aligned with this theme in the propaganda refer to more recent history, including the highly ambivalent relationship jihadi groups have with the Ottoman caliphs, who are referred to seven times in the sample, both in glorified terms and in reference to their religious 'deviation'. This is an emblematic example of jihadi groups' selective usage of history to suit their own narratives. In this sense, this narrative overlaps significantly with the ideological component of the nobility of jihad, and to adopting (often literally) antiquated chivalric traditions; swords are mentioned in 18 per cent of the propaganda alongside spears, arrows and shields. This aspect will be analysed in greater detail in the conduct section (see page 33). The sense of restoration of honour also chimes significantly with the sense of predestination and inevitability of victory that is so central to the values of the jihadi movement.

FAR ENEMY/NEAR ENEMY

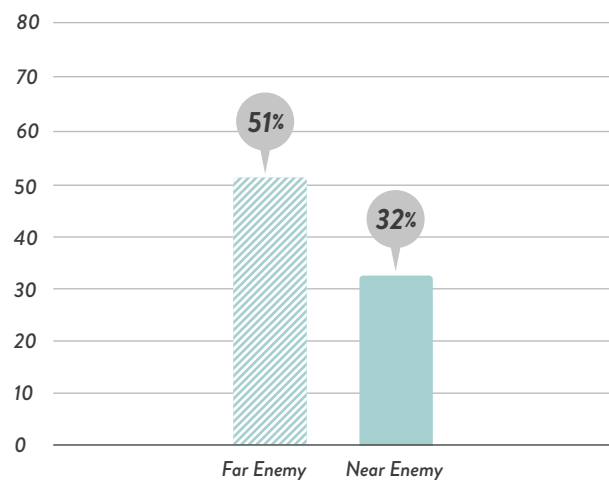
The far enemy/near enemy dynamic in jihadi ideology is the subject of much analysis, including the discourse on 'apostate' regimes in the Middle East and Asia, and Western countries, in particular the United States.

Jihad continues to increase as a global phenomenon, as interconnectivity, globalisation, social media and 24 hour news allows jihadi groups to claim responsibility for attacks they may well have 'inspired' but certainly didn't plan or direct. A clear example of this came in the wake of the Paris attacks of January 2015, where,

FIGURE 3.3

Far Enemy and Near Enemy

Percentage of sources that reference theme



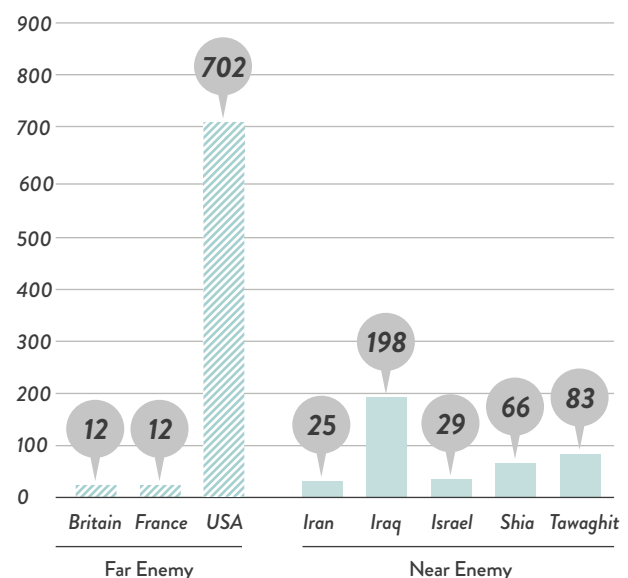
after killing twelve people at the *Charlie Hebdo* offices, the Kouachi brothers claimed to have been acting under the auspices of AQAP, whilst Amedy Coulibaly, who killed four people during the takeover of a kosher supermarket in Paris, filmed a video in which he claimed to have pledged allegiance to ISIS. Both groups praised the attackers as martyrs.

Our analysis found the near/far enemy theme to be among the most dynamic and fluid of the jihadi ideology, and one of the factors most significantly related to a group's locale and circumstances. The

FIGURE 3.4

References to specific enemies

Total references across all sources



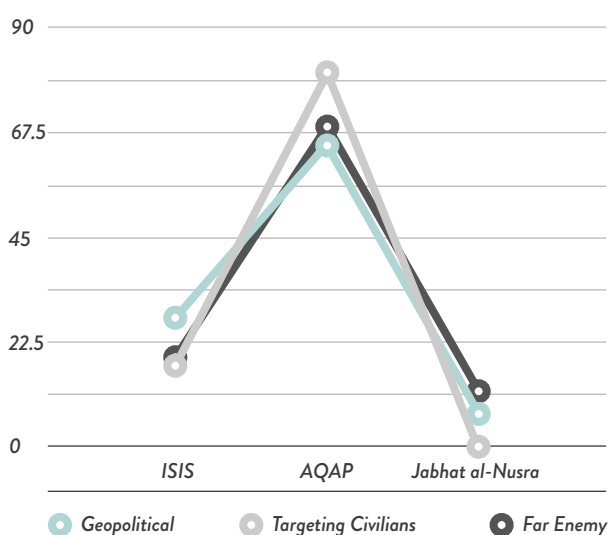
data indicates that as an objective, harm to the **far enemy** (America, Europe, Israel, Britain, Russia, Japan etc.) featured considerably more prominently than references to the **near enemy** overall. Fifty-one per cent of the propaganda references the far enemy, dominated by AQAP, with 64 per cent of the total.

Despite its near-monopoly on media attention in Western countries, the vast weight of ISIS propaganda is focused on the near rather than the far enemy, encompassing Shia Muslims, Iran, the Iraqi government, Assad, the Yemeni regime, Saudi Arabia and other regional national leaders. ISIS only contributes to 19 per cent of the sources in the sample referring to a distant enemy, while it dominates the sources that refer to the near threat, with 59 per cent of the total. On the other hand, AQAP sources only contributed to 22 per cent of those referring to the near enemy. This finding highlights that the weight of jihadi material promoting attacks on the far enemy comes from AQAP sources. Nevertheless, all three groups' rhetoric regarding both the near and far enemy is heavily entwined with the concept of *shirk*, as so-called apostate regimes represent 'idols'. The fact that ISIS propaganda refers to violence towards the near enemy in twice as many sources as the far enemy, highlights that it is Muslims who live proximate to areas of operation who bear the brunt of its brutal violence.

FIGURE 3.5

Convergence of themes related to Far Enemy

Percentage of sources coded to each theme, by group



There is significant overlap in references to the far enemy and propaganda focusing on the justification of killing civilians, seemingly aimed at promoting lone-jihad terrorism against the far enemy. Many sources that referenced the **targeting of civilians** simultaneously included allusions to the far enemy, highlighting the distinct rules of engagement between the Dar al-Harb and Dar al-Islam. Connections such as these demonstrate how certain disparate but inter-related narratives can be drawn upon to strengthen the cohesiveness of elements of jihadi ideology.

This distinction between narrative and ideology is perhaps best shown through the example of AQAP. The Arabian Peninsula's al-Qaeda franchise has attempted to launch a number of high-profile attacks against Western targets, including the printer cartridge plot of 2010, and contains step-by-step guides to launching attacks on passenger aircraft in its propaganda magazine *Inspire*.

Even the rise to power of the Shia Houthi movement in Yemen at the beginning of 2015 did not significantly trigger a near enemy dimension to AQAP's propaganda. This may be partly because the two groups have rarely come into direct conflict, with both factions predominantly battling the internationally-recognised regime of President Hadi. It may also be down to the fact that, in many ways, the 'nearest' enemy is the American drone flying above, targeting AQAP's leadership and strongholds.

In fact the rise of the Houthis in Yemen seems to have had a greater impact on the rhetoric and propaganda of ISIS-affiliated groups in the country, which have targeted Houthi-aligned Shia mosques. ISIS emphasises sectarian narratives in a more concerted manner than its rivals, an aspect, closely tied to group identity, which will be explored later in this report (see page 41).

END OF HUMILIATION

An ideological theme particularly aligned with the far enemy focus of jihadi propaganda is that of ending the 'humiliation' of Islam by outside powers. The findings show this desire to end the subordination

DISTINCTION BETWEEN ARABIC AND ENGLISH PROPAGANDA

While much of the Arabic propaganda shares the same themes as the English material, some distinctions are apparent. Most noticeable of these is the observable emphasis on the near enemy within the Arabic propaganda. While a number of the Arabic sources within the sample contain a combination of references to both near and far enemies (consistent with the English material), all Arabic sources contain heavier emphasis on reference to Shia groups, including those in Iraq, Iran, Yemen; to regional Muslim regimes including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia; and to other ethnic groups, such as the Kurds.

In a speech made by ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani on 23 June 2015, titled ‘O Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah’, references against the near enemy are rich in detail and coverage, with a particular emphasis on the Iraqi Shia community. Adnani’s speech is particularly driven towards an Iraqi Sunni audience, which is addressed directly throughout the statement. As is consistent across AQAP, Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS material, the Shia are referred to by the pejorative term, ‘al-Rafidah’ (the rejectors), while the far enemy is regularly referred to broadly as ‘the Crusaders’. However, the references to

the far enemy in the Arabic content are minimal, and when reference is made, it is done so in a context of further alienating and demonising the Iraqi Shia. Following a detailed depiction of wrongdoings afflicted on the Sunni population of Baghdad, Adnani states:

“O Ahlus Sunnah [adherents to the Sunnah] everywhere, the Crusaders resolved to clear Iraq of Ahlus-Sunnah completely and to make it purely Rafidi”.

However, Adnani then returns to the subject of the Shia in Iraq, paying only brief attention to the so-called ‘Crusader-Rafidah’ coalition. In this way, the emphasis remains on inciting anger against the Shia and marginalising minority sects in an effort to unify Sunni communities.

Similar tactics are evident in numerous Arabic language videos that were either created by provincial media outlets or from other official media outlets, but not translated into English for non-Arabic speaking audiences. In many of these videos, another common emphasis was on the state-building theme. In a video released on the 28 May 2014 by ISIS’ al-Furqan Media, titled ‘The Best Ummah’, evidence of the state-building process features dominantly throughout. By following a member of the so-called Hisba Office (‘religious police’) in Raqqa, viewers are taken through the streets and witness inhabitants interacting

positively with ISIS officials. In this way, stronger emphasis on the pull factor in Arabic propaganda is evident when compared to the emphasis of English-language content.

Furthermore, consistent with Adnani’s speech, references to the near enemy are made throughout the video as the viewer is encouraged to look to the times of Assad as deviation from Islam, corruption and *shirk*. Consistent with the emphasis on the near enemy, the video concludes with footage of the demolition of a Shia mosque that had supposedly hosted ‘idolatrour’ shrines.

