



**PHD**

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*Terrorist Rhetoric, Group Identity, and Threat Framing: The Cases of ISIS  
and Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi*

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*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

*University of Bath*

*Department of Politics, Languages & International Studies*

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## Thesis' Abstract

An effective counter terrorism strategy must entail an improved understanding of the necessary conditions for Islamic terrorism's mobilization efforts. This project focuses on the rhetorical mobilisation which terrorist leaders employ, as well as elements that contribute to said mobilisation's success or failure.

In my efforts to analyse terrorist rhetoric, I asserted the value of group identity and threat framing as the building stone of that rhetoric's mobilisation efforts. We employed two notable theories in social psychology, namely the Social Identity Theory and the Integrated Threat Theory. The application of these theories survived the test in three historical contexts and with three different methodologies.

An introductory chapter is first presented to lay the theoretical and historical grounds for the thesis: it illustrates the current state of the literature on terrorism, its roots, its rhetoric, and its relationship with Islam. In addition, it provides a brief historical context by summarising the history and persona of the project's main character: Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi. A description of the literature's position when it comes to socio-psychological explications of how terrorism functions is then presented before concluding with a more detailed review of the two theories in implementation and highlighting the literature gaps.

The first article traces the historical origins of Zarqawi's rhetoric back to the influential 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar Ibn Taymiyya. The latter was famous for his exclusionary rhetoric which has been extremely relevant for many violent extremist groups around the world: his creed

revolved around the demonization of groups, such as Christians, Shias, and Alawites, by way of framing them as *Out-groups* which pose a *Threat* to Sunni Muslims. Discourse Historical Analysis disclosed how such demonization took a place within the context of foreign invasions and the supposed collaboration of those *Out-groups* with the Crusade and Mongol invaders. I highlight the historical-structural similarities between the days of Ibn Taymiyya's and those of Zarqawi's, as well as the critical role the former's rhetoric had for the latter's: Zarqawi adopted Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric and made numerous references to it as he portrayed Shias as a historical enemy whose *Threat* reflected a historical trend. Such portrayal was empowered by another foreign invasion, that of "Operation Iraqi Freedom", which ended with Shia Iraqis taking control of the government and aggravating the existing tensions; this made an optimal analogy for Zarqawi's rhetoric against Shias.

The second article analysed Zarqawi's statements following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 until his death in 2006, a time in which his mobilisation was most effective. I used NVivo to code the statements page by page in the search for references to the various *Out-groups* and the *Threat* thereof. The results showed, temporally, the prominent relevance of *Out-grouping* and *Threat* in the corpus and the dependence upon them in the rhetorical efforts to mobilise. The effects of the invasion were also shown to have been a significant element in that rhetoric as Zarqawi made clear connections between the Allied forces "far enemy" and the Shia community "near enemy"; the more power Shias were given within the Iraqi state, the more threatening they were portrayed. As Zarqawi's rhetoric became increasingly anti-Shia, Iraq suffered from an increasing terrorism-related fatalities, the highest in the world at the time, and by a significant margin. By illustrating the extent to which Zarqawi weaponized existing societal fragmentation and grievances in Iraq, for his efforts to out-group and threat-frame, I also showed the critical and negative role that the invasion of Iraq, along with its subsequent policies, played in fueling sectarian violence.

The third article focuses on a time of declining ISIS mobilization starting from 2015. It used Learning Natural Language Processing to apply my theoretical framework over hundreds of issues of ISIS' magazine "Al-Naba". The model produced five topics that showed the significance of out-grouping and threat framing within the entire corpus. Furthermore, not only did it illustrate the relevance of these concepts for ISIS' mobilization efforts, but it also constituted a promising prediction model of ISIS' targeting decisions against the *Out-groups* under Study: by doing so, it has also shown that topics which associated *Out-groups* with *Threat* have the most predictive capabilities which, in turn, provided strong support for the findings of the other two articles.

In this PhD thesis I show the importance of the Social Identity and Integrated Threat Theories in explicating terrorist rhetoric in its efforts to achieve optimal mobilisation by appealing to its constituents' group identity through the demonization of certain Out-groups and associating them with Threat. Such improved understanding of terrorist rhetoric, ultimately, aspires to provide a useful model for the purposes of combating terrorist mobilization efforts and protecting vulnerable communities from its violence.

## Introduction and Literature Review

### Introduction:

#### Origins of the Personal Interest in the Topic:

Growing up in Syria, I was aware of the critical sectarian nature to the political system and the historical context of sectarian tensions in the country. Sectarianism plays a major role in the daily lives of people who live in such diverse lands as those of the Levant. Awareness of one's sectarian positioning is an integral part of one's identity and frame of existence.

Belonging to this religious sect or that carries implications that transcend beyond traditions, customs, and simple religious practices: it mandates the way life ought to be lived from the kinds of jobs one is most likely to be able to obtain, to which neighbourhoods to reside in, to which romantic partner one is encouraged to have and the kinds of jokes one is allowed to make.

The shadow of the sectarian violence which took hold of Syria in the early 1980s was still prominent during the times of my childhood. Being born to an Alawite family, stories of family friends and relatives who were killed by the Muslim Brotherhood revolt were often brought up and discussed as belonging to dark times which were never wanted to repeat themselves.

The violent targeting of Alawites, by virtue of belonging to the same sect as the president and his government elites, posed many question marks. It was the case, even before the eruption of the civil war in 2011, that the infamous fatwa of Ibn Taymiyya against Alawites was often cited as the theological justification of targeting them by the rebels of the 1980s. From early age I knew his mandate that “Alawites are more dangerous to Islam than Jews and Christians”.

As Syria plunged into a civil war whose scale and viciousness far exceeded that of the previous century's, the matter of sectarian identity became even more prominent. Social media gave a platform for extremist fractions of the opposition to publicly condemn Alawites and call for their murder. By 2012, sectarian violence was taking over the country, and many individuals I knew had the misfortune to fall victim for it.

The importance of sectarian, religious, and ethnic identity in the Syrian conflict was undeniable. Questions as to the degree to which this inter-group tension in the war was relevant remained present in my conscious. This Thesis is my attempt on my part to explore the role of group-identity in shaping violent conflicts, guided by my personal history and local knowledge of their historical contexts and theological backgrounds.

Based on the aforementioned, this project prompted me to start by investigating the role of Ibn Taymiyya and his rhetoric as the main influence in Islamist extremism and its weaponization of group identity. Furthermore, the significance of group-identity and intergroup conflict is one which my personal experience taught me never to underestimate. This thesis, therefore, is very much integral to who I am as a person and is equally influenced and inspired by it.

An effective counter terrorism strategy must entail an improved understanding of the necessary conditions for Islamic terrorism's mobilization efforts. This project focuses on the rhetorical mobilisation which terrorist leaders employ, as well as elements that contribute to said mobilisation's success or failure.

Terrorism, at its core, fundamentally relies on the conviction of its believers and followers; a terrorist leader must seek to create a rhetoric as such to rally his constituents to his cause and to do so to such a successful degree that such constituents are convinced to sacrifice for said cause. In doing so, he ought to secure his place as a member of the group of people who may

share his beliefs and convictions in that cause: that group of people is called the Ingroup. On the other hand lies a task that is even far more complicated: establishing the danger that certain Outgroups pose to the aforementioned Ingroup. Carrying a specific argument from the point of establishing agency to the point of establishing emergency is, I argue, the building block of violent extremist rhetoric: the foundation block of terrorist rhetoric is establishing an Ingroup and an Outgroup, and the Threat that the latter pose to the former (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Terrorists, however, seem to make repeated comebacks following the eruption of many armed conflicts, and no place where this may be true more than the Middle East these days. Those extremists, ISIS for example, managed to attract thousands of loyal followers and wreak havoc over the region. The study of this phenomenon, namely its mobilizing rhetoric and its rise and fall in this region, will be the primary focus of this thesis.

Terrorism is, according to Friedland (1988), “an outgrowth of intergroup conflict” as opposed to “the view that terrorist behaviour is a manifestation of personality disorders or psychopathologies” (p.106). This intergroup conflict, we argue, is ignited by terrorist leaders by way of rhetoric that outgroups certain populations and associates the latter with Threat against their targeted audience who they perceive, and portray, as their Ingroup. Violent extremist rhetoric makers, after establishing themselves as part, and a devout one at that, of the Ingroup, seek to define the enemy or the Outgroup. Defining the enemy cannot manifest without rhetorical proof. That proof comes in the form of Threat: an Out-group is no enemy if it didn't pose threat to the In-group (ibid).

*In-group*, *Out-group*, and *Threat* are concepts that make the backbone of this research project. These concepts are well established in the literature and have been used extensively for years in various research fields (Stephan and Renfro, 2002; Stephan and Stephan, 2000;

Monterrubio, 2016; Shesterinina, 2016; McDoom, 2012; Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Calhoun, 2002a; Fujita, et al., 2018; Setterstrom and Pearson, 2019; S. McKeown, et al., 2016). They are formulated by two equally well-known theories: Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory, upon which I build my analysis of violent extremist rhetoric and its weaponization thereof. Said concepts, and the theories from which they stem, have been used in a multitude of violent extremist related studies, if in partial aspects in most cases. I endeavour to outline the relevance and importance of these concepts, and how I can build on the existing contributions to theorise a framework of how violent extremist rhetoric is made and what of. Ultimately, the purpose of this project is not modifying these theories, but to apply them on real-life empirical questions.

This chapter will provide an overview of the existing literature on the relevant topics discussed in the thesis; this overview will provide a better understanding of where the current literature stands regarding terrorist rhetoric. This project aims at providing an empirical analysis of global jihadi rhetoric aided by the two social-psychology theories aforementioned. What is meant by “rhetoric” in this project stems from an approach called “New Rhetoric” which is the “discursive techniques that aim to provoke or to increase the adherence of men’s minds to the theses that are presented for their assent” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). Here I attempt to analyse terrorist rhetoric in order to understand the points on which they, the violent extremists, focus on as a mechanism in reaching the audience’s hearts and therefore succeed in influencing that audience and, ultimately, convince them to join ranks or provide support of any kind. violent extremist rhetoric here is studied not just as a way of describing reality, but also as a way of constituting it; between the two lies a thin epistemological line which is, often, rather difficult so see. Here, I answer the how and what questions of such a mechanism: how is the rhetoric formulated to make convincing argumentation? And what are the justifications used in that rhetoric?

Terrorist texts, in various forms whether as transcripts of speeches, letters, or media publications, will be analysed throughout this project as a way of understanding how this rhetoric was framed as it is. All in order to figure out the points on which terrorist leaders focus on in their attempt to mobilise individuals reached by said statements. These texts are a legacy which terrorist leaders intend to last beyond the physical element of those who made them; they prove important as terrorism increasingly depend on sympathisers and affiliates (Holbrook, 2014). In this effort I resort to two theories of social psychology which will help us better understand why certain points of rhetoric were chosen as a matter of focus by my case studied terrorists, regardless of the fact that the latter were unlikely to have implemented their rhetorical strategy based on a knowledge of social psychology. It is important, at this point, to highlight the fact that I am analysing this rhetoric as it is directed towards groups, rather than individuals: this is analogous to the work of Cederman, et al. (2011) in its findings that group inequalities are far more predictive of conflict than individual ones.

One noticeable thing in the study of terrorist rhetoric is the tendency to use etic approaches by researchers, in addition to the lack of empirical studies, perhaps more so in books. Robin Morgan, for example, dwelled on his visit to the Gaza strip where he learnt from his experience working with the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) (Morgan, 2001). Richardson weighed in using the examples of both Islamic and Irish terrorists, what they wanted and how their cases showed the importance of her three Rs: revenge, renown, and reaction (Richardson, 2006). If one was to look through the literature for satisfying answers regarding terrorism, one would find multiple case studies focusing on a single event or individual. Books on Osama Bin Laden, for example, as we shall encounter later, are abundant; his personal history, how he was raised, how he travelled to Sudan and Afghanistan, and how he funded his terrorist organisation are well documented. However,

when it comes to mechanisms of mobilisation, rhetoric, or causes of success thereof, the literature is more limited.

Silke (2001) noted that in 30 years the terrorism literature failed in producing research which provides meaningful explanations, while at the same time suffering from confusion and lack of consensus. A look at the terrorism section of the library shows a tendency to study terrorism in a rather descriptive phenomenological way, but most importantly, the study of terrorism focused, until very recently, on an etic approach. Researchers would cite different terrorist movements, shedding light on their backgrounds, and providing interpretations and explanations of the phenomenon and its roots. McAuley (2006) maintained that the output of the literature was dismal, and that even more serious scholarly studies failed at studying the ideology of Islamic Terrorism with sufficient objectivity, seeing that ideology as simply barbaric and beyond explanation. Lately, however, journal articles have been, as we shall see later, attempting to see terrorism in a different light, using different methodological tools and diving deeper into terrorist related data in order to reach a better understanding of such a phenomenon. Specialised journals such as the *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence* are providing ever increasing detailed studies of terrorism and its mobilisation.

Some research on the mobilisation aspect of terrorism also exists. For example, terrorist recruits are divided into two types: those who join as a result of being recruited, or convinced, by existing terrorists to join these terrorists' cause, and those who are more hard-core, who join a terrorist organisation without an active recruitment effort pitching them. (Faria & Arce, 2005). Terrorists were found to choose a chunk of their new recruits from amongst their existing supporters (ibid) with the majority of cells constituted around friendships and kinship relationships; mosques and prisons were found to be especially important for this purpose (Ranstorp, 2006). In order to pitch for the first type of recruits, Al-Qaida in Britain, according to Magnus Ranstorp, who was the director of the Centre for the Study of Terrorism in

London, used a form of “talent spotters”; these looked out for possible recruits within mosques. In their mind they had two key characteristics which they looked for in a new recruit; strong commitment to the Islamist cause, in addition to their “skill sets and psychological make-up” (Upton, 2004 as cited in (Faria & Arce, 2005, p. 265)).

The struggle of the literature on terrorism, and the ways in which this literature is lacking, will be cited in this chapter; outlining the gaps, as well as the advances, of the existing literature, and eventually pinpointing the contribution that this project can offer. We shall show the diversity of the terrorism literature and the many aspects that it studied, focusing on the research trying to understand terrorism’s rhetoric as necessary and relevant to this project’s aspirations and focus. It will also show the numerous limitations of existing research and the gaps which this project could fill.

The study of terrorist rhetoric has proved more popular for scholars in the recent years; books and papers studying the different aspects of terrorism proliferated in the last few years, especially after the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq ISIS (Borum, 2011; Borum & Neer, 2017; Cohen, et al., 2018; Freeman, 2014; Lakomy, 2019; Pieslak, et al., 2019; Robinson, 2017). A steppingstone in this project will be this aforementioned outline; understanding previous researchers work on the subject will manifest the gap that this project is trying to fill, and the previous work that it can possibly complement. This project, then, aims at understanding how terrorist leaders frame their language in order to appeal to the constituents receiving the message. What are the building stones that these leaders stand on, in order to gain this appeal? To what extent are they successful in doing so? Can the study of terrorist rhetoric prove to have predictive potential in terms of physical attacks and the targets thereof? And can social psychology support the logic behind the choosing of such points? These questions will be tackled in a systematic process which depends on empirical analysis of large samples of data.

We will outline some of the most relevant literature on the subject, in addition to the different takes in understanding terrorism. The Socio-Psychological take is one of prominence here; as terrorism is as much of a social phenomenon as it is a political one, I attempt to merge two theories of social psychology in order to produce a more cohesive picture of my topic under study. This merging of these two theories, Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory, reflects the importance I find in linking agency and emergency as a key tool in terrorist rhetoric; it's not sufficient for this rhetoric to convince the audience those terrorists are with them in one team, but that this team is under threat that requires action: Agency and emergency come hand in hand. We will, in this chapter, briefly define terrorism and outline its roots and the role of religion in it, then discuss the scale and magnitude of the existing literature in more details, before discussing the two social psychology theories which were brought to aid us in this project. I source my data from the internet in the form of statements, letters, or newsletters; the internet provides us with a unique position to implement my emic approach and gain valuable insights into terrorist rhetoric and into the rationale of the men behind such rhetoric.

The following shall outline my main argument pertaining the building block of terrorist rhetoric, at least Islamic one: the literature review will show the relevance of employing the concepts of *Out-groups* and *In-groups* and the associated *Threats* thereof the former in constructing a narrative of agency and emergency upon which terrorist leaders build their rhetoric. These concepts will be shown to have been implemented in related research, but they will also be shown to have stopped short at providing a cohesive and compelling model of said rhetoric.

## Definitions of Terrorism:

The social world's refusal to grant us an objective reality mandates that we attempt to agree on the definition of the social phenomena which we discuss; since social concepts are abstract rather than objective, it would be easier for discussants of a certain subject to fall into misunderstandings resulting from the subjective interpretation of said subjects. Having an established definition of a studied phenomenon proves useful as it provides a degree of clarity upon which analysis can build. Terrorism is one of these phenomena that proved to be rather contentious to define. One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter; terrorists all around the world enjoy some level of community support. Even the vilest and most disgusting ones may develop a huge following and be seen as heroes by an even larger number of people. The problem of defining terrorism is clearly identified by scholars: Friedland (1988), for example, maintains that the mistake that some definitions make is that the criterion of what defines terrorism lies in the actor and not the act. He also cites Bowyer Bell (1978) and Laqueur (1976) maintaining that terrorism literature's definitions of terrorism are ambiguous and lack consensus. The problem of finding a universally accepted definition of terrorism hasn't found a conclusive solution in the last 30 years since Friedland expressed his point of view.

Considering an actor focused view rather than an act focus one may seem, at first glance, to provide a solution. After all, "Like pornography, we know terrorism when we see it, or do we?": That's how Louise Richardson started the first chapter of her book "What Terrorists Want" and thus summarising the point that putting a definition to terrorism is a rather difficult task. She does, however, attempt to define it as "deliberately and violently targeting civilians for political purposes" (Richardson, 2006).

Terrorism lacks a clear definition throughout the multitudes of organisations working to counter it and the cases involving it. That shows in the numerous definitions that exist; here's

a number of these definitions: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) simply defines terrorism by differentiating between domestic and international terrorism; the main criterion is the source of the terrorist motivation, a terrorist act performed by foreigners or locals inspired by foreign powers or movements are considered international, while the same would be considered local if the motivation was inspired by a domestic movement (FBI, n.d.). in that regard, the FBI specifies terrorism to be intended to “Intimidate or coerce a civilian population; influence the policy of government by intimidation or coercion; or affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping” (FBI, 2020).

The United Nations attempted to shed light on a definition of terrorism in many of its resolutions. For example, in its General Assembly resolution 49/60, it described violent activities of terrorist nature as “Acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them” (UNODC, 2018).

Paul J Smith maintains that while the lack of a clear definition of terrorism poses many challenges and criticisms, there is a robust definition of terrorism that is more internationally accepted and is mentioned in the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism in 1999. According to the Convention, terrorism is “Any other act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act” (Smith, 2008; United Nations, 1999). For all intents and purposes, this definition will be the one adopted by this project when mentioning terrorism. In order to focus on the question in hand, it's useful to

keep this definition in mind. When adopting any of the previously discussed definitions, I am to categorise Osama Bin Laden and his “Al-Qaida”, and Abu Musa’ab Al-Zarqawi and his “Jama'at Al-Tawheed wal Jihad” as terrorists. The two terrorist leaders advocated for indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians, spreading terror amongst entire societies, and using religion and for the purpose of advancing their political agendas.

It is crucial, at this stage, to maintain that the use of terms such as “Islamic Terrorists”, “Islamic fundamentalists”, “Islamic Extremists”, and the likes, is not a political statement of any sort. We, in this project, have no intention whatsoever in using the moral lens in viewing my subjects of study. Such terminology is only used to refer to individuals who justify terror with references to their interpretation of Islam. My interest only lies in understanding these subjects and the rhetoric driving their actions.

### Roots of Terrorism:

In his book “The Terrorism Ahead”, Smith (2008) cited the National Security Strategy of the George W. Bush administration which identified two sets of factors regarding the roots of terrorism (as far as the U.S concerns): factors that do not cause terrorism; these are poverty, hostility towards U.S policy in Iraq, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and U.S counter terrorism policies. The Factors that do cause terrorism were political alienation, lack of voice, grievances that can be blamed on others, conspiracy theories and misinformation, and terrorism ideology (Georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov, 2006, pp. 9-10).

Louise Richardson, on the other hand, maintains that, while there are two common explanations of terrorism as either the fault of a deranged individual or a vicious state, the best explanations can be found within the societies that produced the relevant terrorist individuals; alienation from the status quo and the will to change it, the feeling of being subjected to unfair treatment, and the leaders to take advantage of these conditions in a

mobilisation effort. Terrorism, emphasises Richardson, needs a complicit and sympathetic surrounding society. In addition, it is important for terrorism to have a guiding ideology in order to gain legitimacy, recruit, and mobilise (Richardson, 2006). Kivimäki, however, shows that the conditions that produce terrorist individuals do not necessarily produce terrorist organizations, yet both are needed for terrorism to rise (Kivimäki, 2005).