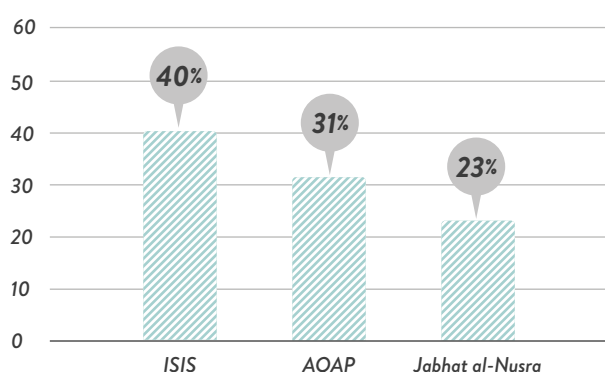
In all the Arabic content analysed within the sample, sectarian rhetoric and emphasis of the near enemy over the far enemy appears to drive and, at times, drown out the other themes that more regularly featured throughout the English propaganda. This demonstrates how jihadi propaganda, though increasingly global, is able to tactically shift its narrative emphasis to suit its target audience.

of Muslims as a prominent shared concern across the jihadi movement, and an effort to end this state is referenced frequently enough in the propaganda to suggest it represents both a short- and long-term objective of all three groups. Twenty-nine per cent of the propaganda in our sample refers to the desire to end the humiliation of the *ummah*. Forty per cent of ISIS propaganda refers to this objective, compared to 31 per cent of AQAP and 23 per cent of Jabhat al-Nusra propaganda.

FIGURE 3.6

Presence of *End of Humiliation*

Percentage of group's sources referencing theme



In the eyes of jihadis, deliverance from the perceived humiliation is so important because this state of disgrace represents a direct attack against the faith itself. In an audio statement in May 2015, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi presented the conflict in Iraq and Syria as one that is “only against you and against your religion”,²⁴ fitting the group’s ideological division of the world into two evangelical camps of Islam and apostasy.

The research data illustrates a close link between the objective to end humiliation, and a focus on the far enemy. The discourse within the propaganda frames the ‘humiliation’ inflicted on Muslim communities worldwide as resulting from of the far enemy’s foreign policy and economic exploitation of Muslim lands.

In this sense, it is no surprise that analysis of the propaganda shows this narrative to be closely related to the global interconnectedness of the Muslim community (the *ummah*), as well as geopolitical commentary referring to an axis against the ‘Allies of

Allah’, or a concerted effort by the non-Muslim world to humiliate the formerly-great Islamic world. In this vein, there is also a significant aspect of predestination about the restoration of Islam to its former glory, which can be found reflected in the propaganda.

The power of this assumption in the propaganda is compounded by a more widely held belief – not in itself extreme – that there exists a conspiracy against Muslims worldwide. A 2007 survey found that three quarters of respondents across Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco and Indonesia believed it was important to “stand up to America and affirm the dignity of the Islamic people”.²⁵

It is no surprise therefore, that **liberation** features as a major coinciding narrative. As this struggle against oppression and humiliation is depicted as a project of restoration rather than construction, the narrative relies on the romanticisation of a glorious past and the seamless connection of this to the present, seen throughout the propaganda. In an almost Karmic inflection, there is also a notable connection in the propaganda between the ideological objective of ending perceived humiliation and the subsequent humiliation of enemies, or retribution against persecutors. It is narratives such as these that prescribe an ideological guide for conduct and action, based on the objectives and values of jihadism.

²⁴ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ‘March Forth Whether Light or Heavy’

²⁵ WorldPublicOpinion.org, ‘Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda’, 24 April 2007, p.15. http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf

Conduct

The third key aspect of the ‘system of ideas’ that forms the jihadi ideology is rules and ideals of conduct. Just as the values are focused on jihad, and the groups’ treatment of mainstream Islamic ideas is framed to focus them on jihad, so the ideals of conduct are focused on jihad. In the system of ideas, the values of the group entail its objectives. In turn, the achievement of the objectives requires certain conduct.

The conduct that the ideology seeks to encourage is what defines the behaviour of the jihadi groups that we examined. While certain actions are often cited as evidence of their barbarism, or their dismissal as a ‘death cult’, it is important to grasp the context in which such actions sit. When jihadi ideologues such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi attack ISIS on the basis of the group’s actions, they are leaning on the place and rules of conduct in the ideology of jihadism. An understanding of this approach can form a strong basis for a successful counter-narrative, building on the contradictions between what is regarded by the group as ideal conduct, and what the group actually does.

NOBILITY OF JIHAD

Central to the ideology surrounding conduct was an emphasis on the nobility of jihad. In fact, this was one of the most dominant themes in the total sample – reflecting the propaganda’s ideological focus on jihad more broadly – appearing in 71 per cent of all sources examined.

The nobility of jihad is both subtly and explicitly referenced, via pictures of jihadis on horseback, and references to heroes, knights and lions. Children in ISIS territory are often referred to as ‘cubs’ in ISIS propaganda, referencing the expectation that they will grow into jihadis.²⁶

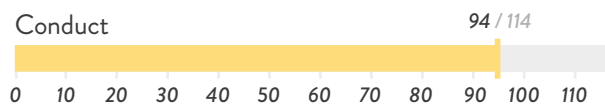
²⁶ ISIS’ Wilāyat Dījlāh media agency, ‘Cubs of the Caliphate,’ July 2015

FIGURE 4.1

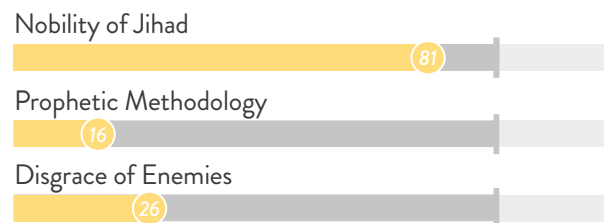
Thematic breakdown for *Conduct*

By number of sources in which themes appear explicitly

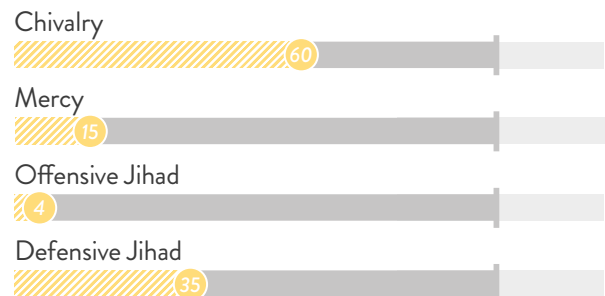
OVERALL



CONDUCT CATEGORIES



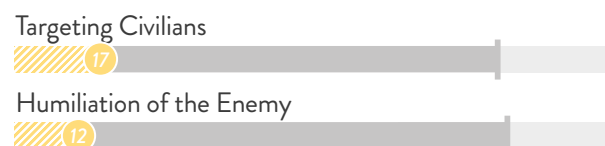
NOBILITY OF JIHAD THEMES



PROPHETIC METHODOLOGY THEME



DISGRACE OF ENEMIES THEMES



* Theme encompasses the entire category

DEFINITIONS: CODED THEMES for CONDUCT

NOBILITY OF JIHAD

Chivalry: Struggle is romanticised as a means of promoting the jihadi ideology, often through reference to a glorious past. In the propaganda this is both subtly and explicitly referenced, via pictures of jihadis on horseback, and references to heroes, knights and lions.

Mercy: Contrasting with the emphasis on courage in battle, the theme of mercy is another extension of the perception of the nobility of jihadis' struggle. Nevertheless, this 'mercy' is usually applied only to Muslims as defined by the groups.

Defensive Jihad: The nobility of jihad depends on its permissibility. The defence of the *ummah* is often used as a justifier for acts of violence, commonly alongside a belief that the Muslim world is under assault from all sides.

Offensive Jihad: Often framed as an attempt to spread Islam in the model of the early caliphs, references to offensive jihad are rare in the propaganda, as it sits at odds with the defensive narratives employed by jihadi groups.

PROPHETIC METHODOLOGY

Prophetic Methodology: In the propaganda the phrase specifically refers to a Hadith tradition, prophesising that after

generations of oppressive rule, the caliphate will be ruled according to the 'prophetic methodology'. There is also a broader Salafi desire to literally emulate the Prophet in all behaviour.

DISGRACE OF THE ENEMY

Targeting Civilians: One of the most divisive themes among jihadi groups, and based around creating a fear factor among the 'far enemy.' Often found in the context of encouraging 'lone jihad' attacks in the West

Humiliation of the Enemy: A belief that liberating the *ummah* from its systematic humiliation will in turn lead to the disgrace of its enemies.

In part, this relates to a narrative theme of romanticising struggle as a means of promoting the jihadi ideology. This is particularly true of Jabhat al-Nusra, with 35 per cent of the group's propaganda classed as romanticising jihad (this may relate to Jabhat al-Nusra's greater emphasis than the other two groups on its 'underdog' status: see page 44).

But it also belongs to the chivalric ideal referenced in the values section (see page 15), with its focus on honour and solidarity, and once again linked to an interpretation of the 'glorious past'. This can be seen particularly in such propaganda titles as Jabhat al-Nusra's 'The Heirs of Glory',²⁷ or references to Saladin.²⁸

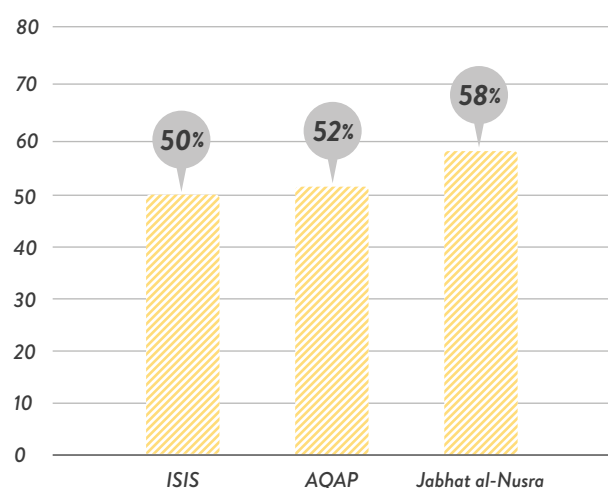
While courage in battle is a prominent part of the chivalric ideal, shown very clearly in the importance given to martyrdom (see page 19), the theme of **mercy**, which appears in 13 per cent of the sources examined,

also fits within this category. An interesting finding was that Jabhat al-Nusra emphasises mercy much more heavily than ISIS or AQAP, making up 53 per cent of the total number of sources referencing mercy. Jabhat al-Nusra also deals with it far more in relation to specific episodes, whereas ISIS and AQAP speak more generally.