The conditions of alienation and deprivation seem to be important to many scholars who study terrorism, and that these conditions can be taken advantage of by terrorist organisations and leadership. “The process of indoctrination must ensure that those who have nothing to live for also have everything to die for. Sometimes this is done pragmatically, when such groups as the Lebanese Hizbollah and Palestinian Hamas guarantee lifetime stipends and medical care (plus access to heaven) for families of deceased Shaheed (martyrs)-young men who felt “unmanned” by being unable to find jobs in devastated economies” (Morgan, 2001, p. xx).

Randy Borum Studied the process in which radicalisation turns into violent extremism and criticised the conventional way of studying radicalisation processes: analysts in the 2000s, according to him, relied heavily on models which lacked the theoretical backbone or systematic research. He instead suggested a “Borum's Four-Stage Model of the Terrorist Mindset”: “Fundamentally, the four-stage process begins by framing some unsatisfying event, condition, or grievance (It's not right) as being unjust (It's not fair). The injustice is blamed on a target policy, person, or nation (It's your fault). The responsible party is then vilified-often demonized-(You're Evil), which facilitates justification or impetus for aggression” (Borum, 2011, p. 39). He, then, agrees with Richardson on the importance of grievances and the identification with victimhood as a necessary element in creating a terrorist. What Borum misses, however, is the role of group identity in creating that terrorist

mindset: injustices and grievances must be addressed towards the terrorists' *In-group*, and those injustices and grievances, in turn, are posed by the *Out-group*.

Terrorism requires, and benefits from, grievances as a fuel to power the fight against the source of these grievances. Terrorists themselves do not, necessarily, need to have grievances, as long as there are constituents whose grievances they can refer to.

All of the above explanations ring true to my proposed angle of analysis; Borum's talk of grievances, and Morgan's talk of devastated economies are but different manifestations of *Realistic* and *Symbolic Threats* whose detailed description will come later. These threats are mobilised in a rhetoric or a "guiding ideology" as Richardson would put it. Terrorists such as Zarqawi have no option but to lean on existing driving forces to support their arguments; calling for people to sacrifice their lives for a cause calls for a worthy cause, and a worthy cause cannot be pulled out of thin air, rather it must relate to existing, or perceived at least, causes of its own.

One thing that this project aims at is to show that, fundamentally, all "roots" of terrorism can be put under two categories as explained by Integrated Threat Theory: *Realistic* and *Symbolic Threats*. A lost job, land, political power, dignity, moral, tradition, custom, etc, are ultimately threats of that sort or the other. Once these threats are established, what is left for a terrorist leader is to identify the party on which the blame is to be put (Borum's "you're evil" part); that party is what Social Identity Theory conceptualises as the "*Out-group*". These out-groups may be the Jews, Americans, local dictators, Shias, etc, depending on the context. Trying to identify these out-groups and the threats they pose, according to my subjects of study, is one key purpose for this project. These two theories, ITT and SIT, then, provide an immense help in illuminating my view of what terrorist rhetoric relies upon; I later argue that, fundamentally, terrorist rhetoric is based on establishing *Out-groups* and associated *Threats* thereof.

What is certain is that the study of terrorism is far from a complete discipline, and the different opinions and schools of thoughts relating to it naturally vary, and perhaps contradict, as a result of such complexity. The discipline of terrorism research still has a long way to go in its attempt to provide a clearer image of terrorism, its rhetoric, roots, and cures. This project aims to provide a simpler, clearer that is, explication of how terrorist rhetoric is framed, on which bases, whether it can predict physical attacks, and what's the role of historical contexts in which it dwells, etc.

Another thing is also for sure, that the role of religion has proved to be a rather significant one for my case studies. In the next section I outline the importance of Islam in my project, and the useful relevance of the aforementioned theories in weaponizing it.

### Terrorist rhetoric and Islam:

One can confidently argue for a major influence of religion as a factor when it comes to Islamic Terrorism, or otherwise global Jihad. If we are to consider the root causes lying behind the rise of so many jihadi organisations, religion's role can never be underestimated. Furthermore, I shall illustrate how the aforementioned theories have been weaponised within the context of religion itself: Naturally, portraying religion to be under *Threat* is a clear example of mobilising *Symbolic Threats*, not to mention mobilising historical fractions within Islam as a source for establishing the *Out-groups* that the *In-group* can be compared against, as we shall see later in one of my papers; Zarqawi's rhetoric relied heavily on that of the famous 13th century scholar Ibn Taymiyya.

If we assert that religion plays a major role in Islamic Terrorism, we see how, in the last few decades, religion has posed as a cornerstone of the most prominent terrorist organisations; enough to mention Hamas, Boko Haram, Al-Qaida, and ISIS as examples of terrorist organisations for which Islam could not be separated from their identity. Kivimäki, for

instance, calculated that 57 percent of listed terrorist groups in the UK, US, and UN utilise Islam for both mobilisation and justification (Kivimäki, 2008). Being on the side of God is nothing but integral in these organisations' rhetoric; as Osama Bin Laden put it so clearly in an interview on Al-Jazeera "God Almighty hit the United States at its most vulnerable spot" (Smith, 2008).

The relationship between religion and terrorist rhetoric is one that is of most importance; three immensely important precursors to current times terrorist movements are all closely connected to religious motives, argues Richardson, the Sicarii or Zealots, the Assassins, and the Thugs, in classical times, medieval times, and medieval to modern periods, respectively (Richardson, 2006).

The importance of considering religion in this project stems from the fact that the terrorist leaders under question use Islam as a backbone of their rhetoric, as we shall encounter later: Their identifications of out-groups and symbolic threats are closely linked to Muslims as a religious group and to Islam as a guiding and unifying ideology.

The case for linking religion with terrorism is a rather contentious one; while some find a clear link between the two, some are suspicious of the validity of such supposition. For example, despite acknowledging that generalisations regarding the link between Islam and Islamic terrorist groups cannot be entirely dismissed, accepting terrorist groups' claims that they speak for religious doctrines can lead to massive misconceptions and serious policy decision mistakes that can lead to the alienation of the religious community in question, a community that is primarily non-violent (Tellidis, 2016). This point, in particular, is somewhat irrelevant to my project: My focus is on the use of Islam in terrorist rhetoric, as I, at no point, accept that terrorists under study represent the entirety of Islam, nor do I accept that said individuals represent the communities from which they dissent. Rather, I argue that Islamic history and theology have been nit-picked in a manner that serve the extremist

leaders' purposes of the violent extremism they manifest and preach.

Nowadays, and especially in the West, religion is increasingly seen as a matter of a lifestyle choice which lost its old influence over peoples' lives and priorities. The issue is that individuals' attachment to religion becomes ever prominent with the existence of violence, not to mention the momentum that religion offers when choosing to opt for violence against others (Dingley, 2011). Since it can be viewed as an alternative source of authority, rather than the civil one, it is argued that religion has terrorism in its very nature; when taken to the extreme religion can be seen as a source of legitimacy for violence against certain individuals, or classes of them, whose death is perceived by extremists as God's will (Hill & Kinney, 2007).

The case for Islam as an integral part of my case-studied individuals is beyond question. In fact, it could be argued that the rhetoric of global jihad harkens back many centuries to Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) who rejected Greek philosophy and argued for the superiority of Islam, called for Muslims to rise against the Tatars who have conquered Muslim lands, and declared Shia Muslims heretics: all who disobeys Islamic law was to be regarded as an enemy whom must be fought (Shahzad, 2011). Both Bin Laden and Zarqawi claimed religious authority and knowledge, cited Quranic verses and Islamic literature, and most importantly, addressed Muslims as a group united by the religion they worship, regardless of ethnicity, class, or colour. I.e., Islam was used as a tool to create the in-group that is "Muslims" as a prelude to create the out-group of the many powers that pose threats to said in-group. Here we see ourselves harkening back to SIT; creating an enemy (out-group) requires an in-group, for the latter Islam comes as an obvious identity pillar that is ready to be hijacked.

Both men were heavily influenced by an extremely conservative version of Islam and articulated their mission as a divine one geared towards pleasing Allah and defending his

religion of Islam. In the following chapter this will be carefully analysed and the prominent role of religion for these men will be clearly articulated, something which can never be separated from their rhetoric. Ibn Taymiyyah's rhetoric of categorising groups into good ones and bad ones, emphasising the threats that the bad ones pose for Muslims, fits well within the framework of the two social psychology theories I am to implement later. This rhetoric proves hugely important for extremists as they integrate it into their own rhetoric of encouraging the use of violence against groups that they, the terrorists, deem dangerous.

## Various Attempts at Understanding Islamist Terrorist Rhetoric:

We have previously maintained that this project adopts an emic approach rather than an etic one: the emic focuses on the inside perspective, the perspective of the individuals under study. This approach harkens back to the psychological studies of folk beliefs (Wundt 1888, as cited in (Morris, et al., 1999)). The etic approach, on the other hand, adopts the external perspective and harkens back to the disciplines of behaviourist psychology and anthropological approaches that focus on how external factors shape cultural practices (Skinner 1938, and Harris 1979 as cited in (Morris, et al., 1999)). In this sense, relatively few have attempted to understand terrorist rhetoric using the emic points of view. The overwhelming complexity of studying such a phenomenon as terrorism only adds layers of difficulty to the field; the central elements of the phenomenon are notoriously difficult to access systematically (Silke, 2001). Research on the subject often struggles: Silke (2001) analysed the existing literature and found the literature to be severely lacking in quality and rigour, he also noted that a huge percentage, 80 percent, of terrorism research published in the 1990s was done by one-timers, i.e., researchers for whom terrorism isn't their primary interest and only published one article in terrorism journals in a period of a decade. Furthermore, over 90 percent of research was conducted almost completely by lone researchers. The methodologies also suffered from serious flaws; 97 percent of interviews for, example, were mostly opportunity -sampled, and were neither standardised nor structured. The problem is, Silke noted, multi levelled; researchers' limited time, resources, and energy, in addition to the pressure to publish drives them to implement methodologies and analysis that helps them get the job done. Multiply with that the problem of transient literature mentioned above and the sheer complexity of the subject and we end up with unsatisfying research. Borum (2010) also surveyed the literature and maintained similar

conclusions and cited many other researchers who shared the view that the literature is, overall, lacking substance and rigour ((Gurr, 1988, Schmid & Longman, 1988; Horgan, 2005; Victoroff, 2005; Victoroff & Kruglanski, 2009) as cited in (Borum, 2011)). This, however, may have been changing lately, as interest in studying terrorism rose with the rise of ISIS, it's still not clear whether this rise in interest in terrorism will decline following the decline of the terrorist organisation.

Gus Martin sees that terrorism's objective is to capture the attention of certain audiences in order to convey specific messages to these audiences that varies depending on the specific audience. These audiences include politically apathetic people in order to force an end to their indifference, the government and its elites to make them yield to the terrorists' demands, and potential as well as confirmed supporters (Martin, 2003). While Louise Richardson maintains that, ultimately, what terrorists want is revenge, renown, and reaction; she mentions how one of the captors on the Hijacked TWA flight 847 kept shouting "New Jersey" in reference to the battleship that attacked Shia sites in Lebanon, and that terrorists understood the value of publicity since the days of the Zealots. She also mentions how Bin Laden boasted how his 9/11 attacks dominated the media, and how terrorists aim to force a reaction for a concession, causing disorder, or provoking repression (Richardson, 2006).

Terrorists, at least their leaders, are not simply lunatics and psychopaths who do what they do without much thought in a capricious manner. Behind terrorist rhetoric there is a logic that aims at achieving specific goals depending on the occasion and the cause. Understanding this is the first step towards acknowledging the importance of the study of terrorist rhetoric.

Robinson (2017) sees that there are four waves of Global Jihad: *The First Wave* is "Jihadi International" which lasted from 1979 to 1990 and was invoked by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. That wave's key ideologue was Abdullah Azzam and aimed at creating a global group of Muslim warriors who would collaborate to free occupied Muslim territory. *The*

*Second Wave* focused on what Osama Bin Laden, this wave's main ideologue, describes as the "far enemy" and hence this wave earned the title of "America First". The second wave was especially driven by the hate of everlasting "apostate regimes" and ignited by the failure of jihadi movements in both Algeria and Egypt. It sought direct attacks against the United States in order to push it out of the Muslim World. *The Third Wave* was titled by Robinson as "Caliphate Now!"; given birth by infamous names such as Zarqawi and Baghdadi and started following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. This wave had "apostacy" as its target and included Shia Muslims in that category as well. It focused on territory, sharia rule, and establishing an Islamic State. *The Fourth Wave*, and latest one, is "Personal Jihad". It was ignited by the fear of the defeat of Global Jihadism following the fall of the Taliban by the allied forces in 2001. It focuses on a media conscious approach to small scale attacks that are networked but decentralised. Robinson's conceptualisation runs parallel to ours: whether it's the Soviets, Americans, or apostate regimes, the core cause for these terrorist waves revolves around an established enemy (Outgroup). One of the purposes of this project is to analyse the saliency of the concept of the Outgroup in terrorist rhetoric, and to identify such Outgroups and differentiate them from each other.

If we are to accept the premise of these "waves", then it would be obvious that the fourth one benefits significantly from the rise of the use of the internet and its social media. The cyber space has been used by ISIS to lend it legitimacy and provide a platform for its "DIY (Do It Yourself) Terrorism" and unaffiliated sympathisers. Twitter gives the opportunity for these sympathisers to disseminate ISIS messages on a wide scale, something rather different from the monolithic organisational voice which the likes of Bin Laden and Zarqawi adopted. These disseminators helped normalise ISIS rhetoric, in addition to deliver its messages; gruesome videos of killing and torture to intimidate Westerners on the one hand, and engagement with administrative tasks, to portray a legitimate state, on the other (Veilleux-Lepage, 2016). We

commence, in this project, to benefit from terrorists' reliance on the World Wide Web in dispersing their message to any willing receiver on the globe.

Understanding terrorism's rhetoric and terrorism from terrorists' point of view, or the emic approach, might be more common with journal articles. Those show a fascinating range of interests in terrorism and a will to provide a more specific understanding of specific areas of study, something that is to be expected given the more specialised nature of journal articles in general (ConwayIII, et al., 2011; Suedfeld & Bluck, 1988; Cornelison, 2015; Lakomy, 2019; Pieslak, et al., 2019; Tsintsadze-Maass & W.Maas, 2014). These attempts at understanding terrorist mobilisation rhetoric reflect the increasing interest in studying terrorism in the past few years, and that can be shown by the multitudes of articles focusing on Islamic Terrorism, namely ISIS, since the latter started making news.

Some studied the complexity, dialectical and elaborative, of terrorist rhetoric as a way of comparison to non-terrorist rhetoric. Terrorist rhetoric was found to be especially simpler when it comes to elaborative complexity, and that it tended to become more defensive the nearer a violent act was imminent (ConwayIII, et al., 2011). This comes compatible with a previous study which shows a decline in "integrative complexity" of government communications in the prior to the eruption of violent conflict between countries (Suedfeld & Bluck, 1988).

Pieslak and his colleagues (2019) study the use of "Anasheed" (songs) by ISIS in its video messages; how these songs are used as soundtrack elements in these video messages. The paper used a tool called Automatic Content Recognition (ACR) which helped the scholars process a dataset consisting of 755 videos. The study aimed at showing the real-life uses of utilising ACR to combat terrorism in online platforms like social media. Tsintsadze-Maass & Maas (2014) Analysed terrorism through the lens of groupthink, utilising groupthink theory

as conceptualised in 1972 by psychologist Irving Janis; how terrorists new and old are susceptible to groupthink, pointing out that there has been a tendency to study rational terrorism and neglect irrational one and the importance of such findings in producing better counter-terrorism policies. On the individual level, however, this tendency may prove harmful, as the price of terrorist action probably massively outweighs the fruits of that terrorist action (Cornelison, 2015).

The rise of ISIS, and its unusually sophisticated propaganda tactics present a unique opportunity for researchers; multitudes of media outlets and social media accounts provide a higher degree of insight into the rhetoric of terrorists. Styszynski (2014) pointed out the new focus by terrorist groups such as ISIS on sophisticated media outlets and that these outlets are used for multiple purposes of publicity, spreading fear, and mobilisation of foreign fighters, he, however, didn't analyse the mechanics by which these goals are achieved in the rhetoric. Lakomy (2019) conducted a comparative analysis between two of ISIS English printed magazines, Dabiq and Rumiya. The paper was close to the spirit of this project as it focused on recruitment and incitement to violence as existed in these two magazines. It attempted to understand the approach that the editors of these magazines took in order to convince readers to join ISIS or conduct violent attacks on "infidels". The study looked for recruitment calls, violence legitimising statements, and callings for readers to engage in violence themselves. It found that the two magazines were somewhat equally focused on the legitimisation of and calling to violence, but they differed in recruitment messages; Dabiq was more focused on the issue, while Rumiya focused on callings for lone-wolf attacks. The paper's conclusions, however, didn't necessarily correspond with the modus operandi of the terrorist organisation, nor did it offer insights into the effectiveness of these ISIS' attempts. In this thesis I go beyond coding "direct recruitment calls" as is the case in Lakomy (2019) and provide an extensive analysis by utilising group identity and threat framing as a nexus of study: our third

article analyses hundreds of Al-Naba magazine issues using an innovative method that employs Machine Learning Natural Language Processing in discourse analysis and succeeds in illustrating the value of the SIT and ITT in predicting targeting decisions.

The attempts to understand terrorist rhetoric have become more urgent as ISIS started expanding outside its physical borders, with groups in countries like Libya and Nigeria declaring allegiance to Baghdadi as a Khalif. Furthermore, with the Lone Wolf phenomenon, incidents such as the two Australian teenagers who left their home country to the Middle East in order to join the jihadists, who were only amongst an estimated 150 Australians who joined extremists groups, according to the Australian government in 2014 (O'Brien, 2014), and estimates that as early as September 2014 it was thought that there were 63 French females and 50 British ones joined jihadi groups, with youngest been only 13 years old (Sherwood, et al., 2014), drove researchers to further understand the radicalisation process, this includes many aspects of the study of terrorism, such as the mechanics by which ISIS operates in order to attract new recruits online, its communication strategies, anti-terrorism policies, etc.

Low (2016) maintains that ISIS approach is one of pedagogy, not only that it tells Muslims that they are oppressed, but also attempts to outline causes and solutions to that oppression: allegiance to the caliphate, of course. Low analysed al-Baghdadi's infamous speech of 2014 in Mosul, Iraq. He found that the purpose of the speech was to construct the notion of an "Ummah" (nation) loyal to Baghdadi. This was achieved in two ways, according to Low: "Firstly, by invoking the name of Islam and articulating general exhortations from the Qur'an to establish a peculiar form of Muslim identity tied to ISIS's political project; and secondly, by establishing a generalised enemy of Islam—the camp of kufr—who is responsible for all the suffering experienced by Muslims around the world." (Ibid, p310). Georges (2016) also analysed the speech and showed its goals of establishing the idea of ISIS as a caliphate in both

Syria and Iraq, with Baghdadi as its Caliph, in addition to framing the conflict as one between East and West, good and evil, believers and non-believers. This invocation of Islam and the notion of the Muslim nation comes very relevant in this project; this, using SIT lens, is fundamentally an unashamed use of Islam as a way of constructing the concepts of the *in-group* and *out-group*.

While one might be tempted to presume Al-Qaida and ISIS as somewhat similar organisations; both, after all, rely on extreme interpretations of Islam and both share a complicated history. They, however, didn't enjoy the same degree of success when it comes to delivering their message. This is evident ever since ISIS emerged as a force to reckon with starting from 2014. While Al-Qaida depended heavily on its most senior leaders, Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri, to deliver its messages; the two were significantly older than the target audience and lacked appeal since their messages were presented in a sermon-like format' (Zekulin, 2018). Their ISIS counterparts were younger, and western nationals were chosen specifically to address their countrymen.

Another factor that made ISIS speakers more appealing is that they represent the grassroots of the movement, unlike Al-Qaida which tends to give priority to top leadership. This helped ISIS look as "freer and more open form of organisation" (Ibid). In another study, three speeches by Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri were analysed using a hybrid method of content analysis, it showed a few interesting results including that Bin Laden tends to emphasise that threat to Al-Qaida is one that comes from within, that is as a result of the mujahedeen slacking in their religion, while Zawahiri emphasises on external enemies as the threat, showing less tendency to blame his fighters. The researchers found that Bin Laden leans towards showing piety and adherence to Islamic creed, and he makes sure to include Al-Qaida leadership as sharing in this righteousness in an attempt to show his extreme-jihadi rhetoric as synonym with "pure" Islam (Cohen, et al., 2018).

In general, terrorism researchers have focused less on the words of terrorists and more on their actions: matters such as the choice of targets or the strategy behind terrorist attacks are prioritised over the study of terrorist rhetoric, despite the fact that analysing rhetoric can enable us to gain a better understanding of the nature, rationality, and behaviour of terrorism, among many other. While it is common amongst scholars to view terrorists' violent actions as more important than their words, these acts are not self-explanatory and are in need for words to frame them within the ideologies, objectives, and world view of the arbitrators (Honig & Reichard, 2017). Studying terrorists' rhetoric using their various communication outlets, then, proves immensely beneficial in analysing the multiple issues which influence them and which they, in turn, focus on: A few statements, interviews, and a recruitment video were used by McAuley (2006) who analysed Bin Laden's rhetoric regarding aspects of tribal and national aspects in the Arabian Peninsula, in addition to Saudi Arabia's place in the world economy. He showed that Bin Laden adopted a pan-peninsular approach and accused the region's leaders of selling out the interests of the people, ranted against western foreign workers stealing locals' jobs, bad services, and taxes in an attempt to appeal to the middle classes.

We, in this project, attempt to provide a much more thorough analysis of Islamic terrorist rhetoric by empirically studying additional data sets of various rhetoric outlets; this analysis shall provide a unique understanding of the way these terrorist leaders frame their speech in order to appeal to their audience. The data will be coded through the lens of two social psychology theories and with a context of a Discourse Historical Analysis which will illuminate the historical analogies and roots of said rhetoric. Such attempts to analyse terrorist rhetoric were made before, however, they were somewhat limited. Georges (2016) did so by studying the 2014 sermon of Abu Baker Al-Baghdadi's, the one when he declared himself Caliph, he uses Critical Discourse Analysis to show that Baghdadi employs the concept of the

Muslim Ummah in order to assert two points: The existence of a “camp of Islam” which all Muslims belong to and which needs the establishment of a Caliphate, and the existence of an enemy of that camp “camp of Kufr (blasphemy)”. The rhetoric is carefully framed in order to create the concept of an overarching Muslim Nation, invite Muslims around the world to stand together under its roof, and mobilise them to engage in Jihad against its supposed enemies. Indeed, Honig & Reichard maintained that terrorist rhetoric can be categorised into two main categories; ideological-based and PR oriented ones; studying rhetoric is important because terrorists are media savvy and tend to keep a good degree of rationality when it comes to their public rhetoric (Honig & Reichard, 2017).

Perhaps one of the closest works to our project is Holbrook’s book “The Al Qaeda Doctrine: The Framing and Evolution of Al Qaeda’s Discourse”. He analysed public statements by Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri in order to study Al-Qaida’s doctrine with regards to its justifications for activism and their proposed solutions, in addition to its communicative strategies. The focus was more on the public discourse of Al-Qaida and its evolution, as well as how the organisation fits within this discourse. The focus wasn’t, however, on particular strategic arguments. He found, for example, a difference in Al-Qaida’s rhetoric of communication as to when addressing Muslims vs non-Muslims. In addition, he provided a number of figures and tables explaining the findings: One showed the references to the undesirability of existing societies, others referred to the principal grievances, to the enemies and targets, to possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction, to calls for economic boycott, to direct threats made against the United States and the United Kingdom, and to criticism of Muslim masses as well as Muslim elites (Holbrook, 2014). The book depended, as did most of the literature in this chapter, on translated versions of the studied statements; indeed, it was shown that depending on translated data can pose serious problems such as the transfer of meaning across languages and the power with which the translator has over the research

design and integration (Temple & Young, 2004). This point I complement by analysing the original text in its original language.

The reliance on translated texts constitutes an undoubtedly disadvantageous approach to analysing any rhetoric. Using such approach would have proved problematic since “rarely does a translated literary work reach the level of the original in terms of conveying the original author’s intended meaning” (Hakemi, 2013, p.375).

The ability to analyse Arabic texts in this project provide multiple advantages that transcend the question of loss of meaning which, inevitably, occurs during the translation of any text. One of them is the expense and practical difficult of translating such amount of data, which would have been a significant obstacle for a sole PhD researcher.

A key finding which I encountered in my research, for example, is the linguistic similarities between the rhetoric of Ibn Taymiyya and that of Zarqawi. Both refer to Alawites as “Nusairies” and to Christians as “Nasara”, for example. These similarities may also extend to linguistic style, that is an interesting aspect for which this project doesn’t have space. The approach to study the original Arabic texts was made out of necessity, while at the same time provided clear advantages both in terms of efficiency and productivity of the research project, and in terms of quality and authenticity of the analysis.

### Literature on the Context of Islamic Terrorist Rhetoric; the Persona and History of Abu Musa’ab al-Zarqawi:

The aforementioned leads us to focus on the main character under scrutiny in this study; a terrorist leader who drew much attention and rewrote the history of terrorism as we know it. Understanding his background and rhetoric will only prove beneficial in this project; shedding extra light on his personalities and believes. If we are to analyse an individual’s rhetoric using his speeches, then it is surely beneficial to have in mind the background and

underlying beliefs which shape said rhetoric. Understanding how Zarqawi employs the concept of outgroups, for example, can prove easier when one understands how he became radicalised and the groups which he fought or considered as enemies. The importance of studying Zarqawi goes almost without saying, he is the spiritual founder of ISIS as we shall see; his activities following “Operation Iraqi Freedom” in Iraq changed the history of the region and caused repercussions we still feel to date.

Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) came into prominence after the war and was led by Abu Musa’ab Al-Zarqawi, who quickly stole part of the spotlight from Bin Laden and deviated from his core ideology, as well as crossing many lines when it comes to war techniques. The most important difference, however, was Zarqawi’s focus on a new near enemy rather than the far one; Shia Muslims in Iraq were suddenly the new main target of global jihad. Bin Laden spent the rest of his life struggling to keep AQI and Zarqawi in line (Freeman, 2014).

Abu Musa’ab Al-Zarqawi was born in 1966 Jordan as Ahmad Fadeel al-Nazal al-Khalayleh. He moved to Afghanistan to join the Mujahedeen there and run a training camp before he left for Iraq to continue his fight against the allied forces. There he led the group of “Tawhid and Jihad” which later merged with Bin Laden’s Al-Qaida. He quickly acquired a reputation for beheadings, bombings, assassinations, and sectarian warfare (BBC, 2005) (Teslik, 2006).

Before he engaged in jihadi activities, surprisingly, he was in jail for criminal activities including robbery, drug possession, and sexual assault. It was only after his release from jail that his mother pushed him into taking religious classes at a Mosque; there he developed an affection for the idea of joining the Jordanian Mujahedeen in Afghanistan. In 1993 he came back to Jordan where he was hailed as a victorious Mujahed, starting a new jihadi organisation which, in 1994, led him to prison under a sentence of 15 years. By 1999 he was released due to a general amnesty by the Jordanian King. He was swiftly back to his usual activities and was keen on fighting “apostate” regimes in the region. Only after 9/11 and the

allied campaign in Afghanistan that he decided to join arms with Al-Qaida and ended up in hiding in Tora Bora along with Bin Laden and many Al-Qaida fighters. He later fled as he was tasked with organising Al-Qaida affiliates in Iraqi Kurdistan, these later united, under Zarqawi's leadership to form what was called "Ansar al-Islam". Zarqawi, however, later decided to split and form his own "Jama'at Al-Tawheed wal Jihad" which was associated with Ansar Al-Islam (Michael, 2007).

Zarqawi implemented a new strategy in order to alienate the allied forces and destabilise Iraq by inciting sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni Muslims. This was done by targeting Shia leadership, holy sites, and even civilians. These practices, however, were at the time met by scepticism even amongst Al-Qaida leaders such as Ayman Al-Zawahiri who expressed, in a letter to Zarqawi in July 2005, his doubts about the wisdom of inciting Sunni-Shia hatred in the Muslim World. Zarqawi's unpopular tactics earned him the nickname of "Al-Gharib", or the stranger, amongst the movement (Riedel, 2007) (BBC, 2005). In his book 'Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS', Jobby Warrick explains the rise of Zarqawi as he was advertised to the world by the US government to be the link between Saddam Hussein and Bin Laden in an attempt to justify the Iraq War. Zarqawi took advantage of the void left by the insolvency of the Iraqi government following the war, by employing intelligence officers and soldiers who lost their jobs and aided by marginalised Sunni tribes as the Shia majority took power over with the allies' help. All this, in addition to the hideous, yet effective, tactics, of Zarqawi, give Zarqawi the undisputed title of ISIS' godfather (Warrick, 2016) (Cambanis, 2015). The importance of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi as a theoretician of global jihadism can't be overstated; the study of his rhetoric and understanding how he framed his speech will aid us in obtaining a clearer picture of how terrorism appeals to its audience, and on which points it focuses in order to achieve this purpose.

## The Rhetoric and its Medium

Zarqawi operated in the pre-social media world where his messages and recordings were either transported by hand by his supporters or made it onto the internet after which official media outlets such as Al-Jazeera may quote them (Aljazeera, 2004). In some cases, brutality was an efficient method of Zarqawi's in attracting attention, such was the video recording of the beheading of Nicholas Berg, which was reported on TV news and uploaded uncensored on YouTube (Chambers, 2012, p.38) . The statements used for analysis in this project were a combination of letters and transcripts of audio recordings which were checked for accuracy by the author of this thesis. The files available on Archive.org which were used in this project show audio recordings of Zarqawi which seem to be recorded amateurly but were, nonetheless, legible.

While these transcripts are confidently believed to be truly those of Zarqawi's statements, it is not clear how each of them was distributed, to what extent were they delivered in terms of scale of audience, and which ones made it on official media sources.

The dissemination of extremist rhetoric is restricted by the times in which it operates.

Literature already established the changing nature of jihadi propaganda and its use of the internet with time: "in the late 1990s, there were merely a dozen terrorist websites; by 2000, virtually all terrorist groups had established their presence on the Internet and in 2003 there were over 2,600 terrorist websites...The number rose dramatically and by November 2007 our archive contains over 5,800 websites serving terrorists and their supporters" . The use of the internet by violent extremists is, in turn, an asset which provided a wealth of data for this research project.

Zarqawi and his organisation were amongst the first of jihadis to adapt to the new age of the internet and sought to spread their message using the World Wide Web, the recording and

online distribution of the beheading of Nicholas Berg, and the increasing use of professional video makers in such efforts was a hallmark of what is called “jihadism 2.0”, of which Zarqawi and his Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) were pioneers (Chertoff, et al., 2020).

While Zarqawi used the early stages of Web 2.0 for outreach purposes and wide-scale dissemination in the form of video and audio speeches, many of which are analysed here, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria “ISIS” a decade later found itself operating in an even more technologically advanced world. The era of “jihadism 3.0” witnessed a shift in recruitment and information dissemination that sought to recruit individuals remotely and provided advice on how to conduct attacks (Ibid).

Indeed, when it comes to the utilisation of the internet for the purposes of propaganda and recruitment, ISIS has proved to be “an exemplar in that it has heavily invested in an online presence and uses online communities and social media to attract and retain supporters” (Piazza and Guler, 2021, p.1256). This latter point is proved once again later in this project as it analyses ISIS’ online-published magazine “Al-Naba” and shows the immense potential of the analysis of this medium.

This thesis covers extremist rhetoric within both versions of jihadism, but, while a fourth version does exist, such version has more to do with the use of the internet as a medium for conducting attacks (Ibid). This is ultimately very important but steers away from the purposes of this study in its focus on rhetoric per se as a tool for mobilisation.

It is worth mentioning, here, that the fault line between those who make the propaganda, disseminate it, and act upon it is rather vague. Nevertheless, the fact that ISIS, at its peak, had a large number of personnel and various administrative entities leads to the speculation that there may be a reasonable degree of separation between the thousands of individuals who worked for the organisation.

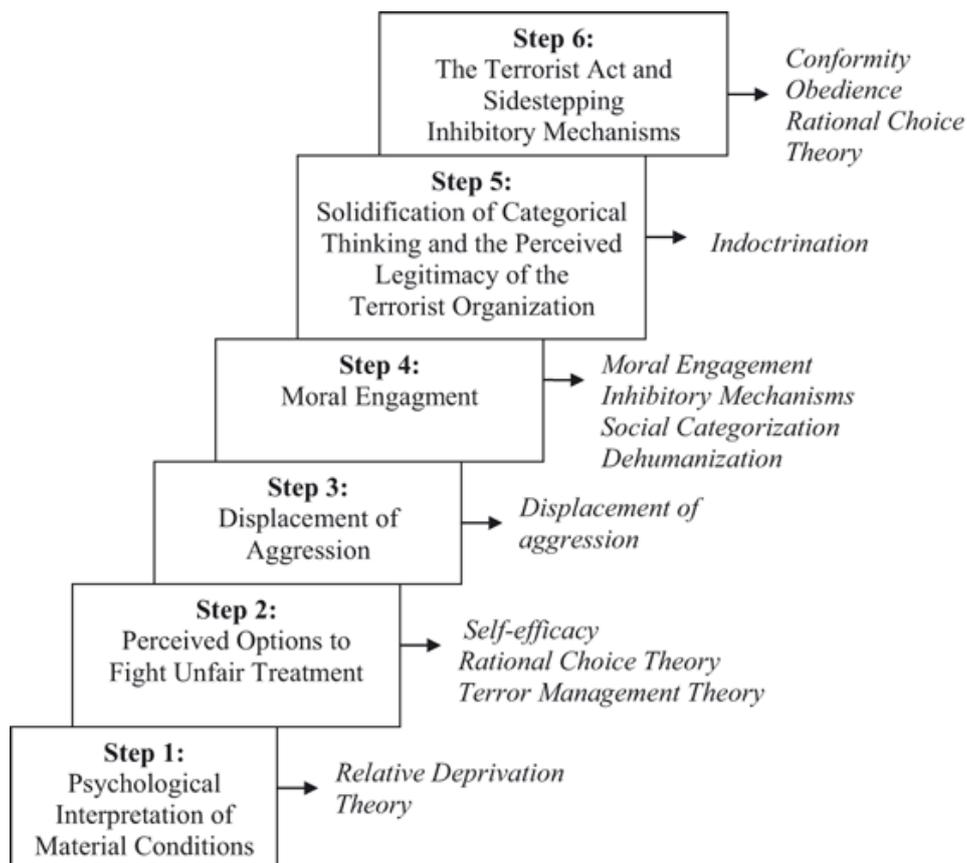
The degree of this separation and the interaction between the fighters and the media personnel, assuming said separation, is a phenomenon yet to be explored by research. It is, admittedly, a subject of immense difficulty to investigate and may never become entirely clear, considering the many barriers to conducting such research.

### Socio-Psychological Explications of Terrorism

We accept the premise that nobody is born a terrorist, rather the transformation is a complex process with numerous factors. Social Science has, so far, been far from reaching a definitive theory of terrorism, despite terrorism studies being around for almost 50 years (Borum & Neer, 2017). Understanding the socio-psychological level of terrorism promises to provide a better understanding of said phenomenon, beyond the influence of mere political observations, which might as well be very beneficial, but still be limited when it comes to explaining what motivates terrorists, what binds them together, or what makes them attractive to a certain section of community, etc.

In the paradigm of political behaviour, Sageman (2017) argues, self-categorisation is the process from which we ought to start when attempting to understand the social world. This perspective, Sageman sees, helps us move beyond certain assumptions that are often used in terrorism research, which in turn led to a stagnation in the field; it's often seen that certain individuals are drawn towards terrorism by some personal traits, while others would view terrorists as simply insane. This ideological perspective can prove to be false and misguided, in addition to counterproductive. Sageman also draws on the work of Henry Tajfel, whom we'll discuss in more detail later, in group identity theory. He, Sageman, gives an analysis of George W. Bush's speech following the attacks of 9/11; how Bush emphasised, inadvertently, the abovementioned theory in the way he was keen to establish two key groups, us vs them. A rather simplistic way of describing the reason for the attacks was that

the terrorists simply hated America and its way of life. This analogy is not far from the simplistic view of the world that terrorists themselves hold, and on which this project focuses. The link between some psychological conditions and some political phenomena have also been studied, proving a relation between individual conditions and the rise of systems of beliefs that contribute, in turn, directly to political events (Ibid). Fear and trauma, for example, were found to play a part in developing extreme religious beliefs which might facilitate war. War, in turn, is a major cause for trauma in individuals, and so on and so forth (Beyer, 2017). Another prominent attempt to explain terrorism from a psychological point of view was Moghaddam’s “Staircase to Terrorism” which was conceived to “organize current psychological knowledge to help direct future research on terrorism.” as shown below (Eid, et al., 2011, p. 610):



The model provides a rather insightful take on the radicalisation process and utilises the current psychology literature in order to understand such complicated phenomenon. This attempt was found to have been backed by empirical evidence, however, this evidence wasn't necessarily always comprehensive and lacked consistent quality; the model is important but further research was recommended to complement the psychological research on terrorism (Eid, et al., 2011).

Precht provided another framework (Precht, 2007, p. 5): "The typical pattern of radicalisation consists of four overlapping phases: 1. Pre-radicalisation, 2. Conversion and identification with radical Islam, 3. Indoctrination and increased group bonding, 4. Actual acts of terrorism or planned plots". He studied European bred Islamic Terrorism as a new phenomenon at the time; people involved in such terrorist activities were found to be mostly young males of (indicative) background factors that make people prone to radicalisation. These background factors were identified as: "(Muslim) identity crisis, experience of discrimination, relative deprivation, alienation, parallel societies, youthful rebellion and a relative lack of Muslim public debate on Islamist terrorism in the West" (Precht, 2007, p. 83).

Two other theories that are often implemented in terrorism research are the Rational Choice Theory and the Social Identity Theory; the two differ in the sense that in the first the individual commits actions that are in line with his/her personal goals. Social change, according to this theory, is done by manipulating the individual through rewards and punishments (Sageman, 2017). This can be counterproductive as it breeds resentment and rebellion on the individual's part. Social Identity Theory, on the other hand, argues that there's an urge to belong to the group; group members are attracted to its norms, and by this we can explain the fact that some individuals choose to sacrifice their seemingly personal interests for the interests of the group, which proves useful when attempting to explain political dissent, something that Rational Choice Theory can't seem to do (Ibid).

Regardless of the existence of a unifying ideology, even an extreme one, it cannot be sufficient to create terrorism. An extreme ideology doesn't necessarily lead to violence: In the process of what is known as "radicalisation", terrorist activists face multiple psychological barriers which the possible new recruits have. Religious reasons, the urge to belong to the group, or the search for a meaning in life don't, alone, lead someone to commit a terrorist act. Despite many people who might believe in a radical cause that justifies violence against the "other", the number of individuals willing to carry through with actual violence is much more limited. The vast majority of individuals find the idea of killing other human beings a rather distasteful one, and this distaste forms a psychological barrier that stands between a terrorist leader's rhetoric, the audience, and the terrorist act being happened. For this reason, these psychological costs must be overcome with influences such as "diffusion of responsibility, deindividuation, obedience, and social identity" (Borum, 2011, p. 15).

The influence of social identity comes as an important factor in helping a potential terrorist weaken his sense of responsibility of his actions, as he identifies with his in-group and sees his actions as strengthening this group, making his sacrifices worth the price ((Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as cited in (Borum, 2011)). In their text analysis study, Cohen and his colleagues (2018) also used the terminology of the Social Identity Theory in establishing a key difference in the rhetoric between Bin Laden and Zawahiri; the former was found to be more focused on the in-group, i.e., the mujahedeen within Al-Qaida itself. While the former focused on the out-group, i.e., the West. The difference was found in the context of both leaders attempting to elevate the morale of their audience by characterising a post jihadi victory; Bin Laden focused on the benefits which the Mujahedeen will enjoy, whether on this earth or in heaven, while Zawahiri preferred to revel in the West's anticipated defeat. It is that last influence, derived directly from the Social Identity Theory mentioned earlier that will prove most important in this project, as we shall encounter later.

## Social Identity Theory

The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology defines Social Identity Theory as “A theory of social categorization based on the concept of social identity, the part of the self-concept that derives from group membership.” And continues to explain that the theory maintains that belonging to a group, whether large such as a nation, or small such as a club, grant their members “a sense of who they are” These groups also dictate what is acceptable conduct and induce prejudice against the out-group as a way to boost the individual’s self-esteem. The theory is the brainchild of a Polish psychologist, based in the UK, Henry Tajfel in 1978 (Colman, 2015). The Oxford Dictionary of Social Sciences, on the other hand, defines SIT as “a social psychological theory of identity formation that privileges the role of large group identities in forming individuals' concepts of self. It has been used, in particular, to examine the formation and forms of adherence to national and ethnic groups.” (Calhoun, 2002).

Intergroup behaviour, according to Tajfel’s SIT, happens when members of a specific group interact with member of another group, whether individually or collectively. However, in order for the interaction to be qualified as an intergroup one, the interaction itself has to take place within the frame of the group identification. Without a categorisation of groups, there can’t be inter-group behaviour: A group can be identified externally, as in when we think of a certain cluster of people as a group, such as those in a certain profession or under similar circumstances, or can be identified internally, when the individual categorises him or herself as part of a group; in the process of the individual’s self-identification as part of a certain group three components need to take place together.