FIGURE 4.2

Presence of *Chivalry* in propaganda

Percentage of group's sources referencing theme



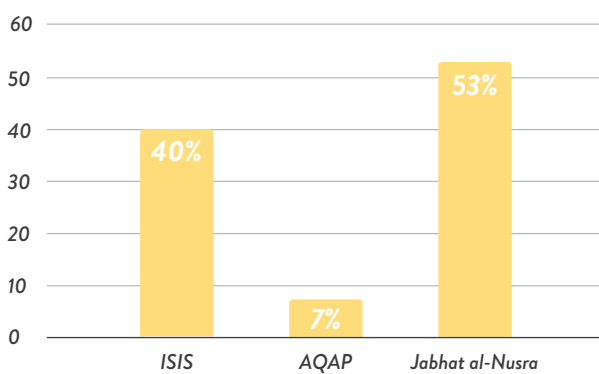
27 Video release, 28 June 2015.

28 Described as "A true Muslim": Al-Risalah, 'The Battle of Victory – An interview with Jabhat al-Nusra military commander Abu Sultan al Jizrawi', Issue 1, July 2015, pp. 9-10.

FIGURE 4.3

Breakdown of Mercy

Percentage of total sources coded to theme, by group



Nevertheless, even for Jabhat al-Nusra, ‘mercy’ is usually – if not always – something that is applied only to Muslims. The prominent use of *takfir* by all three groups allows this definition to be kept quite limited. (For more on *takfir*, see page 41).

The nobility of jihad also depends very heavily on when it is permissible: in defence of the *ummah*, or in offense to spread Islam or expand territory. Of these, **defensive jihad** was by far the most dominant, referenced in 31 per cent of the sources examined. This reflects again the chivalric ideal of advocacy for the oppressed, examined in the values section (see page 19), and the narrative function of geopolitical commentary. It is notable that for all three themes, AQAP places the greatest emphasis, followed by ISIS, with very little emphasis from Jabhat al-Nusra. The focus on defensive jihad can be seen clearly in some of the propaganda under examination:

“It is crystal clear that all jihadi attacks on the West came as a belated reaction to the tremendous western oppression of Muslims...”

(AQAP) ²⁹

“O Sunnis of Iraq, the time has come for you to learn the lesson of the past... that nothing will work with the rafidah [pejorative for Shia] except slicing their throats... They conceal their hatred, enmity and rage towards Sunnis... they trick and deceive them”. **(ISIS)** ³⁰

29 Inspire, ‘The Inevitable’, Issue 11, Spring 2013, pp.20-22.

30 Statement by al-Adnani, ‘Indeed your Lord is ever Watchful’, 22 September 2014.

“The west has strained itself to thwart your Jihad for three years... and began to attack the sons of Jabhat an-Nusra as well as the households of children and women, they flattened their homes to the ground. For you is Allah oh people of Sham!” **(JABHAT AL-NUSRA)** ³¹

References to offensive jihad are much rarer. They do not feature at all in the Jabhat al-Nusra propaganda examined for this research, and only marginally in ISIS and AQAP propaganda (though the results are divided evenly between them). This may reflect the different narrative aims of the three groups; while all three are fundamentally fighting to establish a caliphate (see page 25), Jabhat al-Nusra is particularly focused on the Syrian civil war, which is framed as a defensive jihad. AQAP and ISIS are both more expansive and expansionist:

“Islam is the religion of war. Your Prophet (sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) was dispatched with the sword as a mercy to the creation. He was ordered with war until Allah is worshipped alone”.

(ISIS) ³²

PROPHETIC METHODOLOGY

The above reference to offensive jihad from ISIS reveals the centrality of their reading of the prophetic methodology to the ideology of the groups under examination. It is the desire to emulate the Prophet and early generations of Muslims in all things that makes these jihadis ‘Salafi’. Where this ideology is concerned, it is particularly focused on the perceived practice of the Prophet and his companions in regard to jihad: when it is permissible, and how it is to be conducted.

The ‘prophetic methodology’ recurs throughout the propaganda, and is explicitly referenced in 14 per cent of the sources. These cases refer to the establishment of a caliphate under the so-called methodology of the Prophet, a course of events prophesised in the Hadith that is due to occur after the toppling of tyrannical rulers. However, beyond these specific references, emu-

31 Statement by al-Jolani, ‘For the people of integrity’, 28 September 2014.

32 Dabiq, ‘And Allah is the Best of Plotters’, Issue 9, pp. 50-59.

CASE STUDY

DEFENSIVE JIHAD

“It is rather natural that any sincere Muslim in the West can never feel safe and well, while he watches the country he lives in invading, destroying and slaughtering his Muslim ummah. Because Muslims - no matter where they live - keep their loyalty to Islam only. So what are the western regimes going to do about this? Nothing much I believe”.
(From ‘The Inevitable’, Inspire Issue 11, Spring 2013, pp. 20-22)

The above quote from an article featured in AQAP’s Inspire magazine is indicative of the narrative used to justify contemporary jihad as defence. Calls for defensive jihad feature heavily throughout the propaganda. Such calls exclusively coincide with depictions of oppression and suffering of Muslims across the world, always attributed to the West, either directly, or through corrupt regimes.

Often, jihad is framed as retaliation, with the same article reading:

“It is crystal clear that all jihadi attacks on the West came as a belated reaction to the tremendous western oppression on Muslims throughout the last century”.

Depictions of suffering regularly refer to the vulnerable:

“The Western nations should

comprehend that the type of these young men who killed the British soldier, are many. They all witness your governments’ invasion of Muslim lands, occupations, aggression and oppression which have not stopped yet. These young men see and witness muslim men behind your bars, they see women and children killed”.

(Inspire, ‘The Dear Price and the Constant Turmoil’, Issue 11, Spring 2013, p. 25)

And above all, alongside the depictions of suffering and loss, explicit guidance on how a Muslim should rationalise the evidence is prioritised:

“When you attack one Muslim, you attack all Muslims”.

(Inspire, ‘The Dear Price and the Constant Turmoil’, Issue 11, Spring 2013, p. 25)

“This is oppression towards Muslims. According to a sane mind, the oppressed should be supported until he retains his rights from the oppressors, because this is justice, and sound minds agree with justice”.

(Inspire, ‘Why did I choose Al-Qaeda?’, Issue 11, Spring 2013, p. 27)

It is this rationale that jihadi groups use to justify targeting civilians, and is a major propaganda focus, designed to encourage Muslims to engage in jihad:

“It wasn’t the Muslims who dragged in civilians into this war. It was the Americans, and

on a scale that is astronomically different than ours. They killed millions of Muslim civilians in cold blood during the embargo of Iraq which was before 9/11”.

(Inspire, ‘Q & A with Sheikh Anwar Al-Awlaki’, Issue 12, Spring 2014, pp. 16-18)

Regularly, defensive jihad is framed as an obligation for able members of the Ummah:

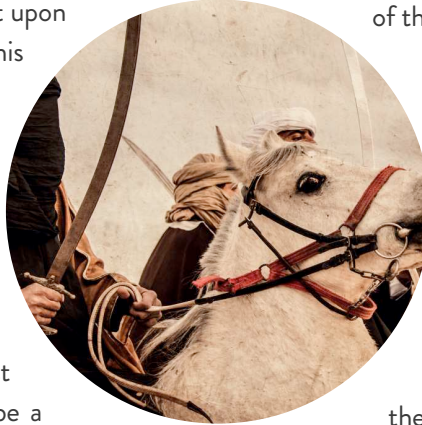
“If you have Ikhlaṣ [Purity] and seriously sit down and think about what this Ummah is going through, and what your brothers and sisters are going through all over the Muslim countries, you will Inshallāh [God-willing] realize that its Fard-Ein [individual obligation] upon you to do your part and defend them and try to release this Ummah from the state that it’s in. What is it that detaches you from the rest of the Ummah!?”

(Inspire, ‘Sincere Advice from a Muhajir’, Issue 12, Spring 2014, p.15)

The ‘defensiveness’ of jihad is rooted in the wider ideology through concepts such as Qisas, meaning retaliation in kind, or retribution – a concept rooted in Islamic jurisprudence where Sharia allows equal retaliation as punishment. It is expressed through Osama Bin Laden’s regularly quoted “As you kill, you will be killed”.

lating the practice of the Prophet imbues the broader conduct of the groups, as well as their group identity as followers of the *salaf* (first four generations of Muslims).

This trend is also seen in the values section. The prophetic model of patience is cited as something to emulate, and all other values are built upon the practice of the Prophet. In part, this may be an effort to draw on the ‘glorious past’, as it fits into the broader aims of the Salafi movement to return Islam to the days of the *salaf*. But it is also a fundamentally religious part of the Salafi-jihadi ideology, as revealed in this research. The Prophet is recognised as the best Muslim, and therefore in order to be a good Muslim, and to restore Islam to its proper dignity, his practice must be emulated. As with much of the rest of the ideology, Salafi-jihadis particularly focus this on jihad and its objectives. As such, the prophetic methodology is also crucially linked by all three groups to the establishment of a caliphate or Islamic state:



“Or did you and your supporters think we were joking on the day we announced the Khilafah upon the prophetic methodology?” (ISIS)³³

“We seek to establish an Islamic State guided by the methodology of the Prophet...” (JABHAT AL-NUSRA)³⁴

“The Boston Brothers’ action is the very action of the companion of the Prophet, Abu Baseer - may Allāh be pleased with him. When the Quraysh became stubborn in their terms, Abu Baseer’s action was the best reaction. It was reported in the Prophet’s seerah (life story) that Abu Baseer moved to the sea shore and cut off the Qurayshi supplies. This was very effective that the Quraysh yielded on their terms”. (AQAP)³⁵

33 Dabiq, ‘Slave Girls or Prostitutes’, Issue 9, pp. 44-49.

34 Interview, al-Jolani, Al-Manarah al-Bayda Foundation, November 2014.

35 Inspire, ‘Between Yesterday and Tomorrow’, Issue 13, pp. 32-3.

DISGRACE OF ENEMIES

The focus on jihad that runs through the ideology, combined with the objective of ending humiliation for the *ummah* and the assurance that God is their ally leads to a promotion in the ideology of conduct that will lead to, or be perceived to lead to the disgrace of their enemies.

However, it is interesting to note that of all the ideological themes covered so far (as opposed to those focused on narrative), those that relate to the disgrace of the enemy are among the most divisive. None of the Jabhat al-Nusra sources in our sample reference the humiliation of the enemy; instead, the theme is shared roughly evenly between ISIS and AQAP. References to the **humiliation of the enemy** make up 11 per cent of the total sample.