The cognitive one is when the individual realises the existence of his membership in a group, the evaluative one is when this individual associates him or herself to the group’s values, and finally when the individual is emotionally invested in these two components (Tajfel, 1982).

Groups, in turn, compete with each other for all kinds of advantages; the way a group's members view the dynamics of a certain intergroup relation determines the strategies and nature of said competition. People appropriate a certain group's norms and adopt them in order to fit within said group. Once they do so, these norms become part of their social identity (Hogg, et al., 2004).

This theory has proved of immense importance in the field of social psychology; it is still widely cited and the interest in its uses is ever present. Tajfel's research on intergroup relations has gone beyond the laboratory conditions of the original study to applications in real life between real social groups and their interactions (Dumont & Louw, 2009). It has proved widely popular amongst researchers, as it's useful in studying a plethora of subjects in a wide range of disciplines, such as political science (Haji, et al., 2016), online gaming (Setterstrom & Pearson, 2019), social entrepreneurship (Pan, et al., 2019), social media marketing (Fujita, et al., 2018), human-robot interactions (Edwards, et al., 2019), and most notably to our thesis, the ideologies of Al-Qaeda and Zarqawl (Kfir, 2015). This popularity is a good indicator that Social Identity Theory is a rather versatile and flexible theory upon which useful research can be conducted, offering a chance to shed some social-psychological light on a multitude of topics. In this project I aim to use this theory in order to show to which extent terrorist leaders depend on the concepts of ingroups and outgroups in their rhetoric.

It is common knowledge that Islamic terrorists such as Bin Laden and Zarqawi focus on portraying themselves as righteous fighters seeking to look after Muslims and Islam. In this sense the ingroup for them is quite obvious, Muslims. However, as we have seen earlier the ingroup itself started changing in for Zarqawi as was evident in his rhetoric. This project will seek to analyse this point empirically using the data set under study. We aim to shed light on the saliency of said concepts in the rhetoric itself; if the fact that they are indeed key in terrorist rhetoric is clear, I show to what extent they are employed, provide an insight into the

different out-groups (enemies) targeted in rhetoric, and explain the historic roots of such concepts and categorisations, dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century Middle East. However, while Islamic identity is crucial to our subjects of study, Raffie reminds us that religion is not necessarily the only factor:

*Findings from SIT suggest that identities are not only driven by social categories (i.e. religion or nationality), but are also negotiated and redefined on the community level. On the one hand, identities are formed in response to contextual and social stimuli and cues. On the other, the cognitive frameworks that define the various groups and networks in which the individual interacts have a significant impact on what s/he perceives, as well as consequent behaviour. (Raffie, 2013, p. 89)*

The benefit of utilising this theory lies in understanding how and why a terrorist leader appeals to the audience of his rhetoric; establishing an in-group in which terrorists and the audience both belong to, versus an out-group which poses as a danger to this in-group, creates a narrative of “we are a team” or “us vs them”. This narrative is a basis on which the terrorist leader’s rhetoric builds its argument. If he is to convince his audience to sympathise with his cause, if not join it, then he benefits from establishing that this cause is directly linked to that audience, that they are collectively on one side and hence what he views as danger should also concern the audience. Having the audience identify with the leader is an effective way to manipulate and mobilise it; how terrorists utilise intergroup behaviour as a mobilisation weapon is, then, a key point in this project. Indeed, scholars such as Julian Richards acknowledged the importance of the concept of identity in her book “Extremism, Radicalization and Security: An Identity Theory Approach” where she highlighted the usefulness of this concept in security analysis and conceptualised three dimensions in this regard, micro, macro, and the relationship between the two (Richards, 2017). Identity Theory, here, is a much older theory which dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and maintains that

individuals switch between multiple selves in different circumstances and utilised the micro and macro levels mentioned above (Ibid). However, the book focused more on theoretical applications of this theory and very little on terrorism. What is clear is that the concept of identity can be rather useful in studying various social phenomenon, and terrorism is no exception.

The concepts of identity and inter-group relations prove to be rather useful in terrorism research in general: Williamson and colleagues (2020) implemented SIT in their research and found a good correlation between strongly identifying as a Muslim were found to be more sympathetic to terrorists' claims of grievances, unlike those had a stricter identification as Australians. They emphasised the importance of SIT when it comes to studying terrorism and support thereof (Ibid). In a survey of a thousand British Muslims, it was again found that while identity is key in understanding support for terrorism, it was how said identity was formed that was most important, i.e., if an Islamic identity meant an extremist political ideology one, then support for violent extremists is more likely (Tausch, et al., 2009). Raffie (2013) explicitly used SIT to study the role of Muslim identity in the radicalisation process and highlighted the negative role of some European Islamic NGOs in promoting an "exclusionist religious identity"; she manifests the importance of this project's framework in a simple manner:

*Radicalization can be understood as a process of first fostering an increase in religious awareness and then manipulating this awareness for political ends. Coupled with a steady demonization of other social identities (for example, 'Britishness') (Raffie, 2013, p. 90)*

It is our belief that the concept of identity is one of major importance for terrorism in general, and for its rhetoric in particular. Research, often indirectly, touches on the subject and highlights that importance while I intend to establish it as a building stone of this project. A

remarkable example of this can be found in an analysis on terrorists' tactics in civil wars, conducted by Polo and Gleditsch (2016). The researchers didn't refer to SIT, although their work inadvertently did:

*Groups with weaker othering or fluid boundaries have higher costs for violence against civilians, and indirect targeting is more likely against hard targets more closely associated with the government...Inclusive claims entail weak othering, since there is no clear 'out-group', and it will be more difficult to justify attacks against civilians...By contrast, secessionist and ethno-nationalist groups (including ethno-religious groups) focus specifically on advancing the interest of specific communal group. This yields a much stronger othering against individuals associated with the government or its constituency...The absence of a specific constituency reduces notably the cost of civilian targeting in terms of undermining support (Polo & Gleditsch, 2016, p. 820)*

What this maintains, in effect, is that terrorist groups with a more inclusive, or a weaker sense, of the in-group finds it more difficult to target civilians. This suggests, then, that a strong in-group identity is integral for terrorist groups if they wished to target civilians. Targeting the latter requires a moral jump that can only be achieved by successfully demonising them. A weaker sense of the in-group necessarily leads to a weaker sense of the out-group, making targeting the latter a much more arduous task for terrorist leaders to ask for.

The importance of group identity in forming terrorist rhetoric, then, cannot be underestimated. This is especially relevant for an exclusive terrorist organisation the like of ISIS; it ought to influence the rhetoric through which these organisations aim to touch the hearts and minds of their audience. My research shows the undeniable saliency of a rhetoric that strongly emphasises a strongly defined both an *In-group* and various *Out-groups*:

Zarqawi, for instance, is shown to have established a toxic narrative of an oppressed Sunni in-group in a state of war against multiple *Out-groups* conspiring against it. By analysing dozens of his statements, I outline the extent to which the latter focused on establishing said narrative, and the manner in which this was done. We also outline the historical roots of his rhetoric, maintaining that Zarqawi didn't simply create that *In-group*, but rather depended on old historical attitudes and grievances sourced directly from his ever most cited scholar, Ibn Taymiyya.

If I have established the key importance of the *In-group* for individuals and the way this induces a sense of belonging to the relevant group, and how this in turn can lead to prejudice against the outgroup (Tajfel and Turner, 2004), then our next theory highlights the importance of perceived threats amongst different groups: establishing a strong *In-group* identity is rather important for a terrorist organisation, especially if it aims to attack a wider range of targets as we have seen, but it is perhaps equally important to frame the targeted *Out-group* as a source of threat. In other words, establishing the in-group identity creates the agency, leaving establishing threat to create the emergency (Stephan and Renfro, 2002).

This next theory to be reviewed here will shed even more light on the issue of perceived threat from, and prejudice against, the *Out-group*, how this prejudice can foster and grow, and how it can be weaponised by terrorist leaders. This theory is called Intergroup Threat Theory or Integrated Threat Theory.

### **Integrated Threat Theory**

*The first condition that can be considered a direct cause of terrorism is the existence of concrete grievances among an identifiable subgroup of a larger population, such as an ethnic minority discriminated against by the majority (Crenshaw, 1981, p. 383).*

Grievances, a word that a study on the roots of terrorism seldom lacks, is often used to describe a state which a terrorist group takes advantage of, or advocates for, in order to mobilise and gain constituents' support and public sympathy. This word I reshape in this project and replace it with 'threat'. The word threat is one, I argue, that is easier to define and categorise, it is a concept that enjoys good support from a rather insightful theory, our second in this project, and that is Intergroup Threat Theory. Whether it's a grievance, a discrimination, an assault, an insult, an attack, or a conspiracy, they are all, essentially, different threats which can be categorised as either symbolic or realistic.

The researchers who came up with this theory, Walter G. Stephan and Cookie White Stephan (2000), were occupied with how prejudice and tension evolve between groups. Noticing that somehow every group in the United States feels as if its lifestyle is under threat, including whites, while minorities in the country still suffer phenomena such as discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice, while noting that progress in this regard has been taking place, such as minority individuals been elected to public office and companies paying attention to the importance of diversity in the workplace. The two researchers were dissatisfied with the state of research on prejudice at the time, they attempted to amalgamate the existing literature on the role of threats in intergroup relations resulting in the conception of Integrated Threat Theory. These threats can be categorised into realistic and symbolic ones, in addition to intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes:

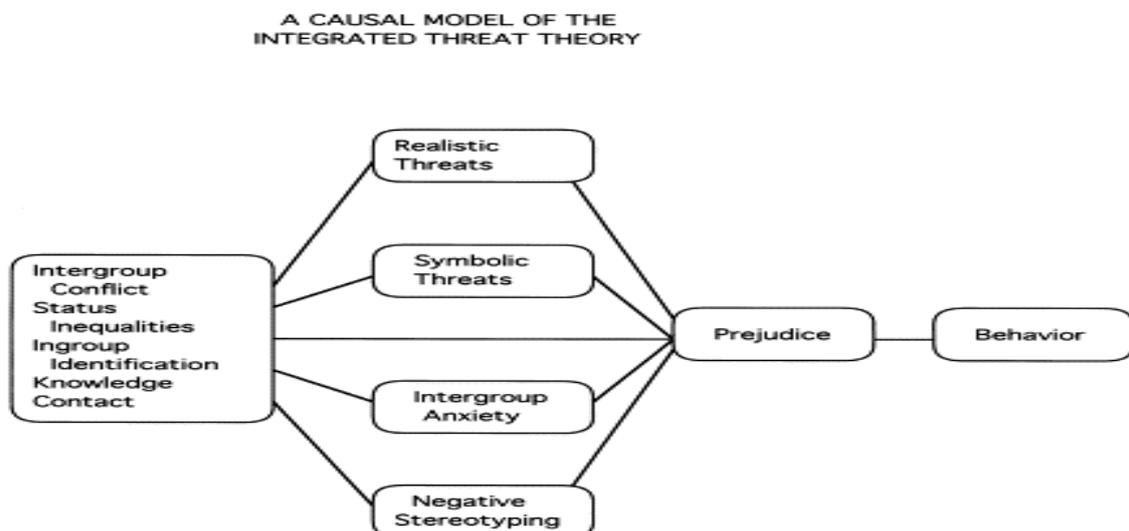
Realistic threats are those that jeopardise the economic or political status, pose an existential or material threat to the group. This threat can be either objective or subjective; the perception of the threat is sufficient for prejudice to take place.

Symbolic threats shake the group's perception of the world, jeopardising the group's belief in the validity of its values. These threats are perceived as differences in morals, values, beliefs

and/or attitudes. The two scholars saw that these kinds of threats are causes of prejudice, not a form of it.

Intergroup anxiety is the personal threats perceived by the individual as a result of interacting with the other, i.e., fears of rejection, embarrassment, or ridicule. Negative stereotypes, on the other hand, lead the individual affected to presume unfavourable treatments from the group holding these stereotypes.

They drew a model of the Integrated Threat Theory as such:



The theory links with the social identity theory as it maintains that an individual who has strong identification with the in-group is more concerned with threats posed to this group, its power and values, and is more susceptible to feeling anxious when dealing with members of the outgroup. The perception of threat by the other group can also take place as a result of previous negative experiences or a disparity in status between the two groups; even ignorance of the out-group can lead to anxiety and fear of that group as its behaviour can't be predicted. The model was later revised to include only realistic and symbolic threats, at an individual and group level, separately (Stephan & Renfro, 2002, p. 203); this revised version is the one

to be adopted in this project, specifically the focus on group level, as it is rare, and unlikely, for our study subjects to address individuals in their speeches.

The Integrated Threat Theory has, similarly to the Social Identity Theory, been widely used by scholars in a multitude of topics revolving around prejudice and discrimination. Its various uses in such topics indicate the significant potential for it in our project; Schmuck and Matthes (2017) utilised ITT in studying “Right-Wing Populist Advertising on Anti-Immigrant Attitudes” and found that negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety were used in all the ads analysed, whether separately or together. They also found that they had a larger effect on lower educated individuals under certain circumstances (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). Koc and Anderson (2018) conducted three studies analysing the origins of negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees in the United States and found an important role for intergroup anxiety to play in the perception and attitudes towards these refugees. Monterrubio (2016) used the theory to study Cancun’s residents’ attitudes towards tourists on spring breaks.

Additional examples are the research of Mashuri and Zaduqisti who analysed the degree to which their surveyed Muslim students are susceptible to conspiracy theories, based on how these students were tested on intergroup threat and the saliency of their Islamic social identity. They maintained that both measures correlated positively with belief in conspiracy theories, especially when high intergroup threat was associated with a salient Muslim identity (Mashuri & Zaduqisti, 2015). Another study analysed the “Secret Islamization of Europe” conspiracy theories; it adopted ITT’s realistic and symbolic threats in designing its survey questions and concluded that “ambiguity intolerance was directly related...via symbolic threat, to conspiracy stereotypes” (Uena, 2016, p. 103). Croucher (2013) utilised the theory to analyse the perception of threat towards Muslim immigrants in three European countries, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. He found that local people of said countries are

more susceptible to believe that immigrants are less likely to desire assimilation, when feel threatened by them. Veddar and colleagues (2016) found support from the theory in studying native Dutch adolescents and Dutch Muslims, they concluded that the native Dutch scored higher in negative attitudes and negative perceptions, i.e., they were less socially open to their outgroup, than their Muslim counterpart. Stephan and Renfro (2002) maintained that the literature strongly supports the model, both experimental laboratory studies and correlational studies, with various target groups such as immigrants, AIDS and terminal cancer victims.

The importance of this theory in this project lies in the ease and clarity of its concepts of Symbolic and Realistic Threats: The presence of these threats, but also the mere perception of their existence, is a major generator of prejudice and negative attitudes towards the outgroup. In this sense this project aims to discover the extent to which terrorists try to mobilise these threats in their rhetoric, in order to appeal to their audience and mobilise them to their cause. Linking the Integrated Threat Theory with the Social Identity Theory is a lens through which I hope to gain a better understanding of terrorist rhetoric. When it comes to building an attractive and coherent rhetoric, terrorist leaders need not only create agency by telling their audience that they form some kind of a unity together, but that this unity is under threat. Maintaining that leader and audience are fighting on the same side, and that the latter ought to support or join him, requires that there is indeed a threat to engage with. The mere belonging to one team can only take you so far. It is for these reasons that I view linking the Integrated Threat Theory with the Social Identity Theory as hugely necessary and beneficial for this project. This merging of the two theories promises a leap forward in the understanding of terrorist rhetoric and the logic behind it. Another important factor in this theory comes from the fact that in order for individuals to be influenced by a certain threat, said threat doesn't necessarily have to be real. Terrorists can seek to establish their rhetoric

around a certain threat, whether this threat was objectively true or not, and regardless of the lack of evidence supporting their claims.

As Albert Bandura puts it, “terrorists minimize their slayings as the only defensive weapon they have to curb the widespread cruelties inflicted on their people. In the eyes of their supporters, risky attacks directed at the apparatus of oppression are acts of selflessness and martyrdom.” (Bandura, 1990, pp. 7-8). The crucial use of perceived grievances is one key element upon which I rely in analysing terrorist rhetoric; in this rhetoric, I maintain, concepts of threat are often used and abused as rhetorical tools to support a narrative of ‘in-group vs out-group’. The legitimacy of terrorist leaders and the organisations they represent can depend on the perceived legitimacy of the grievances they claim to fight against (Williamson, et al., 2020). Those terrorist leaders make sure to employ these grievances to create a “master narrative” upon which calls for mobilisation and discrimination can be built. As Dina Al-Raffie put it:

*The master narrative [of the Salafi Jihadist] focuses on the sufferings and grievances of fellow Muslims in one of two theaters: 1. Countries where Muslims are the minority and, 2. Muslim-majority countries that are perceived to be suffering heavy losses due to foreign intervention. The grievances of Muslims in both cases are caused by non-Muslim regimes and are thus framed as a war against Islam. (Raffie, 2012, p. 18)*

ITT, in addition, maintains that these grievances might as well be historical; to that extent I show support for this by analysing Zarqawi’s statements and the historical discourse shaping them. We later trace Zarqawi’s discriminatory rhetoric to the 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar Ibn Taymiyya and highlight the parallels between the political scene which both men lived in. Ibn Taymiyya lived in a contentious time full of political fragmentation and sectarian tensions, he not only called for fighting foreign invaders, but also for other Muslims who he perceived as

aiding these invaders. Zarqawi made sure to inherit this rhetoric and didn't shy away from citing his favourite scholar most often.

It is worth mentioning here that there are many other social psychology theories that one might, at first glance, think suitable for this project. Ones such as Relative Deprivation Theory which speculates that groups feel injustice when they're disadvantaged compared to a certain level of expectations; this theory was found to severely lack empirical support (e.g., Gurney & Tierney, 1982; Kinder and Sears, 1985; McPhail, 1971; Thomson 1989 as cited in (Tost, 2004)). Realistic Conflict Theory maintains that competition between groups is the reason for hostility between them (Jackson, 1993); a concept that I found is compatible with the concept of Realistic threats in ITT. Self-Categorisation Theory is an elaboration of Social Identity Theory; it focuses on how the individual categorises him or herself into a certain group (Hogg & Terry, 2000). This theory can touch on our subject, however I saw that it isn't suitable for the purposes of this project, since it would be more beneficial in studying why an individual could self-radicalise and that the part that it could play in this project is covered by its relative, i.e., Social Identity Theory.

We hope, in this project, to provide a fresh look at terrorist rhetoric with the help of the aforementioned theories; an attempt to complement, as well as bridge the gap in the existing literature. Understanding to what extent terrorist leaders under study depend on the concepts of group identity and the perceived threats against it shall eliminate our path on the way towards establishing a more cohesive and comprehensive research on terrorism. It is our ambition, then, to shed light on these grievances and sufferings scholars such as Raffie maintains are most important

#### The Case for Combining SIT and ITT

Both theories provide a unique view of the mechanisms by which prejudice takes place amongst groups in their inter-group relations. A case may be made that one or the other may

be sufficient for the purposes of our analysis. However, a closer look at these theories begs for an inclusive approach which endeavours to capitalise on the complimentary nature of these theoretical frameworks.

While Social Identity Theory cements the research revolving around the importance of identifying with a certain group A in creating prejudice against a certain group B: the mere identification with an in-group leads to prejudice against perceived out-groups. Integrated Threat Theory, on the other hand, is occupied with the next stage of such identification: once in-groups are identified with and out-groups are clearly perceived, then the perception that a certain out-group poses a threat to the in-group is an element which maximises the potential for inter-group prejudice and conflict.

The initial stages of this project involved the search for relevant theories upon which the research can be conducted on fertile ground. The going back-and-forth between potential theories and the data set led to the belief that a combination of SIT and ITT was most favourable: an overarching initial review of Zarqawi's statements showed that he heavily relied on two major tenets, establishing agency by identifying himself as a defender of the in-group of Sunni-Arab Muslims against certain out-groups, and establishing emergency by framing these out-groups as a threat to the in-group.

After confirming the potential of the combination of these two theories in the initial review stage of Zarqawi's statements, this project proceeded to test the hypothesis by conducting a thorough analysis of these statements using NVivo and showed an undeniable utility of such merging of SIT and ITT. This potential was also later proved in our third article analysing ISIS magazine Al-Naba.

Ultimately, one key contribution of this thesis is the establishment of a critical connection between group identity and threat framing in the rhetorical mobilization efforts of violent extremist leaders such as the cases of Ibn Zarqawi and ISIS.

While the implementation of SIT and ITT for the purposes of this thesis provides clear advantages the likes of which have been discussed. It is imperative to mention that these two theories discuss the conflicts that take place on the level of groups. Identifying with group X and the perceived *threat* of group Y is a maximising factor of inter-group conflict: this is what these theories establish as a framework.