While it fits into the broader category of promoting conduct that will bring disgrace on the enemy, one theme stands in sharp contrast to the previous emphasis on the nobility of jihad and the chivalric ideal: the permissibility and desirability of targeting civilians, which is found in 15 per cent of the total sample. However, again none of the Jabhat al-Nusra sources studied in this research make a reference to the targeting of civilians. AQAP dominates the theme, with 82 per cent of the sources that refer to it; the rest being held by ISIS.

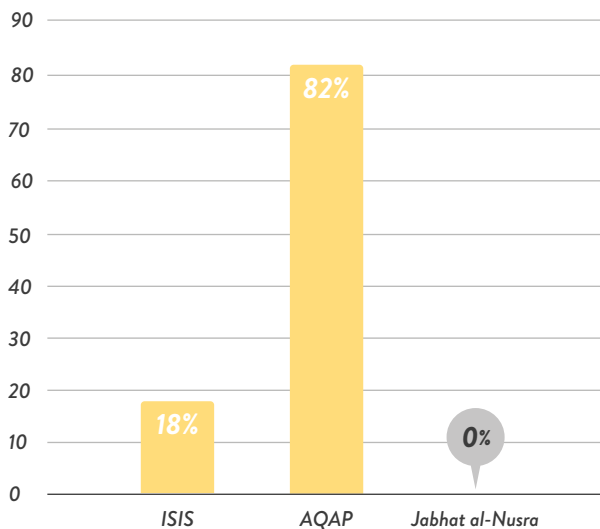
The permissibility of targeting civilians is closely tied to the near enemy/far enemy dynamic explored in the objectives section (see page 28). Indeed, most AQAP references to the targeting of civilians are in the context of encouraging ‘lone jihad’ attacks in the West.

In this context, great importance is placed on the narrative function of building a ‘fear factor’. As has been repeatedly revealed through this research, in the shared ideological values, objectives, conduct and group identities between the three groups, the aims of AQAP are not particularly different from those of Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. However, the group’s rhetorical strategy is somewhat different; the

FIGURE 4.4

Breakdown of Targeting Civilians

Percentage of total sources coded to theme, by group



focus on the far enemy is an attempt to build a ‘fear factor’, damaging economies and creating pressure on governments to change their policies:

“The end of this American crusade is bad consequences, an economic depression, weakness and the loss of the American military’s prestige”.

(AQAP) ³⁶

In this respect, it fits into the narrative function of directly addressing the enemy, both through violent action (intended to elicit a response) and verbally in the propaganda. But this is equally targeted at the propaganda’s sympathetic audience. The ambition of both ISIS and AQAP in emphasising the disgrace of the enemy ties in with this to build a sense of strength within their own groups. This internal focus is further demonstrated by the frequent use of poetry – hardly the propaganda most likely to be read by their enemies:

“Our Shari’a is the minaret and model, and lamp-stand for the ayat [signs] and the perfection. It is the truth that has made darkness die, and thus has the exposed disbelief run away in its disgrace...” **(ISIS)** ³⁷

36 Inspire, ‘The Glad Tidings of Victory’, Issue 13, Winter 2014, pp.22-24.

37 Nasheed, ‘Our Sharia’, Ajnad Media, June 2015.

While the day-to-day actions of the group may be more determined by strategic or tactical concerns, they will take place within the broader jihadi ideology. As this evidence shows, the concerns of this ideology with proper conduct are central.

Counter-narratives seeking to undermine this ideology may find openings in its contradictions. The emphasis on the nobility of jihad and mercy seems to stand in contrast to the targeting of civilians, or the restriction of mercy to only those who ‘repent’. And the divisions between the groups, which are particularly notable in relation to conduct and the disgrace of the enemy – in which Jabhat al-Nusra was much less concerned than ISIS and AQAP – could be exploited.

The inconsistency of their historical references and the way that historical figures are drawn upon could also be exposed, for example emphasising the mercy of Saladin in sparing the life of Richard the Lionheart, rather than using his character solely to demonstrate bravery and martial honour.

Group Identity

Separate from the values, conduct and objectives of jihadism, but representing the glue binding them together is the group identity of those who believe themselves to be waging jihad on behalf of the global Muslim community. The Salafi-jihadi movement has a strong and distinct culture, including poems, iconography and songs, that sets it apart from other groups. It is a culture that analysts, including Thomas Hegghammer, have explored in significant detail.³⁸

Some of the group attributes might appear to be in contest with one another, particularly the identifier of being allied to God whilst also an underdog in the struggle, but in practice a nuanced patchwork is formed within which more concrete and normative aspects of jihadi ideology reside.

This section will explore how groups conceive of themselves and their members, what binds the broader Salafi-jihadi movement together, despite narrative and tactical disagreements between different jihadis, as well as what separates it from others, and what this relationship with the 'other' entails – whether that is other actors in the geopolitical order, or sectarian rivals.

THE UMMAH

“Carry out your obligations, defend your religion”.
(AQAP)³⁹

One of the dominant aspects of jihadism, among the most heavily referenced ideological themes in the propaganda, is based on the Islamic concept of a global religious community. As part of a global *ummah*, fight-

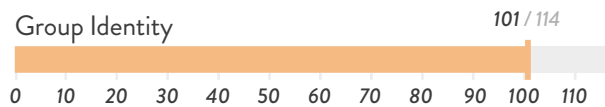
38 Why Terrorists Weep: The Socio-Cultural Practices of Jihad: Militants, Paul Wilkinson Memorial Lecture, University of St. Andrews, 16 April 2015, http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_Wilkinson_Memorial_Lecture.pdf

39 Inspire, 'Message to the American Nation', Issue 11, Spring 2013, pp.8-9.

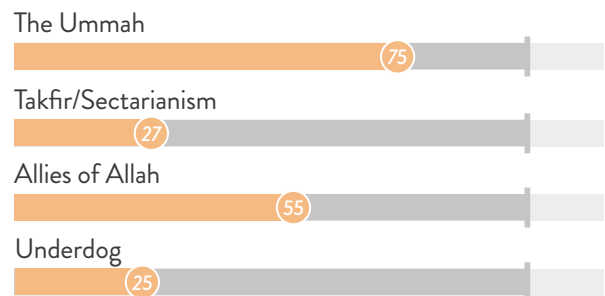
FIGURE 5.1

Thematic breakdown for Group Identity
By number of sources in which themes appear explicitly

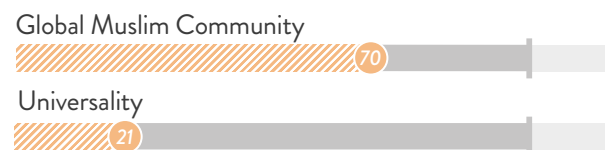
OVERALL



GROUP IDENTITY CATEGORIES



THE UMMAH THEMES



TAKFIR/SECTARIANISM THEME



ALLIES OF ALLAH THEMES



UNDERDOG THEME



* Theme encompasses the entire category

DEFINITIONS:

CODED THEMES for GROUP IDENTITY

THE UMMAH

Global Muslim Community: The worldwide Islamic community or *ummah*, which jihadi groups claim to represent in their struggle.

Universality: Relates to the objective of achieving an Islamic state for the global *ummah*, and the rejection of nationalism. An ideological focus which underpins the transnational appeal of Salafi-jihadism.

TAKFIR/SECTARIANISM

Takfir/Sectarianism: Rhetoric concerned with what it means to be a 'Muslim' as opposed to an 'apostate'. Commonly used to sanction violence against Shia

Muslims, who bear the majority of the accusations of deviancy, as well as leaders of Muslim-majority states deemed insufficiently Islamic.

ALLIES OF ALLAH

Divine Support: Having divine favour provides a significant explanatory lens for both victories and defeats in the eyes of jihadis. It simultaneously provides both a source of hope and a submissive thanksgiving for divine intervention.

Geopolitics: A narrative framed primarily in defensive terms, jihadis often communicate a view of a global world order geared explicitly towards demeaning Islam, which needs to be struggled against.

UNDERDOG

Underdog: At first glance seemingly at odds with a belief that one's mission is divinely ordained, this David vs. Goliath emphasis is proud rather than self-pitying, often accompanied by rhetoric of bravado and victorious struggle against the odds.

ers engage in jihad out of a religious duty to defend Muslim lives and honour, and to fight for oppressed co-religionists around the world. The propaganda presents jihadi groups as the military vanguard of the *ummah*, requiring the allegiance and support of the entire global Muslim community.

Fighting on behalf of the *ummah* catalyses the transnational narrative of defending Islam in a war fought against the religion itself, in conflict zones ranging from Iraq and Syria to Yemen, Israel and even Myanmar. The concept of the *ummah* also represents a powerful recruitment tool, providing a religious identity that transcends culture and nationality, allowing sympathisers in South Asia, South East Asia and diaspora communities to express solidarity and allegiance to a global struggle against oppression, and the re-establishment of supra-national Islamic rule under a caliph. For most Muslims, this jihadi self-conception represents a major cognitive dissonance, as the movement claims to be struggling on behalf of the *ummah*, whilst destroying its most revered sites and shrines, and defaming Mus-

lims around the world by purporting to act in its name.

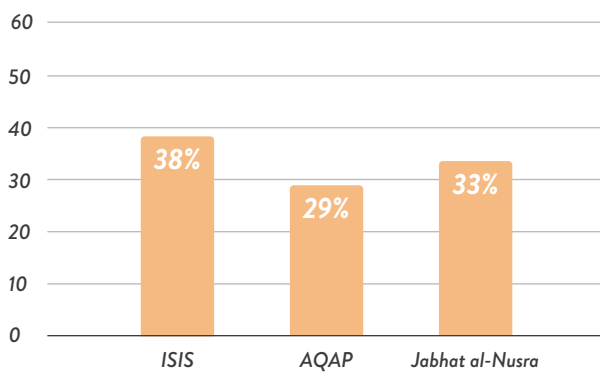
The *ummah* is by far the most dominant aspect of jihadi group identity, with almost twice as many references in the propaganda as any other identity theme. In total, 61 per cent of the propaganda we examined refers to the *ummah*, with all three groups referring to it in over half of their propaganda.

In particular, all groups stress the importance of mujahidin to the defence of the *ummah*. Notably, many of ISIS' references are predominantly to the objective of unifying the *ummah*, requiring the destruction of idolatrous nation states, rather than specifically as an aspect of group identity. This weight of reference clearly shows the extent to which the groups operate around the concept of the international Islamic community. References to the *ummah* were often accompanied by those to 'Ahlus Sunnah', which has a far more politicised and exclusive meaning attached to it, which will be explored in greater detail below in the section on *takfir* and sectarianism (see page 41).