What they don't explain, however, are the factors that make certain individuals more susceptible to radicalisation and discrimination, whether generally speaking or against specific *out-groups*. Criticisms of SIT, for example, included the fact that social identities exist in a complex world of history and culture which posed key issues such as “the existence of identity choice, the subjective meaning of identities, gradations in identity strength, and the considerable stability of many social and political identities.” (Huddy, 2001, p.127).

This seems to be, at first glance, a key drawback of these two theories. Nevertheless, it is the nature of the rhetoric under study in this project that it is intended for the masses of potential recruits and supporters rather than a targeted message aimed at a specific person. The meticulous analysis this thesis conducted will show that the extremists under study weaponised group identity and appealed to people's identification with the *in-group*, that is Sunni Muslims in general, in order to mobilise them against selected *out-groups*.

## The Concept of Framing and the Work of Erving Goffman:

A key tenet of this project's theoretical backbone is the merging of social identity and the concept of threat as an explanatory framework with which the logic behind extremist mobilization rhetoric can be explored. The work of the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman is one that needs to be acknowledged in a research project which discusses framing such as this one. His concept of frame analysis is somewhat relevant to this thesis in that it is "a systematic epistemological treatise about the workings of everyday knowledge" (Hill, 2014, p.3). Goffman intended for his concepts of frames to be a way to explain the angles in which an individual perceives the society with which he is surrounded: the first stage of this framing mechanism is occupied with what he called primary frameworks (Goffman, 1986).

While Goffman's work seems, at first glance, to be useful for the purposes of this research project, it is occupied with argumentation and persuasion in general terms. This, while is very insightful and interesting, steers away from the precise purpose of this thesis as it focuses on mobilization rhetoric within the context of partial state collapse and the accompanying eruption of violent extremism.

The case studies in this thesis come with very specific context as the rhetoric it studies aims at very specific goals: the call for violent mobilization against certain groups of people. This differentiation in approach between this thesis and that of Goffman's comes clear when considering that, for the latter, frames were studied broadly and generally. Goffman maintained that "the individual is just not much obliged to be very consistent in his expression of beliefs, attitudes, intents, and so forth (Erving Goffman, 1986, p.503).

This thesis will show that, to the opposite, the extremist leaders and organisations under study show evident consistency in their weaponization of group identity and threat framing as a rhetorical pipeline for violent mobilization. Not only is this consistency shown within

contemporaries, but also that it stretches back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century as I explore the significant influence of, as much as similarities between, Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric over that of Zarqawi's.

### Main Research Question and the Overall Research Approach

I complement said literature by analysing certain terrorist rhetoric and mapping these threats and their saliency in that rhetoric.

The main research questions of this thesis are:

- 1: What are the groups that are portrayed as enemies and how does such portrayal evolve with time?
- 2: How do extremist leaders frame their language in order to maximise the mobilisation potential of their rhetoric? To what extent do they rely on group identity and threat framing in such efforts?
- 3: What are the threats that are invoked the most? How did these conceptual threats develop and where did they originate from? And how does the rhetoric predict terrorist targeting decisions?

#### Coalescing the Research Design:

Having been familiar with the historical context of modern extremist Islamist rhetoric and its close relationship to the rhetoric of the 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar Ibn Taymiyya, I opted to start this research project with a Discourse Historical Analysis which aims to uncover the historical roots of the beliefs of Zarqawi and his brainchild, ISIS.

At the start of this research project, having conducted an initial review of Zarqawi's statements, it was obvious the relevance of Ibn Taymiyya's influence over these statements and the repeated quotation of the latter's in said statements. This cemented my conviction

that Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric is an essential starting point in any attempt at understanding Zarqawi or ISIS' rhetoric.

The Implementation of Discourse Historical Analysis, within the context of the chosen theoretical framework, aimed at uncovering the historical roots of extremist discriminatory rhetoric which depends on out-grouping and threat framing. This is meant to provide an insightful contextual-historical account of modern extremist Islamist rhetoric and highlight the role of history in shaping their mobilisation rhetoric.

Following the aforementioned investigation, I move to analysing Zarqawi's statements themselves by conducting a Content Analysis using the computer programme NVivo. This part of the research was conducted in a more manual style as the programme couldn't offer its full functions which prompted a process of manual coding of the statements, page by page. The goal was to analyse the extent of which Zarqawi depended on out-grouping and threat framing in his rhetoric and how was that influenced by political events through time.

For the third article, I aspired to conduct a similar analysis to that conducted on the second article but on a far larger scale, The obvious choice was that of ISIS magazine Al-Naba: since the terrorist organisation had originally been started by Zarqawi himself and had witnessed unprecedented success over the course of a few years, a success that Zarqawi himself aspired to but didn't manage to achieve.. After extensive research and discussions with my co-authors I opted to explore the potential of Machine Learning Natural Language Processing in the analysis of these magazine issues within the prism of my theoretical framework.

The overall aspiration of this methodological approach was the extensive and eclectic testing of said theoretical framework on a variety of data sets, in different contexts, and under different methodologies; within the bigger picture of Islamist extremism in the region, of course.

The various methods used in this project tested the theoretical framework's, that is out-grouping and threat framing, prominence in the data set regardless of the method. In addition, said test was extended to various contexts: for start this thesis examined the overarching rhetoric and tracked its historical origin, then it examined the context of Zarqawi's success in mobilisation, followed by ISIS' decline.

The thesis established the prominence of this theoretical framework in all these contexts, and regardless of the degree of success the rhetoric of mobilisation had. Out-grouping and threat framing are shown to constitute the back bone of said mobilisation in different contexts and using different methods.

The investigation into the mobilisation rhetoric of extremist leaders is one that begs a primary overarching question which mandates the general direction of this thesis: how do extremist leaders frame their language in order to mobilise their targeted audience into developing a negative attitude towards certain *out-groups*, as well as take action against them?

In the effort to answer this question, this project opted for a systematic analysis of said rhetoric by referring back to the primary sources in the form of fatwas, statements, interviews, and magazine issues. These sources were studied in their native language, Arabic, in a cohesive effort to reveal what they can offer in terms of answering the main research question.

The approach which this thesis settled on was to attempt to answer this main question using a variety of texts, in different contexts and time scales, and in different mediums of communication. This allows for a more reliable answer, and a larger scope of analysis, that depend on testing the theoretical framework on a number of case studies which, in turn, will exhibit the validity of such approach.

Keeping in mind the theoretical framework that focuses on group identity and threat framing. Answering the main question and testing this framework was done by breaking it into smaller questions that tested different case studies, guided by the Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory.

Each case study focused on a different context and utilised a different methodological approach. In the next section, secondary research questions are posed in three articles, alongside the methodological approaches and the reasoning behind said approaches. In addition to clarifications as to the logic behind their grouping-together.

### Research Design: A Multifaceted Approach

#### The First Article: A Discourse Historical Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the author's personal background influenced the direction of this project towards focusing on the role of group-identity in the civil conflicts plaguing the region. In addition to the influence of the rhetoric of the 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar Ibn Taymiyya in shaping these conflicts.

The primary study of Zarqawi's rhetoric confirmed the author's pre-conceptions regarding the former's adoption, as well as development, of Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric. Therefore, the first article aimed at analysing the historical roots of Islamist Extremism by conducting a Discourse Historical Analysis that uncovers the historical roots of the rhetoric under study.

The article attempted to answer the following questions: to what extent was Zarqawi influenced by Ibn Taymiyya and how relevant was the utilisation of group identity and threat framing? How did foreign interventions influence and benefit their exclusionary rhetoric? How similar were these historical contexts separated by multiple centuries? And what is the

historical root of the current Islamist extremist rhetoric in defining its out-groups and articulating their threat?

This article relies on the prominent role of the perception of *threat* in the social dynamics between groups, which is based on the invaluable contribution of the Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory: the belief that one's group is threatened by another group was found to constitute a significant obstacle in the way of establishing healthy relationships between these groups.<sup>1</sup>

The textual data under use is consists of thirty-eight Zaraqawi statements, all of them were issued between the years 2003 and 2006, except of the first one which took place in 1994. These statements were sourced from Archive.org where exists the most complete amalgamation of Zaraqawi statements that could be found. The source contained forty-two statements, from which I chose to neglect four due to their irrelevant, that is apolitical, nature to this paper.<sup>1</sup>

Any researcher of Zaraqawi's rhetoric ought to have had a good understanding of the importance of history in said rhetoric. Zaraqawi's *in-group* are Sunni Muslims, primarily Arab ones, as he clearly maintained:

فتشيت عليكم يا امتي ان تشكري الله... بان هبى الله ثلثة من ابناء كرم المجاهدين يزودون عن حياضك... وإلا لكان حال أهل السنة في العراق

بين صليبي حاقه، ورافضي غاور.<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Access at [https://archive.org/details/Abo\\_mosaab\\_alzarqawi](https://archive.org/details/Abo_mosaab_alzarqawi)

<sup>ii</sup> Statement titled "هذا بلاغ للناس" "This is a statement for people"

*My nation you are encouraged to thank God...that God equipped a few of your jihadi sons to defend your land...otherwise Sunni people in Iraq would have been placed between a vengeful Crusader and a treacherous Shia*

The Sunni-Shia conflict is one that harkens back to the early period following Prophet Muhamad's death. Whether the Prophet was to be succeeded by his relatives, through bloodline, or by a form of elections was the spark which ignited a centuries-long divide still prominent today.<sup>2</sup> This conflict was arguably first crystalised in 657 A.D. when an Ummayyad governor named Mu'awiyya declined to recognise Ali, the fourth Caliph and the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, as a Caliph over Muslims. Ultimately, Ali's followers were called "Shia" while Mu'awiyya's "Sunni".<sup>3</sup> This divide remains rather salient to this day and has been received attention from researchers to by researchers: examples of which are the studies of the Sunni-Shia dichotomy and its effect on political fault lines in Lebanon,<sup>4</sup> the struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran,<sup>5</sup> the divide between Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan,<sup>6</sup> and even the conflict's presence on Twitter.<sup>7</sup> Here I shed light on this conflict, its importance for, as well as its use by, Zarqawi, and Ibn Taymiyya before him.

The subjects of study, after all, didn't create their discourse for it to linger in a void; it wasn't entirely the brainchild of Zarqawi's, nor Ibn Taymiyya's; it was rather shaped and influenced by a discourse which developed over centuries that, in turn, was heavily influenced by historical developments. That's why, in our efforts to study a certain rhetoric such as that of Zarqawi's, it is imperative that I study the historical and discursive roots of said rhetoric. Something that will illuminate the logic behind this rhetoric and will explain its effect and resonance with the targeted audience.

Having established the critical importance of history and the dialectical approach in this case study. I then opt for the implementation of the Discourse Historical Analysis as our

methodological compass. For DHA, language, whether spoken or written, is a way of social practice; this can be critically analysed to help in avoiding bias and politicisation. This methodology appeals to the research project in question in the sense that it assumes a relationship between discourse and action.<sup>8</sup> A satisfying analysis of today's terrorist rhetoric is one which demands a temporal approach; said rhetoric is the fruit of centuries of historical developments reflecting the Sunni-Shia divide. This is made clear when Zarqawi's numerous citations of Ibn Taymiyya are made obvious, on the one hand, and when the analysis of said citations highlights the importance of that divide's historical roots, on the other.

Furthermore, DHA is, at its core, metatheoretical, multimethodological, and works with a variety of data and background information.<sup>9</sup> And here lies the true importance of DHA in this project, as the latter has, indeed, all these characteristics. As mentioned before, this project relies on Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory as its theoretical backbone. In that context, it relies on data taken from both oral and written statements and analyses historical background information. In addition, one of DHA's original uses was that in studying racist and discriminatory discourses as expressed or implied in written or spoken language: "The specific discourse-analytical approach applied in the four studies referred to was three-dimensional. After having first established the specific contents or topics of a specific discourse with racist, antisemitic, nationalist or ethnicist ingredients, second, the discursive strategies (including argumentation strategies) were investigated. Then, third, the linguistic means (as types) and the specific, context-dependent linguistic realisations (as tokens) of the discriminatory stereotypes were looked into".<sup>10</sup>

We explore one significant discursive strategy via the concept of the *topos*: "topoi' or 'loci' can be described as parts of argumentation that belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable, premises. They are the content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules' that connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim; as such, they justify the transition

from the argument or arguments to the conclusion”.<sup>11</sup> If “the logic of persuasion is audience-dependent”,<sup>12</sup> a *topos* analysis “helps in approaching the text in a systematic fashion... gains academic value by discussing how these topoi function in the broader context and why certain topoi are chosen at the expense of others”.<sup>13</sup> The concept of the *topos* have proved valuable in multiple fields; from religious studies,<sup>14</sup> to art history,<sup>15</sup> to public affairs and the study of lobbying.<sup>16</sup>

### The Second Article: An NVivo Content Analysis

In the next stage of this research project, it was decided that a more in-depth analysis of Zarqawi’s statements was needed. Having established, in the first article, the historical roots of his rhetoric and the influence that Ibn Taymiyya had over this rhetoric by way of adopting a discriminatory rhetoric against certain out-groups and associating them with threat to Muslims in the region.

Exploring extremist rhetoric in this article meant tackling a few questions: To what extent did Zarqawi depend on out-grouping and threat framing in his statements? Who were these out-groups? What kinds of threat did they pose? And how was all of the aforementioned influenced by the political developments on the ground? In other words, what role did the policies of the Allied Forces play in shaping this rhetoric?

The investigation of this article adopts a mixed method research approach. Qualitative Discourse Historical Analysis is used to disclose the main concepts with which *threats* and *out-groups* are built in Zarqawi’s rhetoric. In addition, said approach establishes the consensus that this rhetoric appeals to; this is done by outlining the analogues relationship between this rhetoric and the historical-theological environment in which the former operates.

The analysis of language lies at the core of this paper: whether it’s *threats* or *out-groups*, inasmuch as the language is consistent in its choice of terminology, the rhetoric associated therewith is comprehensible to the audience. Discourse Historical Analysis recognises

language as a method of social practice; it seeks to “transcend the pure linguistic dimension and to include, more or less systematically, the historical, political, sociological and/or psychological dimension in the analysis and interpretation of a specific discursive occasion” ( Riesigl and Wodak, 2005, p. 35). One of the original purposes of DHA, in fact, was to identify discriminatory discourses such as those racist or ethnicist (ibid, p. 44). We will highlight the historical-theological bases upon which groups or individuals can be outcast in Islam; those lay the building block for Zarqawi’s discriminatory rhetoric against other Muslims. We link the linguistic tools to their historiological-theological roots: Zarqawi’s rhetoric is to be proven as based on two main pillars; one is focused on the theological justification of demonising certain Muslims, mainly Shias, building on the concept of the *munafiq* (hypocrite). The other pillar is one that links the aforementioned theological justifications with a historical narrative concerning the *out-groups* under study.

While the qualitative DHA illuminates the internal logic of the rhetoric under study, it is less helpful when it comes to exploring how different themes develop in time, nor does it help with exploring the relevant importance of different *threats* and *out-groups*. It is here where this paper seeks the aid of computer assisted textual analysis.

Computer assisted textual analysis method utilised NVivo as a tool for providing an analysis of the development of Zarqawi’s rhetoric through time; *threats* and *out-groups* are presented in a time scale showing their varied degrees of saliency at different points of time.

Finally, a dialectical analysis focused on the interaction between Zarqawi’s discourse, on the one hand, and the non-discursive developments of the intervention, as well as the allied discourse on counterinsurgency, on the other.

Collecting reliable terrorist-related data can, needless to say, be a rather arduous task. My textual data was taken from the only source I can find where such materials are available:

Archive.org. There exists a collection of Zarqawi statements, many of which are transcripts from video or audio statements that are also available on the website, making them feasible to verify. In total I had forty-two statements from which I included all statements issued in the studied time period between 2003 and 2006, all except ones of personal or apolitical nature, leaving us with thirty-eight statements.<sup>iii</sup>

Inasmuch as I investigate the role of factionalism in creating violence and volatility in Iraq, I operationalise these theories by breaking them down to their basic elements. These elements are sought and coded in a database constituted of 38 Zarqawi statements issued in a time period starting from the aftermath of the Iraq War in 2003 to the time of Zarqawi's death in 2006. In so doing, I distinguish the different *out-groups* who posed threats to Zarqawi's *in-group* (Sunnis in general and Sunni Arabs in particular) as well as the types of *threats* per se. Furthermore, I investigate the development of said concepts through time and in relation to political developments on the ground.

With the help of NVivo, a computer qualitative data analysis software package, I carefully analyse statements by Zarqawi. Those statements were chosen to reflect Zarqawi's active years in Iraq, therefore neither statements outside that time frame, nor letters of personal nature were included, leaving us with thirty-eight statements. We chose to analyse the documents in their original version, that is in Arabic, providing a purer engagement with the rhetoric in question; this spares us the unfortunate loss, as well as change, of meaning which results from translating any text. Analysing the texts in their native Arabic shall provide a unique advantage over other studies which depend on translated texts.

The coding process of these documents distinguished six "nodes", four of which were out-groups while the other two were two types of *threat*. These nodes are:

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<sup>iii</sup> Access at [https://archive.org/details/Abo\\_mosaab\\_alzarqawi](https://archive.org/details/Abo_mosaab_alzarqawi)

<i>Enemy</i>	<i>Description</i>
Kurds	An out group that is present yet far from salient.
Local Rulers	Here are references to authorities, political leaders, or political regimes.
Rawafid	“Rawafid” mainly means Shia, and it is certainly the case in most of the coded documents; the word meaning “those who refuse. Derogatory term historically applied by the Sunnis to describe the Shiis, who refused to accept the early caliphate of Abu Bakr , Umar , and Uthman as legitimate.”(The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, 2021).
West/Jews/Christians	The decision to put them together was made based on Zarqawi’s wording as was frequently encountered in the text. Together they form the “far enemy” as opposed to local rulers and Shias who constitute a “near enemy”.

*Out-groups* (enemies) are coded if they come in the context of posing *threat*, otherwise they are NOT coded, for example, Zarqawi mentioning an Islamic scholar who replied to the former’s statement on the withdrawal of Italian troops. For an *out-group* to be coded as an enemy it must be implicitly or directly accused of posing a *threat*. Furthermore, attributing enmity to one group by way of associating it with another may be counted as two different nodes; an example of that is resembling Shias of Jews in the context of both being a *threat*.

Threats: *realistic threats* can be financial, political, physical, and *threats* to self-worth. While *symbolic threats* are those of religion and the groups' morals and way of life. Such distinction is both necessary and useful in understanding how different types of *threats* are used. This, for instance, could prove especially important in the context of Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) where perceived *symbolic threats* may be remedied by psychological operations (psyops) or counter-propaganda wars. While perceived *realistic threats* may be remedied by revising military strategies or economic policies.

Looking for *threats* in the text means looking for *threats* that are directed towards the group as a collective and are necessarily posed by another group. This group must be current and relevant; *threats* mentioned in way of lecturing religious sermons were not coded. If the people mentioned to have been killed are Jihadists, then the *threat* is coded if it's in the context of drawing attention to an existing *threats* or conflict. *Threats* need to be external and posed by an *out-group*, i.e., mentions of *threat* as a result of people not following true Islam are NOT coded. *Threats* coming from God, whether a test or a punishment, are NOT coded.

Furthermore, *threats* must be current. However, *out-groups* in the latter might be coded as enemies if seen to make direct comparison to the current situation. For example, mentions of Shias betraying Islam in the past. Abstract mentions of *threats* in way of religious preaching are NOT coded. Past *threats* are coded only if they come in the context of the present *threat*. For example, Zarqawi using the past in order to invoke the *threat* Shias pose. On the other hand, *realistic threats* taking place as a result of jihadist operations are NOT coded. For example, Zarqawi talks about Muslims being killed in his operations.

*Threats* need to be external and posed by an *out-group*, i.e., mentions of *threat* as a result of people not following true Islam are NOT coded: *threats* coming from God, whether a test or a punishment, are NOT coded. *Realistic threats* taking place as a result of jihadist operations

are NOT coded. For example, Zarqawi discussing Muslims being killed in his operations.

*Symbolic threats* also need to be imposed by an *out-group*. For example, mentions of loss of morals, or a weakening of religious commitment that are happening with the development of time, as a result of globalisation, or for any reason that is NOT caused by an *out-group*.

This paper's approach was to take coding in a parallel sampling process; such process allows for comparing two or more cases either to all other cases or to subgroups of said cases (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2015, p. 243). More specifically, this is a rather common approach called a 'pairwise sampling process' where "all the selected cases are treated as a set and their "voice" is compared to all other cases one at a time in order to understand better the underlying phenomenon and has been most common amongst qualitative sampling designs" (ibid). In practice, nodes were not coded more than one time in a single page: Once a certain node was coded, it wasn't coded again regardless of its repeated occurrence in the relevant page. This approach assumes that the presence of a node in a page is sufficient to consider that the node plays a considerable role in the page's rhetoric. However, and most importantly, this approach meant that a percentage of how often a certain node is mentioned (relative to the number of pages) can be easily shown. The coding process itself adopted a rather conservative approach; the coded sentence, word, or phrase, should be directly and unequivocally referable to the nodes they are allocated to.

Furthermore, the context in which a judgment (i.e., the decision to code for a specific node) is only considered within the specific page. For example, when a word such as "enemy" occurs at the start of a page, it is only coded based on what accompanies it in the same page, despite already knowing who that enemy is (based on the previous page/s). This is to make the coding process more transparent, easier for revision and assessment, and replicable. If the word "enemy", for example, was mentioned without clear evidence (within the page itself) as to who the enemy in question is, the instance wouldn't be coded at all.

The results of the coding process are then compared to the Global Terrorism Data Base for further insights regarding the interrelationship between the rhetoric, political developments, and attacks on the ground. The GTD is a research source of immense importance to this thesis and is used in two of the three articles included in this project.

A more in-depth discussion of its contribution and importance will be included later in the thesis. However, It is useful, at this stage, to point out a few of the limitations which I faced while making use of the GTD. One key aspect was the lack of the group-identity of the victims within the database. Targets and victims are classified using various metrics such as nationality and region, but it wasn't feasible to distinguish which religion or sect they belonged to. The third article of this thesis will discuss the mitigation strategies I took in that regard.

The original makers of the database outlined in its introduction a number of limitations, more specifically related to its collection methods: first it was the fact that “the data base was designed to err on the side of inclusiveness” (LaFree and Dugan, 2007, p.187) which meant many attacks would not be included in other databases.

The second limitation was the inclusion of “events that appeared to be mostly criminal if they were carried out by a known terrorist group (Ibid, p.188). This results in the inclusion of incidents which may be conducted for criminal purposes such as hostage taking as a way to raise funds, similar to those of the Colombian group FARC.

Having these limitations in mind, the GTD provides the best open source available for the purposes of this research project. It constitutes a beneficial tool in testing both the theoretical framework and the methodologies adopted in it.

### The Third Article: A Machine Learning Natural Language Processing

After the manual coding of Zarqawi's statements in the second article, I aimed at processing a far larger corpus, namely ISIS magazine Al-Naba. In this case, I chose to use the recent advances of machine learning in processing language texts. This decision was made for two main reasons: the first was NVivo's inability to provide reliable analysis of Arabic texts, a problem which was replaced with manual coding in the second article which wasn't feasible considering the large data set in this article. The second was the aspiration to provide cutting edge analysis which delivers a quantitative backbone to the article and, in turn, provide a unique method validation of the theoretical framework.

The varying methods used in this thesis, starting with the Historical Discourse Analysis, test the centrality of out-grouping and threat framing. The advanced quantitative analysis in this article avoids the interpretive influence that the more qualitative methods used in the previous articles may have and, therefore, fortifies the reliability of this theoretical framework if this centrality can be shown by using these vastly different methods.

Having both the similarities and the differences between ISIS and its godfather's circumstances, this article built on its prior by a different testing of the theoretical framework over a larger data set and on a more recent case study. In addition, it provides a proof of concept as to the potential of Artificial Intelligence in our academic field.

Taking advantage of the superior capabilities of our machine learning model in processing large data sets, I expand the questions asked in the second article and add new ones. Namely, what are the out-groups for ISIS and what threats do they pose? How did this change over time and how similar it is to the case of Zarqawi's? Can artificial intelligence prove useful in detecting these out-groups and their threat? And, thereafter, can it provide a predictive model as to targeting decisions made by ISIS?

My co-authors and I developed a novel framework to estimate how outgroups are discussed by ISIS. The corresponding code to implement our framework will be made available online via a GitHub repository, such that our results can be replicated. Furthermore, our code may be used to facilitate research in comparable settings. The authors hope that our framework will be used by other researchers to increase the use of Arabic natural language processing in political science to overcome the focus on English text, which neglects important discourses simply because they happen in other languages for which the required natural language processing software is, so far, not available.

The LDA model was developed by Blei et al. (2003). It is an unsupervised natural language processing model that can be used to extract latent topics from a document. As a generative probabilistic model, the LDA assumes that a document is generated as a random mixture of topics. The extracted topics are discrete probability distributions over words that can be interpreted by humans. Therefore, in our case, sophisticated knowledge of Arabic is required in order to interpret the meaning of topics, while evaluating the estimated probability distributions over words. Furthermore, the topic model estimates the probabilities that a document was generated by each of the topics. These probabilities can be then used to compute how the prevalence of the topics' changes over time.

To convert the PDF documents of the Al-Naba magazine such that they can be used for natural language processing we apply parsing with the package pdfplumber. We processed 316 issues of the Al-Naba magazine from Oct 15 – Mar 21. Subsequently, we clean the parsed data further by comparing the parsed words against a dictionary of Arabic words. We keep only parsed words that are also contained in the dictionary of Arabic words and thereby clean the corpus from wrongly parsed words. In order to establish a dictionary of Arabic words we use the Alittihad newspaper corpus. In addition, we use 500 hand selected words from the Al-Naba magazine out of the 1000 most prevalent in order to keep ISIS specific

vocabulary. Subsequently, we apply further natural language processing techniques to clean the data. We remove control characters, punctuation and numbers. Moreover, we apply tokenization and extract the date of publication. To complete the pre-processing of the data we remove stop words with an Arabic stop-word dictionary, which we also complement with additional removal of stop words by hand to improve the results. Stop-words are ones that are excluded from the processing for being insignificant: an example of which in English are the “the” and “are”.

For the training of the LDA model we aim to train the model in such a way that it specifically focuses on the discussion of outgroups. In order to achieve this, we select pages in each magazine in which any of the outgroups’ names can be found more than three times. For each outgroup we use a dictionary with a range of names that are used by ISIS to refer to the respective outgroup. We then use all tokens from these pages for each magazine to establish the corpus on which the LDA model is trained. As such, the LDA model is trained to focus especially on the outgroups. The LDA model is then applied on the overall corpus. Note that the LDA model is using only tokens that are contained in the training corpus when it is applied on the overall corpus.

This specific LDA framework especially focuses the model on out-groups but extracts topics that are related to them in a broad context. In the further analysis, we compute time series of the prevalence of topics over time by issue and month. In addition, we use the visualisation tools to analyse the topics in detail. We find that our framework performs very well in identifying how the outgroups are discussed in the Al-Naba magazine and how the topics develop over time. This is confirmed by the strong correlation of topics with real world attacks against the respective outgroups, which we will see later.

Finally, when it comes to the operationalisation of the GTD, it offers a wealth of categories that can be accessed using the Excel sheet's "drop down lists". These categories proved immensely helpful: they aided us in identifying which targets can belong to a specific outgroup. Once the results of the model were produced, we make both the topic data and the data on fatalities of ISIS attacks in Syria and Iraq monthly and stacked monthly frequencies against each other using the GTD database of ISIS attacks and analysing the associations with STATA 17 program. Doing so allowed us to compare the monthly findings of the LDA model to monthly fatalities of physical attacks on the ground. Our code separated all group categories in the GTD database into three overarching groups: far enemies and near enemies, and near enemies 2 (Gerges, 2009). We also opted to outline, alongside the aforementioned groups, two key groups: Peshmerga (Kurdish forces), and Shias with Alawites. The categorisation of said groups was made as an approximation; for example, targets associated with the Iraqi and Syrian governments were categorised as Shias and Alawites, while the Peshmerga forces had their own category within the sheet which made categorising them straightforward. Similarly, targets associated with Western or non-Muslim countries were categorised as far enemies, while those associated with Muslim countries were categorised as near enemies. Near enemies 2 was a special category which combined Shias and Alawites with Peshmerga. One important caveat must be noted here, however: our outgroup categories include government agencies and forces and are, therefore, not exclusive to civilians. The detailed rules of the classification of attacks onto these target groups can be found in the data annex.

The results included direct correlations between monthly targeting and rhetoric variables. We then lagged the targeting data by a month, and then the rhetoric data by a month, and found that the predictive relationship worked both ways: rhetoric strongly predicted targeting

decisions, while targeting decisions also predicted rhetoric that out-grouped and presented as a threat the groups that had been targeted the previous month.

## Research Gaps

Research on terrorism has gained relative popularity in the recent years, much has been done to shed light on this contentious and complex phenomenon. In the field of terrorist rhetoric there, indeed, have been multiple attempts to provide a clearer picture of what terrorist view as important in their creed as well as their attempts to appeal to their audiences. My literature review has shown the importance of the concepts of identity and threat in the terrorist rhetorical framework. Scholars have highlighted the importance of identity and threat (or grievances as many call them) in shaping terrorists' views of the world and in attracting individuals to terrorist causes. I have attempted to amalgamate an adequate sample of the literature in order to show that all said literature can, in essence, be explained by two prominent social-psychology theories. Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Integrated Threat Theory (ITT).

What is lacking in the literature, having established the importance of the aforementioned concepts, is a detailed empirical study on the relevance and utilisation of said concepts in terrorist rhetoric. I study this rhetoric by breaking down these theories into their fundamental elements. With SIT I study the historical development of the *In-group* and the *Out-groups* according to fundamental Islam, and how these concepts were weaponised and further developed by the terrorist leaders/organisations under study (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Similarly, with ITT I focus on the development and weaponization of the realistic and symbolic threats. Ultimately providing a more empirical analyses of the different out-groups and threats, as portrayed in the terrorist material (Stephan & Renfro, 2002).

For instance, I analyse dozens of Zarqawi statements in search of these different elements and show evident significance of these elements in those statements; a large proportion of the statements focused on the establishment of different *out-groups* and the supposed threat thereof. My analysis of Zarqawi not only supports my argument that concepts of social identify and *out-groups' threat* are of the utmost importance when studying terrorist rhetoric, but also shows the extent to which these elements are salient, and outlines how regularly these elements are utilised, how they're categorised, and how they're prioritised over time (Alkhayer, 2021).

It is our belief that terrorists' main objective, when it comes to building their rhetoric, is establishing concrete *Out-groups* and allocating various threats to these groups. They establish agency by building upon an existing In-group (Sunni Muslims in our case) and establish emergency by outlining different Out-groups on which they blame their grievances on.

### Conclusion:

I found in this chapter that the literature on terrorism is short on providing satisfying answers as to how to analyse terrorist rhetoric. A significant part of the literature consists of thought pieces that lack the empirical backbone, while more recent literature turned towards empirical studies, if on a smaller scale in terms of data set or analysis. One of the causes of such lacking is the complexity of the subject which demands large dedication for researchers in terms of both resources and time, something that doesn't necessarily fit well with the pressure to publish those scholars have to adhere to.

This is not to say that literature on terrorism, in general, is limited; in fact, as I encountered in the research for this chapter, numerous articles and material which attempts to tackle various numbers of aspects of terrorism. This chapter sought to show some of the most prominent and

relevant attempts in explaining terrorist rhetoric as both a social phenomenon and a psychological one. In our search for the understanding of that rhetoric I showed the different attempts and angles that previous scholars adopted. From Louise Richardson's "What Terrorists Want" to Miron Lakomy's comparative analysis of two English ISIS journals focusing on recruitment and violence calls, for example.

In our effort to conceptualise a better framework for analysing terrorist rhetoric, I presented a complicated subject that research on which proved to be rather elusive and fragmented.

Terrorist rhetoric has been tackled often but partially so. Research, I complained, often took the *etic* approach (the perspective of the observer) and focused on certain individuals or organisations from that perspective. I, on the other hand, choose to adopt the *emic* approach (the perspective of the subject) and believe that it will provide us with a far superior picture of how terrorist rhetoric is structured and framed, in addition to a clear map as to whom that rhetoric focuses on, and in what regard.

I seek to prove that, ultimately, terrorist rhetoric is about establishing agency and emergency within its targeted audience. Agency is established in a relatively straight forward way; one ought to be a native member of said group and, reiterate that group's beliefs as well as advocate for its well-being, or at least pretend to. Establishing emergency, on the other hand, is a multi-faceted operation which requires careful framing of language and the assistance of existing, as well as historical, stories and stereotypes. Emergency asks for an Out-group and Threats which the former is a source of. Such concepts have, indeed, both directly and (mostly) indirectly been touched upon in the existing literature.

My initial review of the literature showed the importance of the concept of the Out-group, even though the researchers behind said literature didn't necessarily frame it as such:

Terrorist leaders come from different backgrounds and do not necessarily share the same

points of view on the motivations for, or the methods of, terrorism. I found that Osama Bin Laden and Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi both adopted fundamental Islam as a backbone of their rhetoric, yet each came to express their creed in a different manner. While Bin Laden was born of immense privilege and chose the path to extremism very early in his life and with little hesitation, Zarqawi was more of a common man who lived a life of criminality until he was converted later. Yet, despite their clear differences they shared an emphasis on the rhetorical establishing of Out-groups and associating Threat to them: Bin Laden focused on the far enemy; the West for him was the main obstacle that faces the Muslims before they can turn their liberation efforts towards the tyrannical and corrupt regimes that governed them. Zarqawi, on the other hand, saw that the near enemy is the first threat to be tackled; the near enemy for him, however, developed from being the same tyrannical regimes to entire classes of people whom he blamed for the survival of these regimes. Namely it was the Iraqi government that took over after the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003: Shia Muslims suddenly found themselves in the crosshair of Zarqawi's brutal tactics in targeting civilians indiscriminately. This strategy went too far, even for Al-Qaida, to the extent that Zarqawi found himself unpopular amongst Al-Qaida's leadership that he later went and established his own group, a group which, eventually, became what is called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS.

In order to produce a more insightful study, I have decided to team up with a couple of social Psychology theories, namely Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory. Both proved to be highly useful for scholars, and equally flexible in the topics they can cover. The topic of how extremism and prejudice originate is one of key importance in both theories; they offer a unique insight into the mechanisms in which individuals and groups alike become radicalised and how they develop negative attitudes and stereotypes towards other groups. What is most important, for us at least, is how these two theories can be employed to

analyse the rhetoric of the terrorist leaders or organisations under study. By analysing the extent to which these the latter employ the notions of In-groups, Out-groups, and symbolic as well as realistic Threats, this project aims to provide a clearer idea of how terrorists frame their rhetoric in order to reach out to their base, mobilise, and influence it.

The careful and extensive application of these two theories, via the conceptualisation of Out-groups and Threats associated thereof, is our chosen route towards a deep empirical analyses of terrorist rhetoric. An *emic* approach that, I hope, will prove much more robust, detailed, and replicable. In the pursuit of said approach I provide three papers which shed light on different angles of our task at hand; by the end I aim to provide a clear picture of, according to terrorists under question at least, the different groups that are framed as Out-groups ‘enemies’, what threats were they claimed to pose, and how these frames and conceptualisations came to be.

My papers to be included in this project aim to explore the potential of those concepts in application to terrorist statements; a journey of discovery deep into the psyche of the terrorists behind the rhetoric revealing who these terrorists view as enemies, what Threats they perceived them to pose, and how this changes through time in adaptation to relevant political and historical events. The ultimate ambition for this framework is to prove both reliable and replicable; the soon to be included papers strive to test this point of view using a mixed method approach.

In this introductory chapter, I laid the grounds for an extensive analysis of terrorist rhetoric as shown in the statements of Abu Musa’ab Al-Zarqawi and the issues of the ISIS magazine “Al-Naba”: I aim at establishing the theoretical framework, as well as the historical context, of this analysis. Following this chapter, three articles will be presented:

The first of which is a primarily qualitative study that will discuss the historical roots of Zarqawi's rhetoric and its employment of the Topos of Threat which harkens back to the famous 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar Ibn Taymiyya. It uses Discourse Historical Analysis to find the historical genesis of today's Islamic terrorist rhetoric which also highlighted the important role foreign interventions play in fuelling violent extremism.

The second article adopts a mixed method approach and analyses Zarqawi's statements using NVivo; such method resulted in establishing the key relevance of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) in explicating terrorist rhetoric and its efficacy, as well as predicting terrorist violence.

The third article benefited from an intensive collaboration with two data scientists at the University of Göttingen, Germany. The core theoretical framework of this thesis was applied using Machine Learning Natural Language Processing. The project was a testament to the benefits of multi-disciplinary research as it resulted in a Topic Modelling approach that showed, similar to the second article above, the undeniable relevance of out-grouping and threat-framing within ISIS' magazine "Al-Naba". Furthermore, I were able to show the predictive capabilities of these topic models in predicting terrorist attacks against selected *out-groups*.

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Article 1:

<b>This declaration concerns the article entitled:</b>						
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## Know Thine Enemy? Zarqawi, Ibn Taymiyya, and Mobilising the Discourse of Exclusion

### Abstract

*This article sheds light on terrorism's critical reliance on group-identity. Terrorists seek to Mobilise by demonizing specific groups. Said rhetoric depends on associating these out-groups with threat against the terrorists' targeted constituents or in-group. It also benefits from historic grievances that can be brought alive back by terrorists seeking to inflame existing societal fractures. That was compounded, in the case of Zarqawi, by the fatwas of the famous Muslim scholar; Ibn Taymiyya. A Discourse Historical Analysis, underlined by a dialectical approach, shows the significant consequential role of foreign invasions, in both Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric and Zarqawi's.*

### Introduction:

In this PhD thesis, Zarqawi's rhetoric is a major source in the analysis of extremist rhetoric and its mobilisation efforts. While the second article of this thesis is occupied with his rhetoric as a primary target of analysis, this article is primarily interested in investigating the roots of said rhetoric. The success of Zarqawi's rhetoric in gaining support and popularity amongst his in-group of Sunni-Arabs cannot be solely attributed to the wording of his statements, i.e., in its weaponization of group identity and threat framing, but also in the imbedded historical references used to fortify his rhetoric by attempting to establish a historical facticity of his claims.

Not only are Shias, for Zarqawi, dangerous enemies to Sunnis in post 2003 Iraq, but also is their animosity nothing but a historical fact that is unchanging: the threat that Shias pose to

Sunnis has been the case ever since the Crusades and Mongol Invasions. Zaraqawi benefited from, in that he extensively cited, the rhetoric of the well-known 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar Ibn Taymiyya. The analysis of the latter's rhetoric and influence shall provide a useful understanding of the origins of Zaraqawi's rhetoric in its origins and historical context. This, in turn, shall pave the road for this thesis' second article which will focus on Zaraqawi's own statements and outline the development of his use of group-identity and threat framing in his mobilization efforts against both the Allied forces and Shia forces and communities following the Iraq War of 2003.

The similarities between Ibn Taymiyya and Zaraqawi extend beyond the rhetoric and offer insightful analysis into the significant influence that the former had over the latter. The cultural profile of Ibn Taymiyya shows a politically active individual who, in a manner not dissimilar to Zaraqawi, took over the leadership of the resistance party against the Mongol invasion of Damascus and condemned the religious beliefs of both the invaders and their local allies. Also similar to Zaraqawi, he was jailed in Cairo for almost two years between 1306 and 1308 for his extremist and exclusionary beliefs; that happened again in 1309 in Alexandria (Laoust, 2012)

Both Zaraqawi and Ibn Taymiyya, then, shared an exclusionary rhetoric whose major tenant was the blaming of certain out-groups and the framing of said groups as a threat to Islam and Muslims. The target audience for both men, the aforementioned reveals, was Sunni-Muslims in the context of foreign invasions.

said invasions by far enemies, whether Christian Westerners or Mongols, were ultimately associated with local "near" enemies. Ibn Taymiyya demonized Shias and Alawites for their alleged collaboration with Crusaders or Mongols the same way Zaraqawi demonized Shias for their alleged cooperation with the Allies. One possible logical explanation behind Zaraqawi's

utilisation of Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric and historical context comes supported by Hoffman's framing concept when the latter maintained that "for what a speaker does usually is to present his listeners version of what happened to him. In an important sense, even if his purpose is to present the cold facts as he sees them, the means he employs may be intrinsically theatrical, not because he necessarily exaggerates or follows a script, but because he may have to engage in something that is a dramatization...he runs off a tape of a past experience"

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The invasion of Iraq by the allied forces was a historical incident of monumental consequences; leaving the country in a state of anarchy accompanied by heinous acts of violence, sectarian violence in particular, which left a significant scar still apparent on the face of the country to this day. Foreign invasions are often seen as a destabilising factor: in Syria, for example, the number of direct conflict fatalities more than tripled in the aftermath of the Western airstrikes against ISIS and the corresponding U.S military interference.<sup>17</sup>

Said interventions, even when conducted in the spirit of either fighting terrorism,<sup>18</sup> or the responsibility to protect,<sup>19</sup> are shown to have counterproductive results by way of increasing terrorist attacks and/or civilian fatalities. Multiple theories attempted to explain this phenomenon; from causing a national backlash, to providing better targets of attacks, to the prompting of asymmetrical warfare,<sup>20</sup> etc. This article provides an alternative explanation that focuses on interventions' production of viable threats and enemies (outgroups) for extremists to target. It also provides a dialectical lens under which said interventions are uncovered in terms of their possible inflaming of old societal grievances by way of replicating material conditions similar to those under which said grievances took place, and consequently nourishing exclusionary discourses that coincided with them. As interventions increase the violence by their opponents, this takes place by way of creating material conditions under which extremist rhetoric can foster.