FIGURE 5.2

Breakdown of *Universality*

Percentage of total sources coded to theme, by group



Following on directly from the ideological focus on the *ummah* is the narrative of **universality** which underpins the transnational appeal of jihadism, and which partly explains the passage of jihadis and supporters to seemingly alien struggles in foreign lands.

The universal factor of the movement is a powerful theme that relates to the objective of achieving an Islamic state for the global *ummah*. It appears in 18 per cent of all the propaganda we examined. All three groups make reference to the universality of their faction, with ISIS making up 38 per cent, AQAP 29 per cent and Jabhat al-Nusra 33 per cent of the propaganda which aligned with this theme.

Although not from ‘official’ propaganda, insight into the prominence of this universalist ideology can be seen in the fact that during the Ferguson protests of August 2014, ISIS-affiliated Twitter accounts condemned racial discrimination in the United States, claiming that all ethnicities and nationalities were equal in their ‘caliphate’. As well as a creative piece of PR, this idealistic rhetoric may also reveal a streak of defensiveness over accusations of Arab superiority within Jabhat al-Nusra, ISIS and AQAP, with reports of Indian foreign fighters in particular being refused frontline combat roles.⁴⁰

ISIS in particular utilises this transnational aspect in its recruitment narratives, calling to “brothers in creed”

40 ‘I cleaned toilets while in ISIS, Kalyan youth Areeb Majeed tells NIA’, Times of India, 30 November 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/I-cleaned-toilets-while-in-ISIS-Kalyan-youth-Areeb-Majeed-tells-NIA/article-show/45328623.cms>

from Western countries to join its cause, whilst Jabhat al-Nusra sees its Syrian battle as part of a wider movement. AQAP, which relies less on foreigners for its jihad, still emphasises the transnational nature of the struggle:

“To our dear brothers and sisters in the West... Rejoice! for all is not lost. Verily, the opportunity is still available to participate in Jihad with your wealth”. (JABHAT AL-NUSRA)⁴¹

“O muwahhidin [believers in tawhid] in Europe, America, Australia, and Canada... O muwahhidin in Morocco and Algeria... O muwahhidin everywhere upon the face of the earth...” (ISIS)⁴²

“Dear Muslim, don’t you see the banners of Lā Ilāha Illa Allāh [profession of tawhid] being increasingly raised in the streets of our nations? The Ummah is calling for you... Don’t you want to be a part of the armies that reestablish the Khilafah?” (AQAP)⁴³

TAKFIR/SECTARIANISM

A crucial part of the identity and ideological construction process of jihadi groups is through defining themselves in contrast to the ‘other’, and in particular expressing what it means to be a ‘Muslim’ as opposed to an ‘apostate.’ The act of **takfir** (declaring someone apostate) in jihadi propaganda is commonly used to sanction violence against Shia Muslims, who bear the majority of the accusations of deviancy, as well as leaders of Muslim-majority states who are deemed insufficiently Islamic. Within Islamic jurisprudence the act of **takfir** is a highly controversial subject, and a false accusation of apostasy against another Muslim is considered a serious sin.

Sectarian language is an element that features prominently across all three groups, appearing in 24 per cent of the propaganda we examined. ISIS and Jabhat

41 Al-Risalah, ‘Ramadan: the Month of Striving’, Issue 1, June 2015, pp. 19-20.

42 Statement, al-Adnani, ‘Indeed your Lord is ever watchful’, 22 September 2014.

43 Hafiz al-Uruppi, ‘Sincere advice from a Muhajir’, Inspire, Issue 12, p 15.

al-Nusra material formed the weight of takfiri and sectarian references, taking 35 per cent and 38 per cent of the takfiri sources respectively. Only six per cent of the AQAP propaganda we examined contained references to *takfir*, though it is conceivable that continued Houthi political dominance in Yemen could precipitate an increase. Jabhat al-Nusra's prominence in this finding contrasts with the weight of 'merciful' narratives propagated by the group (see page 34), particularly towards religious minorities.

The implementation of sectarian tactics has been a prominent strategic dispute between al-Qaeda and ISIS and its predecessor groups. The disagreement was one of the major factors that precipitated the split of the movements in 2013, when ISIS entered Syria. Indeed, in its propaganda ISIS has even gone as far as accusing other jihadi groups of *irja*: in essence, not being restrictive enough in whom one defines as a Muslim.

Nevertheless, this research suggests that differences in sectarian language in the propaganda do not represent an ideological divide between the different groups, but rather a narrative split; Ayman al-Zawahiri's al-Qaeda places a greater importance on winning public support from those who might balk at explicit sectarian violence than ISIS' more divisive tactics.

However, such depictions are reflective of a growing culture of sectarianism across much of the Middle East. A 2012 survey found five countries in the Middle East and North Africa in which over 40 per cent of respondents believed that Shia are not Muslims.⁴⁴

ALLIES OF ALLAH

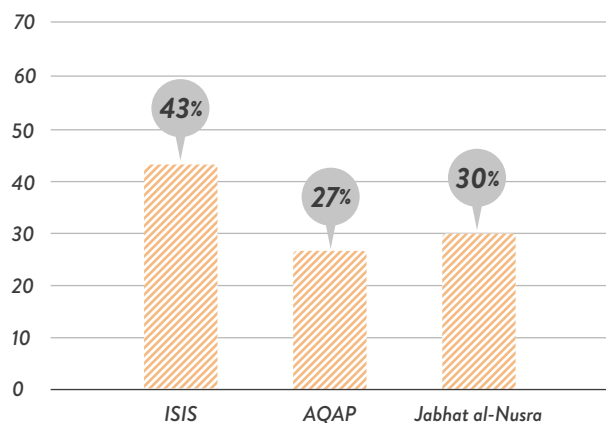
Sectarian rhetoric and pronouncements of *takfir* are often bound up in the propaganda with references to a supposed 'Shia-Zionist-Crusader' alliance, determined to humiliate and degrade the Sunni Muslim world. This represents another example of the binary lines drawn in the propaganda, wrapped up in



⁴⁴ Pew Research Center, 'The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity', 9 August 2012, p.9. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/08/the-worlds-muslims-full-report.pdf>

FIGURE 5.3

Presence of *Allies of Allah* in propaganda Percentage of group's sources referencing theme



apocalyptic language of the great battles of the end times.

This self-conception of jihadis as '**Allies of Allah**', defined largely against those who are His enemies, is an important identifier within the propaganda. It appears in 33 per cent of the sample, with ISIS emphasising it marginally more than AQAP or Jabhat al-Nusra. This conception provides a significant explanatory lens for both victories and defeats in the eyes of mujahideen. It simultaneously provides a source of hope and a submissive thanksgiving for divine intervention.

In the jihadi conception, God is alternately facilitating victories and testing faith, and so is always on the side of the fighter. Perpetually being on the winning team, even when faced with defeat, once again raises the self-fulfilling value of *yaqeen* (certainty), which underpins all other ideological aspects of jihadism and makes the movement's narratives so hard to deconstruct without falling into the binary trap that they build up.

In the propaganda, all groups make regular references suggesting divine allegiance. This is split between expressions of allegiance towards God and from God, meaning that some references explicitly express fighters' loyalty to God and others focus on the message that God is facilitating their victories and thus, is present in their struggle.

CASE STUDY

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The global jihadi movement has become an increasingly competitive arena, with evidence of tense relations between factions and organisations operating on shared battlegrounds. Jabhat al-Nusra's affiliation with al-Qaeda has further entrenched the group's rift with ISIS, and both groups have dedicated significant propaganda to undermining the other. In an effort to appear distinct from ISIS and to garner popular support from other rebel factions in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra has attempted to style itself as the moderate, merciful and reasonable Salafi-jihadi faction operating in Syria.

In an Al Jazeera interview in June 2015, the group's leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani made the case for the group's merciful qualities when discussing the issue of the Druze community and Alawite defectors. In the interview, Jolani states that "we will defend [Alawite communities who disassociate from Assad], like we defend ourselves". Through his expressions of mercy and accommodation of minorities within the liberated towns, Jolani aims to differentiate his group from the ISIS approach towards the Druze, who for the latter are considered, unlike Christians, not eligible for *jizyah* (a protection tax for minorities) as they are not conceived of as people of the book. This argument, based on an interpretation by medieval

Islamic scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah, is propagated in an article titled 'The Allies of Al Qaidah in Sham' in Issue 10 of *Dabiq*, criticising Jabhat al-Nusra and its allies. It features a theological and historical debate over the "Druze apostates".

Irregularities in other Jabhat al-Nusra material, however, suggest an inconsistent and far less accommodating position on minority sects and non-Muslims. Throughout the sample, there is clear evidence of references within Jabhat al-Nusra material that demonstrate equally strong takfiri and sectarian narratives to those of ISIS. In a statement made by Jolani in September 2014 titled 'For the People of Integrity, Sacrifice is Easy', sectarian discourse is dense and recurrent. In quite distinct contrast to the accommodating image he portrays in the Al Jazeera interview, Jolani refers to the Shia, saying: "They have begun to bear their teeth after the repercussions of recent events. These people resent the Sunnis and regard them as the first enemy to them, and they seek to take revenge against those who killed Hussein (R.A), the son of the daughter of the Prophet of God (S.A.W), one thousand four hundred years ago, and they base their religion on this aspect".

The speech mirrors the tone of Jolani's other speeches and reflects similar tactics used by ISIS to demonise and alienate minority sects, thereby portraying a far less moderate image than

is otherwise implied through the group's occasional references to mercy.

Furthermore, it is also clear that for many references to mercy, either by Jabhat al-Nusra, AQAP or ISIS, the theme of repentance was central. In other words, mercy was granted under strict conditions that involved complete rejection of previous affiliations and evidence of commitment to the group before mercy could be granted. Conditions attached to expressions of mercy are observable in Jolani's Al Jazeera interview and also in an ISIS video released in April 2015, titled 'From the Darkness to the Light' which features defectors from Jabhat al-Nusra and the Free Syrian Army switching allegiance to ISIS and repenting. Jabhat al-Nusra's narrative of mercy is exactly that, a narrative, and is underpinned by the same intolerance towards those deemed 'un-Islamic,' as is seen in ISIS' brutal videos.

The identification of enemies as opponents of Allah is very closely associated with the narrative function of commentary on geopolitics, communicating a world order geared explicitly towards demeaning Islam. This narrative is framed primarily in defensive terms; references inciting defensive jihad are often interconnected with those to geopolitical commentary in the propaganda.