This targeting, here, is analysed and proved rhetorically by focusing on Zarqawi's statements following "Operation Iraqi Freedom". Using Iraq as an example, this article utilizes Discourse Historical Analysis to demonstrate the mechanism by which Zarqawi used the Allied intervention as a catalyst for mobilisation against foreign agents, but, most importantly, how this mobilisation eventually chose Shias as its main target. This, I show, was done by associating Shia Muslims with the Allied forces. Furthermore, I show the undeniable relevance of existing discourses, namely that of Ibn Taymiyya's, in providing legitimacy to Zarqawi's. The latter point will highlight insights into how a dialectic approach can contribute towards, as well as highlight the benefits of, taking history into consideration when analysing such phenomena.

This article aims to outline the rhetorical and morphological similarities between the discourses of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi and Ibn Taymiyya in order to trace the foundations of arguments used by Zarqawi; foundations upon which extremists base their rhetoric when appealing to targeted communities. In the endeavour to obtain answers to these questions, two social-psychology theories are summoned to analyse the discourse of the two men in question. A quick discussion of the role of *threat* in influencing group interrelationships is needed at this point as a building block for our discussion of the *topos of threat*. In essence, the two social-psychology theories, Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory, can draw the necessary picture explicating the potential efficacy and justification for the role of *threat* in such discriminatory rhetoric.

A brief historical background is provided, outlining the roots of Zarqawi's discriminatory rhetoric; this rhetoric builds on a long and complicated history of extreme interpretations of Islam whose utilisation encourages discriminatory behaviour, and ultimately, mobilises. The importance of this study approach, then, is to portray the logic and the historical background of the discriminatory rhetoric upon which Zarqawi depended in demonising his enemies.

Analysing his statements shows how he built upon a repertoire of exclusionary discourses and a long history of conflict between Sunni Muslims, being his constituents, and other Muslim sects, mainly Shias. I highlight the extent to which Zarqawi borrowed from Ibn Taymiyya in building his discriminatory rhetoric, and, in doing so, also highlight one major historical root for said rhetoric.

This article goes beyond the mere study of a terrorist's discourse, it rather holds history in regard and outlines the beneficial use of dialectic in analysing said discourse. It shows the potential of dialectic as leading to a "self-reflexive understanding of history as a form of praxis; a 'processual' understanding of society as a historically evolving totality; and identification of the social antagonisms (contradictions) as the driving force of the above-mentioned process; and anchoring of everything social in human praxis; and an optimistic affirmation of the cognoscibility of social phenomena".<sup>21</sup> An ever-increasing mindfulness of history, when it comes to analyzing extremism and its rhetoric, is of most importance.

This undertaking of a dialectical approach to analysing said rhetorical dynamics means that by outlining how the rhetoric of the two figureheads reacted to foreign invasions, I also outline how such invasions can be weaponised to empower certain discriminatory discourses. Interestingly, despite the 700 years gap between Zarqawi and Ibn Taymiyya, I find that both men used somewhat identical logic in the process of such weaponization. In essence, their discriminatory rhetoric required both historical pre-agreements of discriminatory argumentation and suitable material conditions under which said argumentation can foster. Such conditions represent what I can call "*realistic threats*". Furthermore, I illustrate the evident influence which Ibn Taymiyya had over Zarqawi, making little room for doubting the importance of both, foreign invasions and Ibn Taymiyya, in shaping modern day extremist groups the likes of ISIS. Said invasions were rhetorically weaponized, this paper argues, through the medium of the *topos of threat*.

In Iraq, the 2003 invasion left a country in a state of an extended civil war, which contradicts the allies' hopeful vision of a democratic and peaceful Iraq following the dethroning of Saddam Hussein's regime.<sup>22</sup> Increased fatalities were not solely due to the direct action of interventions per se, rather, the latter may intensify violence amongst the local communities themselves. This article suggests that this is largely because interventions help create more credible *out-group* and *threat* perceptions and thus make violence-mobilizing rhetoric more appealing and credible.

### Group Identity and The Puzzle of Iraq's Post-War Terrorist Upheaval

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is simply "a social psychological theory of identity formation that privileges the role of large group identities in forming individuals' concepts of self. It has been used, in particular, to examine the formation and forms of adherence to national and ethnic groups".<sup>23</sup> The importance of group identity in our lives can never be underestimated: that has been evident in its use in multiple scholarly endeavours.<sup>24</sup> What SIT informs us is that people tend to identify with their *in-group* and compete with it against *out-groups*.

Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) complements the aforementioned theory by establishing two main types of *threat* whose perception maximises the potential for prejudice against the *out-group*: *realistic threats* are ones which pose as an existential danger to the *in-group* or its members, whether by way of political, economic, physical, or material threats; while *Symbolic Threats* are concerned with the worldview of the *in-group*; such as morals, beliefs, values, standards, and attitudes.<sup>25</sup> SIT and ITT are closely tied; for the establishment of an ingroup-outgroup dynamic is a prerequisite for ITT's tenants to function: SIT establishes the importance of identifying with a certain group in creating prejudice against perceived out-groups, while ITT adds to this by explaining how the perceived threat of an out-group is bound to increase the likelihood of conflict between these groups. Likewise SIT, ITT has

been widely used for a multitude of academic purposes relating to prejudices and conflicts between groups.<sup>26</sup>

Simply put, these two theories explain the prejudice that takes place between different groups, and the increased possibility of conflict amongst them once *threat* is perceived. The application of said theories has all to do with our research questions in the sense that it shall help us outline a model in which certain *out-groups* are associated with *threat* as a means for advocating prejudice against them. Furthermore, a dialectical approach shows how similar material conditions were used similarly between two men separated by seven centuries, which was no mere coincidence, as shall be discussed later. The latter point serves to clarify how discourse is not isolated from the material conditions in which it reverberates: the discriminatory discourses under analysis significantly benefited from the foreign invasions during which they operated, helping extremists demonize certain groups and advocate prejudice against them, the article argues.

Multiple studies were produced on the consequences of various wars of which Iraq was a part of: political consequences due to Iraq's neighbouring powers competing for influence over the country in a predictable realist fashion and the following instability as a result of a civil war in a weak state,<sup>27</sup> economic consequences of the Gulf War such as a rapid decline in oil exports and production,<sup>28</sup> and legal consequences such as joint and separate liability of occupant forces.<sup>29</sup> However, despite Iraq's post "Operation Iraqi Freedom" insurgency and unprecedented rise in civilian casualties,<sup>30</sup> not much research on how intervention affects mobilizing discourses exists. A clue is provided by Kivimäki's qualitative analysis which shows that the identity of unilateral interveners helps opponents of intervention build credible arguments against intervention.<sup>31</sup>

The effects of foreign intervention with regards to its extremism-inducing aspect are somewhat well researched; Kaiser and Hagan showed a link between the U.S troops surge in 2007 and an increase of terrorist attacks stemming from an increasingly threatened Sunni-Arab community.<sup>32</sup> The allies' counter-insurgency strategy in the country only aggravated sectarian divisions and treated the Arab Sunni community with hostility for their assumed support of what was later called the Islamic State in Iraq.<sup>33</sup> The Shia-dominated government and, especially, its allied Shia Mahdi Army, which took liberties in targeting innocent Sunni civilians, that and the U.S troops' heavy-handed, if not repressive, treatment of Sunni communities suspected of harbouring terrorists, left Sunni-Arabs in a state of "legal cynicism" leaving the latter more susceptible to radicalisation, in turn.<sup>34</sup>

The invasion of Iraq left the local Arab-Sunni communities in a precarious condition. That condition, I argue, was capitalized upon by Zarqawi. Indeed, good research shows that threat framing is essential to mobilization.<sup>35</sup> Social structures were found to have a significant role in mobilization efforts by way of consolidating into "collective notions of threat with quotidian networks based on shared understandings of history and identity".<sup>36</sup> Extremist elites during the Rwandan genocide, for example, weaponized threat and dispersed it through their radio broadcasts.<sup>37</sup> Such threat framing in mobilization efforts necessarily requires a collective identity whether pre-existing or newly framed:<sup>38</sup> here I call such identity the "*in-group*" as described by Tajfel.<sup>39</sup>

So far, the literature establishes the crucial role of the invasion of Iraq on the latter's Sunni-Arab communities, and the importance of threat framing in inter-group mobilization. Can I, based on this, explain the rise of sectarian conflict in post war Iraq? How did Zarqawi utilize the invasion for threat framing purposes? And could I have anticipated that by considering the region's long history of Sunni-Shia conflict? For this research I focus on two key figures: who was Iraq's most wanted man and, certainly, one of the world's most influential terrorist

leaders, Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi, and his ideological mentor, the 13<sup>th</sup> century famous scholar, Ibn Taymiyya.

The dialectical interaction between developments on the ground, namely foreign intervention, on the one hand, and the rhetorical developments of extremist figures, on the other, is a valid starting point for answering such questions. Zarqawi's dependence on Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric can only be so effective without current, and relevant, material conditions which serve to corroborate that rhetoric.

Indeed, I find that a dialectical approach may prove most beneficial and agrees with many scholars' recommendations. Alker and Biersteker, for example, called for "greater dialectical sensitivity towards one's own research situation".<sup>40</sup> I choose to use the term 'approach' rather than 'methodology' although I might as well use the latter if it was in line with Brincat's opinion that it should "not mean a rigid set of principles or ready-made formulas that are to be forcefully applied to any question".<sup>41</sup>

My dialectical approach is one which imposed itself upon further investigation of Zarqawi's rhetoric, where mentions of Ibn Taymiyya and the Sunni-Shia conflict are overwhelmingly present. Connecting the dots between the discourses of the two men leads us to the incontestable need for a dialectical analysis: these connected dots outline astonishing historical-structural similarities. Of course, analogies, per say, may provide little in way of respectable scholarly work, and here lies the importance of the dialectical approach as Patomäki put it: "any claim about rational tendential directionality of world history has to be understood as a dialectical argument within the meaningful human sphere."<sup>42</sup>

Threat and its Topos in the 13<sup>th</sup> century: Ibn Taymiyya's Infamous Fatwas

Before I start discussing the immense influence of Ibn Taymiyya on Islamic extremist rhetoric, it is worth mentioning that there are several other, rather influential, scholars who also have played significant roles in shaping different jihadi movements over different time periods. Perhaps the two most likely to rival Ibn Taymiyya are Sayed Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab: Sayed Qutb, for example, was said to have inspired Al-Zawahiri and provided a religious pretext for jihadists.<sup>43</sup> Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, on the other hand, also added much to the Islamic literature of jihad and represented a mile stone in that regard; his rhetoric is often times linked to that of Osama Bin Laden's, despite some arguing that the latter's rhetoric is actually much more indebted to the rhetoric of Ibn Taymiyya and Sayed Qutb.<sup>44</sup>

The reason why I chose not to include such scholars in this project is twofold. The first is that Ibn Taymiyya is already established as the most influential of all scholars when it comes to jihadism and that is reflected in the astonishing amount of literature covering his works which will be outlined shortly. The second reason, most importantly, is the clear prominence of Ibn Taymiyya in our database: using a simple key word search through the data shows the supremacy of Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric for Zarqawi. In the thirty-eight Zarqawi statements analysed in this paper, Ibn Taymiyya was mentioned fifty-two times in seventeen statements, Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab two times in two statements, while Sayed Qutb was only mentioned once. These results shed light on the key importance of Ibn Taymiyya within the rhetoric of the terrorist leader under study: a discourse historical analysis will track the lineage of the discriminatory rhetoric under question and will illuminate the ways in which this rhetoric influenced that of Zarqawi, and how the latter adopted, adjusted, and updated said rhetoric for the purposes of his own discriminatory rhetoric.

The use of *threat* as a rhetorical tool can be found justified when considering the literature around how *threats* can shape a population's attitudes. In fact, studies have shown the

relevance of the concept of *threat* in shaping Muslims' opinions about the world. For example, Mashuri and his colleagues showed how Integrated Threat Theory is employed in analysing how Indonesian Muslims perceive terrorism in their own country; *realistic* and *symbolic threats* substantially affected the extent to which terrorism was credited to external factors: in other words, a conceived notion of *realistic* and *symbolic threats* against the *in-group* led to lesser credit given to domestic radicals for the terrorist attacks in question.<sup>45</sup>

In the next section I shed light on the historical similarities between the days of Ibn Taymiyya and those of Zarqawi's. I show how foreign invasions were capitalised upon for the purpose of fortifying discriminatory rhetoric against local minorities. Such light shedding, for the lack of room, shall pay special attention to the political environment of the 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar as I anticipate most readers are much more familiar with the current political atmosphere in the Middle East, compared to that of Middle Ages'.

### Different Foreign Invaders, Similar Local Enemies:

#### *13<sup>th</sup> Century Middle East; Mongols, Crusaders, and their Accused Collaborators*

One of the most well-known and influential Muslim Scholars of all time, Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) was headstrong and vocal against what he saw as the compromised rhetoric of other renowned regional scholars, such as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Ibn Arabī; the neo-platonic philosophy of the former and the mystical speculation of the latter were in striking contradiction with Ibn Taymiyya's.<sup>46</sup> He was a strict literalist who adhered to the fundamentals of Islamic sources, namely the Quran, Sunnah, and early Muslims and their piety (known as the Salaf).<sup>47</sup> Taḳī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, was born at Ḥarrān (now in Turkey) and was forced to seek refuge in Damascus as a child running from the Mongol invasion.<sup>48</sup> A difficult

start in life that was meant to shape the way he viewed the world, as well as his religion, as we shall see next.

By 1258, Baghdad, and subsequently the Abbasid Khalifate, had fallen to Hülegü. The Mongols moved onto taking over Aleppo and Damascus the following year, reaching all the way to Gaza.<sup>49</sup> This was, needless to say, a critical existential threat to Muslims around the region who fought back and managed to secure key victories as early as 1260, when Muslim Mamluks defeated the Mongol army in the battle of Ayn Jalut on September the 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>50</sup> Crusaders, on the other hand, were on their last grounds after multiple failed campaigns following their major defeats to Saladin. They had caused immeasurable instability and anxiety in the region in an effort which was described as “perhaps, the largest-scale military mobilizations of the medieval period”.<sup>51</sup> Ibn Taymiyya lived in a world where hideous massacres were still fresh in the collective memory; stories such as the sacking of Baghdad where mosques and palaces were set on fire, and thousands of Muslims were killed in a span of a week:

*During the week of slaughter and pillage Hulegu held a banquet with the caliph in his palace, at which he pretended that his prisoner was his host and mocked him for not having used his treasure to pay soldiers to defend him. When his beautiful city was in ruins, the caliph and his sons were sewn up in carpets and trampled to death beneath the hooves of Mongol horses.<sup>52</sup>*

This environment of constant external existential *threat* was only exacerbated by internal divisions between Muslims themselves: the Caliph was a Sunni and had a Shia Vizier who resented him for prosecuting Shias and had been in secret negotiations with the Mongols; Hülegü, prior to the start of the siege, was welcomed by a few Shia suburbs outside the city.<sup>53</sup>

The Mongols, in addition, had Christian Georgian soldiers amongst them who took part in the massacres, and Christians who sought refuge in the Nestorian church were spared.<sup>54</sup>

Before the Mongols there were the Crusaders: their grip on the region had radically loosened by the time the formers arrived, but their legacy was, arguably, no less terrifying and still present in the collective memory by the time of Ibn Taymiyya. After all, the Crusaders started their campaigns with several horrifying massacres of their own: the most famous of which, perhaps, took place following the Siege of Ma'arra in north-western Syria. It was the First Crusade, and the European invaders had besieged the city for twenty days before managing to shatter its defences. The city was pillaged, and thousands of civilians were killed, despite being promised safety for their surrender.<sup>55</sup> That massacre, nonetheless, was infamous for the recorded incidents of cannibalism: a priest who went by the name of Fulcher of Chartres witnessed the events and recorded them:

*I shudder to tell that many of our people, harassed by the madness of excessive hunger, cut pieces from the buttocks of the Saracens already dead there, which they cooked, but when it was not yet roasted enough by the fire, they devoured it with savage mouth. So the besiegers rather than the besieged were tormented.*<sup>56</sup>

As with the Mongols, the Crusaders naturally started developing alliances with the local powers in the region, many of which had warring rulers who worried more about their Muslim counterparts than the Crusaders.<sup>57</sup> One of these many powers which found themselves forced to strike peace with the Crusaders were Alawites who aimed to save their positions in their historical mountainous regions.<sup>58</sup>

I see here that Ibn Taymiyya was born in uncertain times: two centuries constituted of a long series of unfortunate events, leaving an environment of fear and existential anxiety. Peoples

around the region had to fight for survival, which included swallowing the hard pill of making alliances with foreign invaders. Many of these peoples were minority communities who had historic grievances with the majority Sunni communities in the region, something which the likes of Ibn Taymiyya chose to focus on and manufacture a discriminatory rhetoric around. As to the reasons why certain minorities would choose to side with this foreign power or that is somewhat irrelevant for the purposes of this project; after all, Ibn Taymiyya himself could have chosen to call for war against the many Sunni leaders who themselves sided with the same foreign powers on many occasions.<sup>59</sup>

The Sultanate, in which he lived, had declared jihad against the Mongols coming from the east towards Syria. Ibn Taymiyya emerged, as the enemy approached Damascus, encouraging people to hold still, to donate money to the cause, and to hold arms, and discouraged them from fleeing away.<sup>60</sup> The scholar naturally took an active role in the fight against the Mongols. His biggest contributions, however, were theological and political. Ibn Taymiyya's strong views on Jihad and other Islamic sects proved to be hugely influential and a building block for what was later to form Wahhabism and Salafism: he advocated for the return to what he perceived as the original practice of Islam carried by the Salaf (the righteous ancestors).<sup>61</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya was one of the most influential Islamic Scholars in history. A debate always exists between scholars as to the degree of credit given to him when assessing his potential influence over modern day Islamic extremists: for example, the assassins of Anwar Al-Sadat relied heavily on Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric in their doctrine.<sup>62</sup> Another case example is Boko Haram's rhetoric which is influenced by the concept of Islamic political authority, itself raised to prominence by Ibn Taymiyya:<sup>63</sup> Boko Haram shares Ibn Taymiyya's opinion that prosperity and social justice can only be achieved by reforming Islam and implementing

sharia law.<sup>64</sup> Even Wahhabi scholars were hugely influenced by Ibn Taymiyya and did indeed adopt many of his teachings and incorporated them in what we now days call Wahhabism.<sup>65</sup>

A complete portrayal of his contributions and historical relevance, therefore, will occupy space I can't afford in the context of this article. However, it is important to outline the fact that Ibn Taymiyya has been drawing increasing attention from western scholars in what has been called "Taymiyyan studies".<sup>66</sup> Cases in point, in addition to the scholarly work already cited, are Carl Sharif El-Tobgui's "*Ibn Taymiyya on reason and revelation : a study of Dar' ta' āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*";<sup>67</sup> Mohd Farid bin Mohd Sharif's "*Baghy in Islamic Law and the Thinking of Ibn Taymiyya*";<sup>68</sup> Livnat Holtzman's "*Accused of Anthropomorphism: Ibn Taymiyya's Miḥan as Reflected in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's al-Kāfiya al-Shāfiya*";<sup>69</sup> Felicitas Opwis' "*The Construction of Madhhab Authority: Ibn Taymiyya's Interpretation of Juristic Preference (Istihsān)*";<sup>70</sup> and many more. Most of these works analysed Ibn Taymiyya from the angles of theology or hermeneutics, in this project, therefore, I also use primary data taken directly from Ibn Taymiyya's works and translate them to English for a more unique addition to the literature on the one hand, and, most importantly, to better serve the purposes of this research in identifying the specifics of how he associated certain *out-groups* with *threat*.

The emphasis, then, will be on the parallels between his rhetoric and that of Zarqawi's when it comes to defining the enemies and outlining their *threats*. What is known for certain is that he, Ibn Taymiyya, adopted a polemical rhetoric against Shias and Christians. He wrote "the most detailed anti-Christian and anti-Shi'i polemics to come from the medieval Sunni tradition".<sup>71</sup> His ideology runs counter to the fundamentals of democracy in the sense that it insists that the source of all authority must come from the Quran and Sunnah; only Allah, not the public, has the authority to command Muslims' lives, and a form of theocracy is the only acceptable form of government where the leader's primary object is to enforce God's will.<sup>72</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric is a major influencer of the *takfiri* ideology (takfiri meaning the denouncement of individuals or people as infidels) which influenced several jihadi movements from Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, to Abd al-Qadir in Algeria, to Osama Bin Laden.<sup>73</sup>

An alienating rhetoric, and an authoritarian ideology: it becomes clear the appeal which Ibn Taymiyya has for Islamic extremists. From Sadat's assassins and Boko Haram to Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi; Ibn Taymiyya's teachings provide fertile grounds in which extremism and discrimination flourish. In the next section I clarify Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric of discrimination and outline his dependence on the *topos of threat* behind the demonisation of the other, as well as the tools used to achieve such demonisation.