As a narrative, geopolitical commentary appears in a quarter of the propaganda we examined, although this was not equally distributed. AQAP propaganda dominated the coverage of this theme, with almost double the proportion of ISIS, while Jabhat al-Nusra referred to global events in a mere eight per cent of its output.

UNDERDOGS

A particularly interesting finding in the research was the prevalence of an ‘underdog’ spirit as a key group identifier, a phenomenon that at first glance might seem at odds with a movement that believes its mission is divinely ordained. A proud rather than self-pitying narrative, the underdog attribute is often accompanied by the rhetoric of bravado and victorious struggle against the odds. In this sense, this group identifier is very closely linked to the ideological value of advocacy for the oppressed.

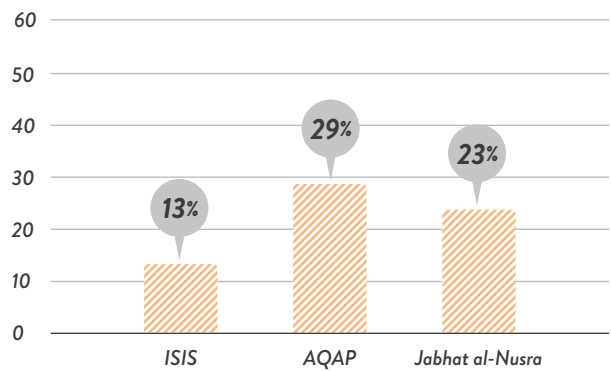
The underdog theme particularly relates to parts of the material that spoke of, or alluded to, being in a position of inferiority against an enemy’s weapons and might, and overcoming them despite meagre resources or limited men. This narrative of being simple and humble in resources and numbers against a global power (or alliance of powers) connects with many of the values identified as central to jihadi ideology. It often coincided with the mocking of enemies and victory being attributable to Allah, whilst also having significant implications for jihadi conduct, presenting an interesting dynamic as grand chivalric ideals sit beside a romanticised image of a resourceful and wily ‘Robin Hood’ character.



FIGURE 5.4

Presence of *Underdog* in propaganda

Percentage of group’s sources referencing theme



“America is not a legendary power... It has been defeated in Irāq and then in Afghānistān in the hands of simple Mujahideen who carry AKs and knives”. (AQAP) ⁴⁵

AQAP dominates references to the ‘underdog’, with 29 per cent of its material referring to it. A more cynical reading might ascribe this narrative to a fundraising necessity. Showing off high-end weaponry seized from military bases might not be as effective a tactic in endearing groups to donors than references to victories with “modest rifles”.⁴⁶ Jabhat al-Nusra exhibits this tendency in 23 per cent of its propaganda. This narrative of an underdog spirit is much less prevalent in ISIS propaganda, appearing in only 13 per cent of its material. This may be because ISIS feels such a narrative would undermine the legitimacy of its ‘caliphate’, as it uses its propaganda to present an image of a functioning state.

These group identity factors play as important a part in jihadi propaganda as core values and prescriptions of conduct, adding cohesiveness to the ideology and helping to explain the actions of those outside their own group. Adopting identifiers that explain both victories and struggles in terms of divine favour allow jihadis to solidify their certainty in the binary that justifies their violent struggle.

45 Inspire, ‘Iman Defeats Arrogance’, Issue 12, pp. 11-12.

46 Al-Risalah, ‘Everlasting reward, Shahada Series’, Issue 1, June 2015. pp. 41-42.

The use of group identity is also a good approach for counter-narratives to take. The select nature of the group in the Salafi-jihadi ideology explicitly excludes the vast majority of Muslims around the world. If applied consistently, it would also exclude Muslims through history, including those like Saladin who are much admired in the propaganda. These contradictions should be exploited by those who wish to compromise the ideology's appeal.

SCRIPTURE and SCHOLARSHIP

HOW JIHADI GROUPS USE THE QURAN AND THE HADITH

As part of an exploration of the intellectual resources drawn upon in jihadi propaganda, it is important to examine how Salafi-jihadi groups make use of Islamic scripture, namely the Quran and the Hadith, in their attempt to imbue their ideology with religious legitimacy.

DEFINITIONS: SCRIPTURE and SCHOLARSHIP

Hadith: The collection of the reported actions, sayings and tacit approval of the Prophet Muhammad. The material was transmitted aurally until Islamic scholars verified and collected the materials into six authenticated books some years after the death of the Prophet.

Quran: The Islamic holy book, believed by Muslims to be the word of God as dictated to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel. Consists of 114 surahs (chapters) of varying length, subdivided into ayahs (verses).

Scholarship: Works of Islamic theology and exegesis. Sunni Islamic scholarship is split into four major schools of thought (Hanafi, Maliki, Shaifi, Hanbali), which are regarded in Salafi doctrine as *bidah* (religious innovation), detracting from the purity of the revelation of the Quran and Hadith.

Our findings suggest that the centrality of Quran and Hadith references in all types of propaganda, both outward and inward facing, means that scripture and reference to religious authority will play a crucial role in efforts to curb the appeal of jihadist ideology. Often the use of such texts by the groups is dismissed as instrumental or irrelevant. But ignoring the ways in which Salafi-jihadis lean on scripture leaves the interpretation of texts to extreme actors and alienates the important role religious leaders have to play in countering extremism.

Although the use of scripture in the propaganda might be read purely instrumentally as a show of outward piety, wielded to justify acts of barbarism, the way that these texts are used by these groups implies that they are in fact used to underpin the entire ideological framework, and are the first authority turned to when the groups come under fire for their actions.

The Salafi-jihadi ideology holds that its interpretation of the practice of the Prophet and his companions represents the ultimate example of Islamic practice. As such it should come as no surprise that the Quran and the Hadith, the purported revelation of God to Muhammad and sayings and actions of the Prophet respectively, are the main reference tool for these groups in seeking legitimacy for their actions.

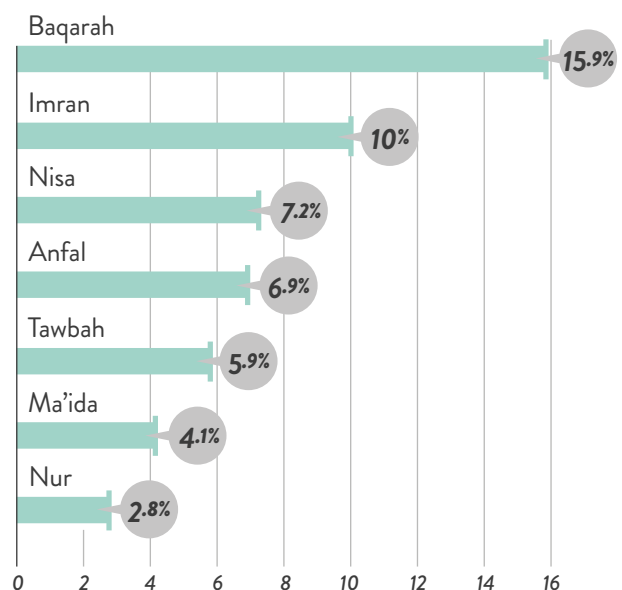
SCRIPTURE

Exactly 50 percent of the total sample of material features references to ayahs (verses) from the Quran. The first notable finding was the breadth of this referencing. Of the 114 surahs (chapters) in the Quran, 63 are referenced throughout the sample. It is likely that this number would increase with an enlarged sample size.

FIGURE 6.1

Seven Most Referenced Surahs

Percentage of total sources coded to each surah



As Figure 6.1 illustrates, Surat al-Baqarah is the chapter from the Quran most frequently referenced in the propaganda. Nevertheless, this still only amounts to a total of 46 references and 16 percent of the total. This demonstrates a broad, but highly selective, use of the Quran in the jihadi propaganda. When references to the Quran are made to support claims, it was common throughout the material for multiple references to be quoted from a variety of chapters.

Multiple Quranic quotations are more likely to be used per source to affirm the legitimacy of statements than quotations from Hadith literature. Of the sources in which the Quran or the Hadith are referenced there is an average of 5.1 Quranic references per source, compared to 3.1 Hadith references.

ISIS demonstrates the most extensive use of scripture in its propaganda overall. Density of Quranic references are particularly high in written propaganda, but references are also surprisingly comprehensive in statements. In fact, many ISIS statements are so rich with Quranic references that the tone was similar to that of a sermon. A good illustration of this is a statement made by ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani in June 2014 titled 'This is the Promise of Allah'. Overall it contains 24 references to the Quran, comprising 26 per cent coverage of the entire statement. Of these 24 references, 13 different surahs are referenced, ranging from the second surah of the Quran to the sixty-third. Of the 13 surahs, Surat al-Imran features the most, with a total of six references, followed closely by Surat al-Nur with five.

The vast and expansive application of the Quran is indicative of a wider pattern that features across the sample, in all three groups' propaganda. These findings suggest that although propagandists are careful not to contextualise their use of scripture, and to ignore any scholarship that contradicts their system of belief, they quote from a wide variety of sources, suggesting that they believe that drawing from a range of material affirms the legitimacy of their ideology.

Nevertheless, a deliberate rejection of swathes of

Islamic scripture problematic to their ideology by jihadis, sits at odds with the centuries-old tradition of *tafsir* (exegesis/analysis) within Islam, whereby in order to produce a religious ruling, a comprehensive examination is required of any scriptural reference that could be read as a possible exception or contradiction. According to a strict Salafi interpretation, scriptural arbitration is of no importance, as such scholarship represents *bidah* (innovation), which contradicts *tawhid*. (As we will see later, however, jihadi groups often do allude to scholarship when it suits their ideological framework.) This has considerable implications for the response to jihadi ideology. It suggests counter-narrative efforts need a religiously engaged argument that contextualises, and provides a fuller account of, scripture than the jihadi ideologues and propagandists do.

Received wisdom dictates that jihadi groups use highly selective Hadith to emphasise the apocalyptic nature of their project, making vague references to great battles and the imminence of the end of days. However, the majority of Hadith referenced in propaganda are classified as Sahih Muslim and Sahih Bukhari, followed by Sunan Abu Dawuud, Sunan al-Nisai and Jami al-Tirmidh, all within the canonical hadith collections and the top five most highly regarded books within the Sunni tradition. When it is deemed to add legitimacy, multiple authorities are cited, although notably Hadith are occasionally quoted without attributing a reference, possibly when the propagandists think that its authority is less robust.⁴⁷ While the Quran is often quoted in propaganda without context, Hadith are often used more specifically by jihadis, including with interpretations from authoritative Hadith scholars (seemingly standing at odds with their rejection of scholarship as 'innovation'). In all, 22 per cent of the propaganda refers explicitly to Hadith literature.

When justifying the burning of Jordanian pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh in February 2015, ISIS cites no fewer than six examples of punishment with fire from Ha-



47 For example: "And what about the Hadeeth [sic], when [the Prophet] said, 'The Muslim who resides in Dar-ul Kufr is not my responsibility.'" (Inspire, Issue 12, p.15)

dith literature and the rightly-guided Caliphs.⁴⁸ This response may well have been prompted by the near universal condemnation of this action by Muslims (including jihadis) around the world, referring to the Abu Dawuud Hadith that “No one may punish using fire other than the Lord of the Fire”. Defensive reactions like ISIS’ prove that scripture really does matter to jihadis, showing their susceptibility to the use of religious texts to condemn their actions.

Jihadi use of Hadith could also be interpreted as another way of rooting the movement in a Sunni group identity. Sunnis in particular relate to the identity of ‘Ahlu Sunnah’ (People of the Sunnah) closely, indeed the word ‘Sunni’ comes from the word ‘Sunnah’: the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad as recorded in the Hadith. Although this usage is not in itself sectarian, certain Hadith references can be viewed as a way of excluding minorities (including the Shia, whose Hadith canon developed separately from the Sunni tradition), and forming a more exclusive identity, rooted in the use of scripture.

Beyond specific scriptural references, the tone and style of the Quran is often appropriated for rhetorical purposes in contemporary jihadi statements. In particular, statements will often claim to use the Quranic trope of “Speaking to the Muslims”, chiming with the numerous references to be fighting on behalf of the global *ummah*.

Due to the poetic character of some surahs of the Quran, some passages are even interpreted in different ways by different jihadi groups:

“And spend in the Cause of Allāh (Jihād of all kinds) and do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction. And do good; Truly, Allāh loves the doers of good”.

[2: 195]

AQAP applies the above verse to the concept of *in ghamaasi* (the legitimacy of martyrdom for its own sake, see page 20), by defining the vice of “throwing yourselves into destruction” as “abandoning jihad”, rather than committing martyrdom without gain. This interpretation has stretched the meaning of the verse

far from the mainstream understanding, for example providing an unconventional English translation of the ‘Cause of Allah’ as ‘Jihad of all Kinds’. Meanwhile, Jabhat al-Nusra interpret this verse as a more mundane call to not be “miserly with the wealth that Allah has provided them with” during Ramadan. Disagreements such as these, particularly regarding the relativistic understanding of poetic language, may contribute to undermining jihadis’ claims to absolute certainty in their ideology.

However, certain Quranic references are used consistently by different groups, suggesting a coherence in how scripture is used across the movement. In particular, a verse from Surat al-Baqara, used in a statement by ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani as well as Jabhat al-Nusra in their propaganda, represents a neat encapsulation of the perpetuity of defensive jihad:

“And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able”.

[2: 217]

Residing within the apocalyptic ‘end of days’ framework, this verse is interpreted as central to proving that there will be a continued jihad until the end days.

HOW JIHADI GROUPS MAKE USE OF / REJECT SCHOLARSHIP

Apart from references to the Quran and the Hadith, jihadi propaganda also draws upon certain areas of Islamic scholarship that it deems to affirm its own religious legitimacy. This is despite the fact that Salafism, a broader movement within which the three groups analysed reside, condemns much scholarship as religious innovation (*bidah*), and an aberration from the pure Islam of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. A finding of our research is that jihadi groups are happy to quote religious authorities when it suits their ideological agenda.

SALAFI/ NON-SALAFI SCHOLARSHIP

The propaganda demonstrates a broad application of Islamic scholarly work and a considerable utility of Islamic intellectual heritage. Especially interesting was the variety of scholars referenced in the propaganda

48 Dabiq, ‘Responding to the Doubts’, Issue 7

who were not simply of Salafi or even Hanbali associations.

The propaganda indicated that scholars from the range of *madhabs* (schools of jurisprudence), including Hanbali, Shaifi and Maliki, were quoted extensively in support of group conduct and objectives. Of this selection, particularly prominent is Ibn Taymiyyah, a commonly referenced medieval Islamic scholar associated with the Hanbali school. From the Shaifi school, Bayhaqi, al-Nawawi, and al-Mawardi are also recurrently referenced, and from the Maliki school, Qurtubi and Attiyah. However, references are by no means limited to this. In fact, in total, there are 45 different scholars quoted or referenced throughout the sample with a high likelihood that the number would rise in a larger sample. The only major school that was not represented was the Hanafi school. Further research is required to develop our understanding of the theological and intellectual culture that is being promoted through Salafi-jihadi circles and propaganda to explain why no Hanafi scholar featured in the sample.

An observation during the analysis of the material was references to the work of well-known Muslim theologian, Abu Hamid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali and his scholarly volume, titled ‘Ihya Ulum al-Din’. This volume is repeatedly cited by both ISIS and AQAP. Ghazali is strongly associated with Sufism. His book, referenced in the propaganda simply as ‘al-Ihya’ due to its singular reputation, is known for its unrivalled analysis of Islamic spirituality, an emphasis that has been noted by much of the jihadi propaganda. A closer look at the volume displays some interesting attributes that are equally emphasised in Jihadi propaganda. For instance, within the volume, books are dedicated to ‘Patience and Thankfulness’ (Book 32), ‘Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil’ (Book 19), ‘Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence’ (Book 35) and ‘The Duties of Brotherhood’ (Book 15). By cross-referencing some of the themes, it is interesting that many of the terms used in the jihadi propaganda reflect many of Ghazali’s themes. To some extent, it shows the reliance of the propaganda on Islamic intellectual heritage. To an Arabic-speaking audience, references to some of these great works would be impressive and would help a person relate and trust the authenticity of the source. However, even for a

non-Arabic speaking audience, the extensive and accessible references to scholarly work introduces the audience to a debate that may be relatively new to them if they are a religious novice. For both audiences, references to known and respected scholars selected widely from the various *madhabs* creates an illusion of a large, timeless and transnational community.

The extensive reference to multiple scholars of varied backgrounds suggests that the Salafi or Hanbali interpretations are no longer singularly promoted in the propaganda, but that the use of intellectual heritage has broadened exponentially. By focusing so much on the Salafi-jihadi nexus we overlook a wealth of other material. In fact, as the research has found, jihadi propaganda is far more holistic than is often acknowledged, and the groups’ attempts to propagate jihad not simply as a physical state but also a route to spiritual fulfilment is likely to continue to coincide with the broad-spectrum referencing of various scholars that we see incorporated into the propaganda today. Effective counter-narratives will need to mirror this holistic approach to framing jihad and work to incorporate an equally diverse intellectual heritage.

REJECTION OF SCHOLARSHIP

While there is extensive referencing of, and quoting from, Islamic scholarly circles throughout the propaganda of all three groups, there is also recurrent evidence of rejection of scholarship in general. This contradiction is common to all three groups, but ISIS’ dysfunctional relationship with scholarship is especially pronounced in the propaganda. In statements, Adnani frequently referred to the scholarly body as the “donkeys of knowledge”:

“Look with the perspective of the Shariah and the evidence, and then don’t turn to the fatawa of the donkeys of knowledge who’ve stumbled and fallen in trash. Do not let their famous reputations deceive you, even if they have a long history of writing and authorship, for they neither left the laps of the tawaghit, nor marched forth to jihad”.⁴⁹

49 Al-Adnani statement, ‘O Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah’, 23 June 2015.

Within the sample, ISIS applies the same pejorative phrase in reference to scholars in issues nine and ten of *Dabiq* as well as in other statements within and outside the sample.

METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

In order to gather the evidence-base for this research, an in-depth analysis was conducted through a process of coding of more than one hundred sources of propaganda from the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), Jabhat al-Nusra, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

The innovative approach of applying well-established qualitative data analysis coding to the study of jihadi ideology and propaganda has given us the opportunity to deliver accurate and conclusive evidence that is both quantifiable and rich in qualitative analysis. The combination is crucial to measuring the significance of the nuances within jihadi ideology while also portraying the bigger picture.

Using the leading qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo, the sources attributed to each group were coded for recurring themes, references to Quran, Hadith, scholarship, inconsistencies in the text, and language and terminology. The coded software then underwent a second level of analysis by merging quantitative findings with important qualitative findings, and applying them to a framework of analysis designed to group common themes and isolate others, in order to query patterns or irregularities in the texts across the sample.

The sample for analysis included only officially released material from the three groups, but sources varied on the nature and type of propaganda, including magazine publications, written statements, audio statements and nasheeds, as well as video releases. Both Arabic and English material was used in order to guarantee a full-spectrum analysis of the ideological content for both Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic speaking audiences.

In order to streamline the focus for collation of material, timeframes were adopted through which to filter the search. A broad timeframe, from ISIS' entrance into Syria in April 2013 to July 2015, was applied. Only material released from within this timeframe was considered for analysis. However, if the material published within this date also featured references to speeches or statements released before April 2013, analyses for these statements were permitted.

By analysing and coding the content of jihadi propaganda, it was possible to quantify and assess the dominance of recurring themes and measure their importance based on the frequency with which they occurred across the sample. The comparative approach also allowed us to assess the consistencies in ideology between different groups and thereby apply conclusions per group and more broadly too. The coding process further enabled us to demonstrate the interconnectedness of themes within the ideology, revealing a strong internal coherence.

CRITERIA OF SOURCING

In total, 114 sources were gathered, comprising 48 AQAP propaganda sources, 40 ISIS sources and 26 Jabhat al-Nusra sources.

It was decided that only official propaganda material should be included in the sample, in order to accurately reflect the central position of specific topics and themes. As jihadi information outlets and propaganda become increasingly informal and decentralised across social media, it is important to distinguish the official outlets and sources from the unofficial material. For the purpose of this research, only official sources can be seen to be representative of the central ideology of the groups. However there is a need to assess, perhaps in future research, to what degree material from official and unofficial outlets differ in respect to ideology and narrative.

In order to ascertain the official credentials of each source, a simple framework was applied to include only those materials produced and disseminated by known official media outlets associated with the groups. Consequently, the sample only features material from seven different official media outlets.

PRINCIPLE DATA SOURCES IN COLLATION OF GROUP MATERIAL

All materials were drawn from online archives. Aaron Zelin's 'Jihadology' blog (jihadology.net) and Ay-menn Jawad al-Tamimi's site (aymennjawad.org) have provided a useful repository of jihadi propaganda, including videos, audio statements and written statements and publications. Tamimi's blog was especially

Group	Official Media Outlets
Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)	Al-Furqan Media Foundation Al-Hayat Media Centre Ajnad Media Foundation Al-Itisam Foundation Provincial media outlets (e.g. “Raqqa Province Media Office”)
Jabhat al-Nusra	Al-Manarah al-Bayda Foundation for Media Production
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	Al-Malahim Media Foundation

TABLE 7.1: Principle propaganda outlets in collation of group material

useful for sourcing official nasheeds from the various groups and the images of billboards in ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra territory. Zelin’s ‘Jihadology’ blog is a source for videos, statements and publications from a variety of jihadi groups operating globally, and offers archives dating back to 2008. Materials are searchable by date, group, or subject. Pieter Van Ostaeyen’s blog (pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com) offered an additional point of reference for various material from all three groups.

CLASSIFICATION OF SOURCES

Once collated, the materials were imported into the Nvivo software for coding. The collated sources were categorised according to a number of attributes that would feature as variables for analysis. These included the date when the material was published or released, the media outlet responsible for its production, and the apparent intended target audience for the propaganda: Muslim, non-Muslim, or mixed.

Categorising the intended target audience was the most ambiguous attribute to classify. However, there were many indications in the material that informed the target audience. Those directed exclusively for a Muslim audience typically contained ritual expressions of Islam and numerous Quranic references. All of these elements disappear when messages are directed to a non-Muslim audience. It is also common for groups to begin their message, video, or statement with an explicit message to the intended addressee.

The mixed target audience category required greater nuance. A common feature was that for material

intended for a mixed audience, a combination of intimidation and mobilisation techniques were used to engage both audiences. Therefore sources that featured this combination of techniques were classified as ‘mixed’ for the intended target audience. This said, many materials that were identified as designed for a mixed target audience were within magazines and publications that were designed predominately for a Muslim audience. Consequently, such articles could arguably be considered ‘entertainment’ for the sympathetic Muslim audience, and primarily designed to incite and inspire violence for the cause.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Throughout the coding process, themes or ‘nodes’ were identified in order to group and categorise specific ideological aspects that were present in the material. Initially, the themes were broad outlines based on typical expectations one might have of jihadi propaganda. As references to these themes appeared in the material, the relevant sections were coded and flagged for subsequent analysis.

As the coding process developed, more detailed and specific themes or nodes were identified as and when they appeared in the sources. The *ad hoc* approach to coding enabled more thorough coding to take place and an especially comprehensive analysis as a result. It also meant that researchers’ preconceptions could not unduly sway the findings. The themes served to break the content down into manageable elements for analysis and allowed the qualitative data to be easily and accurately quantified for the purpose of measuring the dominance of specific themes over others.

	Coded Theme
Ideological Themes (Nodes)	Defensive Jihad Offensive Jihad Destruction of heritage Humiliation of enemy (Justification of) attack Mercy ‘Prophetic Methodology’ Slavery Targeting civilians Allies of Allah Leadership The Ummah Underdog Universal (borderless) Advocacy for the oppressed (Justice) Apocalypse Attribution of victory to Allah Brotherhood Honour Ihsan Iman Loyalty Martyrdom Afterlife Patience Predestination Tawhid Truth over Falsehood/Good over Evil The Far enemy The Near enemy (End of) ‘Humiliation’ Liberation Caliphate State-building Unity of the Ummah Takfir and/or sectarianism Rejection of Scholarship Rejection of nationalism Nobility of Jihad
Narrative Themes (Nodes)	Connection of past and present Direct address to enemy Pull factors Push factors Geopolitical commentary Media commentary Romanticising struggle Binary ‘The Glorious Past’ (Narrative Utilities) Hadith Reference Quranic reference Scholarship and tafsir Poetic rhetoric (Arabic) Poetry

TABLE 7.2: Propaganda themes coded according to ideology or narrative

Each new node or theme was classified according to whether it occurred as a narrative or as an ideology.

Ideological themes were identified as those that are based on religious or political beliefs, as framed by the groups. They were later arranged according to the analytical framework used to clarify the key components of the system of beliefs that form the group ideology. Examples of possible ideological themes could be ‘martyrdom’ (as a component of the groups’ value-base) or ‘Establishing the caliphate’ (as a component of the groups’ objectives).

The same rationale was adopted in determining those themes or nodes that work as narrative-builders. A clear example of a narrative theme in the selection was ‘Romanticising the struggle’.

References to specific surahs or chapters from the Quran and Hadith collections were coded, as well as references to the works of specific Islamic scholars. These were later analysed for their dominance in the material and their relation to the themes.

In addition, the language style and techniques were coded for poetic language and rhetorical devices. This offered a further dimension to the analysis, as the results were considered alongside the themes and the attributes against the sources. For example, this allowed comparisons to be made according to the language styles between the groups and between their different types of sources, and when these address certain subjects or covering specific themes. Any shifts in language style were coded and flagged for subsequent analysis. All language style nodes were categorised as being related to narratives, as it is a technique through which to complement an ideology, but it can be important in assessing the importance of some themes over others where rhetoric and emphasis through language is made for greater impact.

ARABIC SOURCES AND CODING

Currently, there is no qualitative data analysis software available that is compatible with Arabic. This has meant that translations of some documents and materials have been necessary for full-spectrum analysis to take place. Where possible, official translations disseminated by the groups’ designated media outlets have been sourced and used for analysis.

Where this has not been possible, the research team’s own translations were used. Awareness of some interpretive bias was considered when using unofficial translations. Translations of referenced Hadith and Quranic text throughout the Arabic material were not made by the research team, but rather sourced based on the references provided, and official and recognised translations were used accordingly. For video releases in Arabic, notes were taken by the team and imported into the software, where coding of the notes took place.

GLOSSARY

Ahlus Sunnah: ‘People of the Sunnah’ in Arabic. Often used as a phrase of address in the Hadith, the word ‘Sunni’ derives from this term.

Al-Risalah: ‘The letter’ in Arabic, the name of Jabhat al-Nusra’s English-language propaganda magazine.

Ayah: Literally means ‘evidence’ or ‘sign,’ but in relation to the Quran it refers to a verse from the text. Ayahs, or verses, are found in the surahs, or chapters, of the Quran and are usually numbered.

Bayah: Oath of allegiance.

Caliphate: A form of Islamic governance that emerged after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The leader, known as the ‘caliph,’ must be appointed by consultation according to Sunni thought, and should represent the interests of the entire Muslim community.

Dabiq: The title of an English language online ISIS magazine. It is also the name of a town in northern Syria and in Islamic eschatology is one of the two possible locations for an epic battle between invading Christians and defending Muslims that will result in a Muslim victory and mark the beginning of the end of the world.

Dar al-Harb: ‘The Domain of War’ in Arabic. A contentious term denoting an area where Islamic rule is not enforced and

where jihadis believe Muslims are unable to practice their religion freely.

Dar al-Islam: The ‘Domain of Islam’ in Arabic. A contentious term denoting an area of Islamic rule where Muslims are free to practice their religion.

Hadith: The collection of the reported actions, sayings and tacit approval of the Prophet Muhammad. The material was transmitted orally until Islamic scholars verified and collected the materials into six authenticated books some years after the death of the Prophet.

Hijrah: Refers to the migration of the Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Medina. In the propaganda it refers to the migration that Muslims should undertake to move away from ‘hostile lands’ to Muslim lands, where they can practice their faith safely.

Ihsan: The physical demonstration and manifestation of a Muslim’s faith, encompassing worship and importantly, of doing good as an expression of worship. This includes adopting a sense of social responsibility. It is considered the highest level of worship to Allah, after submission (Islam) and belief (Iman). It is central to Sufism.

Iman: Conscious belief in the metaphysical aspects of Islam based on a sound, reasoned understanding of the religion. In simple terms, it refers to the belief in the six articles of faith:

belief in God, the Prophets, angels, scripture, predestination and the afterlife.

Inshallah: ‘God Willing’ in Arabic.

Jahilliya: An Islamic concept referring to the ‘state of ignorance of the guidance of God’ or the ‘Days of Ignorance’ in reference to the condition of the Arabs before Islam was introduced to Arabia. In Salafi-jihadi ideology, the reference is applied to the state of most of the Muslim community today.

Jihad: A religious responsibility on Muslims to serve and uphold the religion. The word means ‘to struggle’ and ‘to persevere,’ and for the majority of Muslims refers primarily to a spiritual struggle.

Madhab: School of thought or jurisprudence. There are four major Sunni schools of thought (Hanafi, Maliki, Shaifi, Hanbali), two Shia schools (Jafari, Zaidi) and the Ibadi school.

Martyr: A person who willingly sacrifices one’s life in pursuit of a cause. In jihadi literature the Arabic term for martyr is often not translated into English but instead will be seen in the text as *shahid* or the plural *shuhada* (lit. witness).

Nasheed: Literally ‘anthem’, in Salafi-jihadi propaganda this is vocal music in the form of rhythmic chanting often sung in a cappella. They are often used as motivational purposes but also during celebratory gatherings.

Salafi: A Sunni Muslim school of thought that advocates a return to the early Islam practices by the first generations of Muslims, relying on literalist precepts of the Quran, the Sunnah and Hadith, as interpreted by its adherents.

Salafi-jihadism: A sub-set of the Salafi school that believes in the implementation of puritanical Islamic governance through violent jihad.

Shia: The second largest denomination of Islam. In the jihadi literature, Shia communities are often referred to pejoratively as ‘Rafidah’ (which derives from the Arabic word for ‘those who reject’) or ‘Nusayri’ (exclusive to a Syrian Shia branch, commonly known as Alawites).

Shirk: Idolatry or polytheism, literally associating others with God. The opposite of *tawhid* (monotheism).

Sunnah: The traditions of the Prophet.

Surah: A chapter of the Quran, of which there are a total of 114. Each chapter contains a number or ayahs, or verses.

Sykes-Picot: A secret agreement made between Britain and France in 1916, preparing for the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War.

System of beliefs: Refers to the values, conduct, objectives, and identity categories that organise

the themes and make up the ideology.

Taghut (pl. Tawagheet): In Islamic theology, the term refers to idolatry or to worship of anything but Allah. The term is regularly applied in jihadi circles to refer to the leaders of Muslim majority countries.

Takfir: An accusation of apostasy made about another Muslim.

Tawhid: The fundamental Islamic tenet of the unity of God. The opposite of *shirk*, it refers to an unequivocal belief in a single God, omnipotent and without partners. The jihadi concept is an extreme interpretation of a belief generally held by the Abrahamic faiths.

Ummah: The worldwide Islamic community.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the following institutions and individuals for their work, resources, time, and ideas in the research and writing of this report:

Jonathan Furman, Sheikh Dr. Usama Hasan, Ben Higgins, Lambeth Palace, Ross Martyn-Fisher, Melanie Smith and staff at the Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

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