### Foreign Invaders and their Accused Collaborators in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Iraq: Structural Similarities and Expected Outcomes

Having clarified the political environment of Ibn Taymiyya's, as well as his resulting philosophical outputs, I see the similarity of said environment to that of Zarqawi's in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For decades Muslim lands hosted a few of the largest and longest lasting conflicts in the world: the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 in addition to various other violent conflicts, from Somalia to the two invasions of Afghanistan, both by the USSR and the USA. "Operation Iraqi Freedom" was the medium in which Zarqawi found himself positioned at the forefront of yet another invasion of Muslim land; the war was, in fact, largely justified by his own presence in Iraq. As Collin Powell, the U.S Secretary of State at the time, in his famous speech addressing the United Nations Security council, laid the groundwork for the invasion of Iraq by making a link between weapons of mass destruction and supposed terrorist affiliations:

*What I want to bring to your attention today is the potentially much more sinister nexus between Iraq and the Al Qaida terrorist network, a nexus that combines classic terrorist organizations and modern methods of murder. Iraq today harbours a deadly terrorist network headed by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, an associated collaborator of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaida lieutenants.<sup>74</sup>*

Zarqawi found himself positioned at the heart of the largest war the Middle East had witnessed for decades. American forces, backed by several countries, formed an alliance which took Iraq over and toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein. That was followed by a Shia-dominated government reflecting the results of a democratic vote wherein Iraqi Shias were majority constituents. The charged political atmosphere, in addition to the activities of Shia militias left Sunni Arabs in the country in a state of disillusion.<sup>75</sup> In practice, Iraq was ruled by a coalition of a Shia-dominated government and Western forces. The resulting discontentment by the Sunni-Arab community was only made worse by the repeated transgressions against them, both by the Allies (such as the infamous case of Abu Ghraib Prison), or Shia militias which were accused of kidnaping, torture, and murder of Sunni civilians.<sup>76</sup> These tensions quickly escalated following the invasion: between 2003 and 2007 terrorism's share of total deaths in Iraq rose to around four times the rate of the next countries on the list, such as Afghanistan and Somalia.<sup>77</sup> Zarqawi made sure to take advantage of these tensions in a manner similar to that of Ibn Taymiyya's, as we shall see next.

### **Ibn Taymiyya's Topos of Threat: Waging War on the Out-Group**

Ibn Taymiyya didn't spare much criticism for many groups outside of his own (Sunnis): from Shias to Sufis to Mu'tazilas to Jews and Christians. Here I aim to outline the different justifications, as well as the different classifications, upon which Ibn Taymiyya built his rhetoric vis-à-vis the relevant *out-groups* and the treatment thereof.

It is worth mentioning here that, henceforth, whenever I use the general term “Muslim”, in this context, I mean Sunni Muslims as Ibn Taymiyya himself intended. In fact, he was adamant on emphasising the superiority of the Sunnah and depended on the authority of the Salaf to support his interpretation thereof.<sup>78</sup> Ibn Taymiyya’s animosity towards Christians and Shias can, at least in part, safely be credited to the historical context in which the Imam lived, as I have established; Crusaders had invaded the holy land, and, according to Tariq al-Jamil, Shias were patronaged by the Ilkhanate Mongols.<sup>79</sup>

Shias, in particular, were given the full Ibn Taymiyya treatment: “He also wrote a polemical treatise that specifically targets Shi‘īs entitled ‘The Way of the Prophetic Example in Refutation of Theology of the Qadarite Shī‘a’ ”.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Ibn Taymiyya was keen on addressing other Muslim sects as a more salient danger than Christians themselves, but before before discussing this we are better off establishing, briefly, what he thought of Christians and their role amongst Muslims communities.

Some literatures have already established that Ibn Taymiyya viewed Christians and Jews as impure and hypocrites who are not true believers.<sup>81</sup> Others outlined how Ibn Taymiyya accused both Christians and Jews of altering their holy books deliberately and therefore accused them of corruption.<sup>82</sup> In fact, when it came to Christians, then, he didn’t settle for anything less than a dedicated book: “His Correct Response to Those Who Alter the Religion of the Messiah comprises perhaps the longest and most systematic anti-Christian polemical treatise by a premodern Muslim author”.<sup>83</sup> Related to this is his rejection of Muslims imitating foreign cultures and that this, in turn, weakens one’s Islamic tendencies.<sup>84</sup> Here I circle back to *symbolic threats*. In his book “The collection of Fatwas” (مجموع الفتاوى), a book on which I will depend extensively, he addresses the matter of congratulating Christians on their religious occasions by going beyond the congratulations per se: Muslims are not only to

abstain from congratulating Christians but also to abstain from joining them in any way, shape, or form:

لا يحل للمسلمين أن يتشبهوا بهم في شيء، مما يختص بأعيادهم، لا من طعام، ولا لباس ولا اختسار، ولا إيقاد نيران، ولا تبطين عادة من

معيشة أو عبادة، وغير ذلك، ولا يحل فعل وليمة، ولا الإهداء، ولا البيع بما يستعان به على ذلك للأجل ذلك، ولا تمكين الصبيان ونحوهم من

اللعب الذي في الأعياد، ولا إظهار زينة<sup>85</sup>

*“Muslims are not permitted to imitate them in anything, when it comes to their religious holidays, neither food, clothing, washing, lighting fire, nor cancelling a routine of living or worshipping, and other than that. It is neither permitted to have a feast, gifting, selling anything which facilitates that, letting little boys and the like play in relation to these holidays, nor showing decorations.*

The logic behind this extreme attitude towards a local community becomes clear in the next paragraphs: *symbolic threat*. The *topos of threat* is implemented as the fatwa digresses; it is the weakening of Islamic identity and tradition. Reisigl and Wodak defined the *topos of danger*, within the context of their work, as being “based on the following conditionals: if a political action or decision bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform or do it”.<sup>86</sup> The *topos of threat*, for Ibn Taymiyya, is one with a political-regulatory agenda as it aims to push for regulating that social action and mobilise the people against it. As such, Ibn Taymiyya’s *topos of threat* can be summarised in the following manner: if a certain act or group supposedly pose a *threat* to Muslims, the act must be abolished, and the group boycotted or fought. I use the following excerpts to clarify Ibn Taymiyya’s use of different *threats* and the *topos of threat*.

The aforementioned fatwa cites the Prophet Muhammad's " (من تشبه بقوم فهو منهم) " or "He who imitates a people is one of them" and associates that with an after-life threat; that is the prospect of being treated as Christians and, therefore, being sent to hell like them:

وقال عبد الله بن عمرو بن العاص: من تأسى ببلاد الأعمام، وصنع نيروزهم ومهرجاناتهم، وتشبه بهم حتى يموت، وهو كذلك، حشر معهم يوم

القيامة.

*According to Abdullah bin Amr bin Al-Aas: he who emulated foreign land, and joined their holy days and festivals, and continued doing so until his death, will be put together with them on judgment day.<sup>87</sup>*

Imitating and dealing with Christians, then, is not only a *threat* to the values and traditions of Muslims, but also a religious threat leading one to suffer God's punishment.

When it comes to *out-groups*, other Muslim sects had a significant share in Ibn Taymiyya's exclusionary rhetoric, at least when it comes to the severity and negativity of that rhetoric. One of his most well-known fatwas was that concerning Alawites, and along with them a major section of Shias. The striking in this fatwa is the blatant and unmitigated hostility which starts right from the beginning:

هؤلاء القوم المسمون بالنصيرية هم وسائر اصناف القرىمطة الباطنية اكر من اليهود والنصارى... وضررهم على امة محمد اعظم من ضرر الكفار

الجاويين مثل طفار النار والفرنج وغيرهم فان هؤلاء يتظاهرون عند جهال المسلمين بالتشيع ومولادة اهل البيت. وهم في الحقيقة لا يؤمنون لا

بالله ولا برسوله ولا بكتابه...

*Those people called Nusairies are, they and the rest of bāṭiniyyah Qaramaitans, more blasphemous than Jews and Christians... and their damage to the nation of Muhammad is greater than that of warring infidels like the Mongols and the Franks and others; these people pretend to be, to the ignorant of Muslims, as lovers and allies of the Prophet's family. And they, in fact, neither believe in Allah, nor his Prophet or his book.<sup>88iv</sup>*

Although their *symbolic threat*, being infidels faking loyalty to the Prophet and his family, is clearly implied in this introduction, their *realistic threat* is conveyed shortly after with clear sentences which leave little for misinterpretation:

فإذا كانت لهم مكنة سفكوا دماء المسلمين

*If they had the chance, they would spill Muslims' blood.<sup>89</sup>*

Ibn Taymiyya digresses to accusing them of being allies of Mongols and Crusaders and blames them for the fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders and of the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate itself:

ثم بسببهم استولوا على القدس الشريف... ثم إن النصار ما دخلوا بلاد الإسلام وفتلوا خليفة بغداد... إلا بعاوتهم

*Then it was because of them that they [Crusaders] took over the holy Jerusalem... Then it was their help which allowed the Mongols to enter the lands of Islam and kill the Caliph in Baghdad.<sup>90</sup>*

The fatwa then goes back to *symbolic threat* in more pronounced sentences:

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iv Nusairies is an old derogatory name for Alawites, while he uses the term bāṭiniyyah Qaramaitans to refer to certain Shias such as Ismailis.

وأما بلفظ ثابت عن النبي فيجوزونه عن مواضعه...وقد دخل كثير من باطلهم على كثير من المسلمين وراج عليهم

*They reshape and misinterpret even a credible citation of the Prophet...And much of their fallacies has ingrained in Muslims and became trendy<sup>91</sup>*

Having established to his audience the *threat* posed by Alawites and Shias to Muslims, regardless of the credibility of such *threat*, Ibn Taymiyya digresses into establishing his *topos of threat*; a framework for fighting said groups:

وقد اتفق علماء المسلمين على أن هؤلاء لا يجوز منا كتحميمهم...ولا يتزوج منهم امرأة ولا تباح ذبايحهم

*It is agreed amongst Muslim scholars that it is not allowed to mate with them...and no woman of theirs can be married to, nor are their slaughtered animals allowed to be eaten<sup>92</sup>*

إن أوانيهم لا تستعمل إلا بعد غسلها

*Their dishes can only be used after washing<sup>93</sup>*

لا يجوز دفنهم في مقابر المسلمين ولا يصل على من مات منهم

*They are not permitted to be buried in Muslims' cemeteries, nor is it allowed to pray for their diseased ones<sup>94</sup>*

وما نهم واهمهم مباحة

*Their blood and belongings are permitted (res nullius)<sup>95</sup>*

The concluding paragraphs head towards the, now expected, path; declaring jihad against them, even giving priority to fighting them over Christians and other infidels, as long as the latter are not at war with Muslims:

ولا ريب أن جهاد هؤلاء وإقامة الرد عليهم من أعظم الطاعات وأكبر الواجبات وهو أفضل من جهاد من لا يقاتل المسلمين من المشركين

وأهل الكتاب

*There is no doubt that carrying jihad against these people and punishing them is one of the greatest services and duties to God and is better than carrying jihad on non-combatant pagans and people of the book [Christians and Jews]<sup>96</sup>*

This infamous fatwa takes the *topos of threat* and maximises its utility, creating a rhetoric of hostility towards, and mobilisation against, a large plethora of *out-groups*, whether Jews, Christians, or, especially, other Muslim sects. The *topos of threat* is used extensively throughout the letter forming the fatwa, as we have seen. Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric here is, first and foremost, built upon *threats* which in turn, were largely constituted in the rhetoric itself. The *topos of threat* is, here, most prominent: the fatwa goes into extensive length outlining how and why these *out-groups* pose a *threat* to the *in-group*, before using this *threat* as a justification for discrimination and, ultimately, the use of violence.

### Zarqawi's Adaptation of Ibn Taymiyya's Topos of Threat

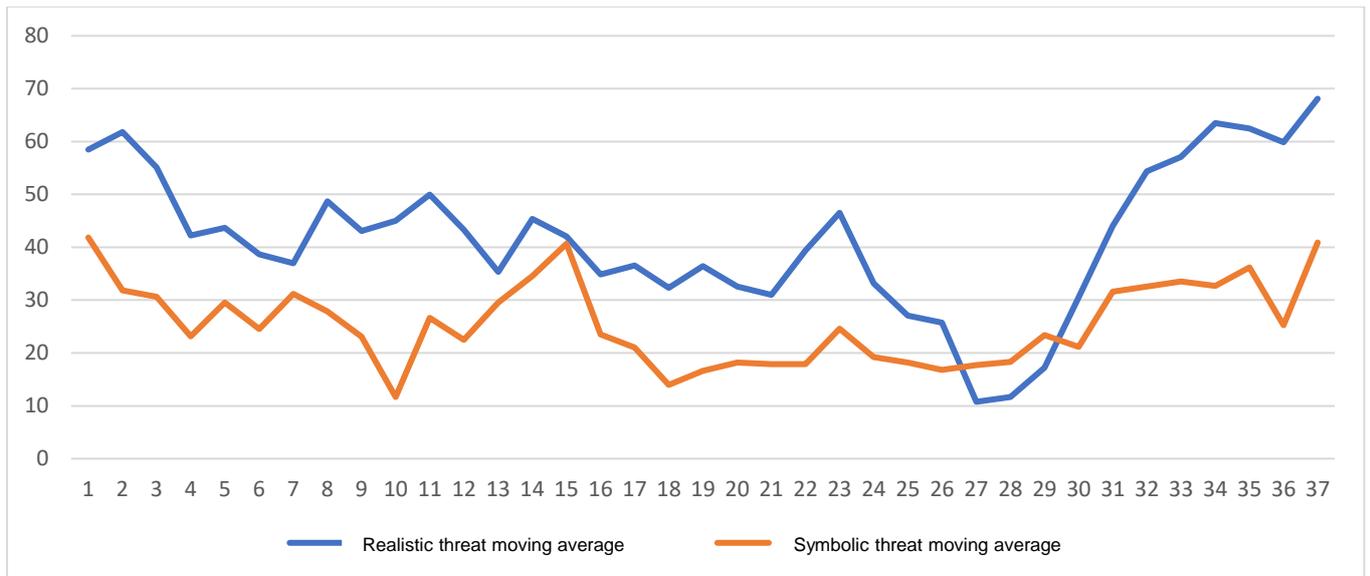
As mentioned before, a quick search through our statements of Zarqawi's shows that Ibn Taymiyya was cited in 54 instances throughout 18 documents. Needless to mention, then, that the 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar has a rather influential role in shaping Zarqawi's rhetoric and the way he views the world, especially the former's rhetoric when it comes to views on the aforementioned outgroups and the use of the *topos of threat*.

At the core of this article is the premise that foreign invasions provide rhetorical fuel for extremists seeking to demonize entire groups by associating them with the external *threat* as posed by these invasions (the dialectic approach). The previous section outlined Ibn Taymiyya's reliance on such a method. This section, consequently, will outline Zarqawi's borrowings from Ibn Taymiyya for the purpose of said demonization. It will not only bring to attention examples of the intricate mechanisms by which Zarqawi formulated his rhetoric, but also bring to attention the undeniable effect of the Allied invasion of Iraq and its alliance thereafter with the Shia powers which dominated the Iraqi Government.

Using data provided by our second article,<sup>97</sup> I analyse the correlation between *symbolic* and *realistic threats* in Zarqawi's statements between the invasion of Iraq and Zarqawi's death in 2006. The statements were already analysed using a process whereby they were coded for such threats by page, and results were shown as pertains to the existence of *threat* in each page and relative to the total pages of each statement, to prohibit longer statements from skewing the results. <sup>v</sup>

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<sup>v</sup>Using STATA, a Shapiro-Wilks test reveals non normally distributed variables; the analysis shows a significant correlation between *symbolic* and *realistic threats* (N=37, Spearman's RHO=0.7385, p <0.00005). we calculate the moving average of the threats to produce this graph which shows the correlation between them, whereby the X axis shows the statements chronologically and the Y axis shows the percentage of the pages which mentioned a certain threat in each statement.



The relevance of the concept of *threat* for Zarqawi, then, cannot be underestimated. Both went seemingly hand-in-hand, as the graph shows. This correlation manifests an interrelationship between *symbolic* and *realistic threats*; the material conditions imposed by the foreign intervention, and the *threat* thereof, were used alongside a repertoire of *symbolic threats*. In other words, the rhetoric of *realistic threats* fortified that of *symbolic* ones. But beyond that, how exactly was the Allied invasion used by Zarqawi? How were Shias associated with that invasion? And to what extent did Ibn Taymiyya play a role in that 21<sup>st</sup> century rhetoric? Next, I answer these questions.

My first encounter with a citation of Ibn Taymiyya comes in Zarqawi’s earliest statement; one that was delivered by Zarqawi in front of a martial court during his trial for possession of explosive materials which he planned to smuggle into the West bank.<sup>98</sup> This statement has a special importance in this context, as it dates almost ten years before Zarqawi’s activities began in Iraq, therefore it shows the saliency of Ibn Taymiyya’s influence on Zarqawi as early as the latter’s “career” beginnings at the age of 28: Zarqawi cited Ibn Taymiyya several times in his statement delivered to the court, as he accused the Jordanian regime of being a “*Taghut*” (tyrant); except that the word carries a much more severe meaning in

Arabic: it implies that the Jordanian regime has replaced God's rule in society. The *Taghut* is a "Quranic term for false god or idol. Also applied to tyrannical rulers who arrogate God's absolute power and use it to oppress people".<sup>99</sup> Zarqawi quoted Ibn Taymiyya stating that

ومتى ترك العلم ما علمه من كتاب الله وسنة رسوله، واتبع حكم الحاكم المخالف لحكم الله ورسوله، كان مرتدا كافرا يستحق العقوبة في الدنيا

والآخرة

*Once one left the guidance of Allah's book and his prophet's Sunnah and followed the rule of the ruler which is in violation of God's rule and his prophet's, he is an apostate infidel who deserves punishment in this world and the afterlife.*<sup>vi</sup>

The relevance of the concept of *Taghut* in Zarqawi's earliest statement here brings us to the core message of the statement: the fact of the matter is that this rather illuminating statement starts with, and mainly revolves around, *symbolic threat*. Such focus on *symbolic threat* may be understood when I consider that, for example, Schmuck and Matthes found that this type of *threat* has been proved to be more effective in igniting negative attitudes towards the *out-group* (represented by immigrants in their study) than economic threats.<sup>100</sup> Zarqawi commenced his statement by outlining the *symbolic threats* that the nation is facing in the form of weaker religiosity, decline in morals, and spread of usury, alcohol, and adultery:

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<sup>vi</sup> Document titled "The statement of a war prisoner; People why do you call me to hell, while I call you to salvation"

نحن قوم كنا في جاهلية جهلاء، في وقت عطلت فيه أحكام الله المظهرة ونسي كتاب الله بجانبنا، واستبدل بشرايع شتى من اذهان

وحثالات البشر، فأصبح المعروف منكرا والمنكر معروفا، والسنة بدعة والبدعة سنة، وأشيعت الفاحشة بين الناس، وفشى الزنا في اشراف

القوم وعامتهم، وأصبح الربا والتمر يسميان بغير اسميهما تغطية للحق وتجميل للصورة الباطل<sup>vii</sup>

*“We are people who were in complete ignorance, in a time when the pure rules of God are disabled, and the book of God has been set aside and replaced with various legislations from the minds and scum of people. The good deed became frowned upon, and the bad deed became a good deed, the Sunnah is novelty and novelty is Sunnah. Lewdness spread amongst people and adultery has spread amongst the nobility as well as commoners, and usury and alcohol are named differently in order to conceal righteousness and to garnish the image of injustice”*

Zarqawi, later, switched to employing *realistic threat* and cited, again, Ibn Taymiyya in support of the argument: he criticised torture and house raids practiced by the country’s security forces:

وقد كنا سمعنا وقرأنا عما يفعله زبانية المخابرات في ساحات التعذيب<sup>viii</sup>

*And we have heard and read about what the security forces do in torture squares*

والموت أحسب أننا من أن يداهم جمنوه الطاغوت بيوتنا فيقوموننا من بين أهائنا وأطفالنا<sup>ix</sup>

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vii Ibid

viii Ibid

ix Ibid

*And death is more tolerable to us than for the Taghut's soldiers to raid our houses and drag us in front of our families and children*

Here comes Ibn Taymiyya for Zarqawi's support in nothing else but to establish the *topos of threat*: as I stated before, the *topos of threat* establishes the *threat* a certain *out-group* poses and demands action against such group in the condition that the said *threat* is confirmed. Ibn Taymiyya is cited as such:

والعدو الصائل الذي يفسد الدين ليس أوجب بعد الإيمان من دفعه<sup>x</sup>

*The audacious enemy who ruins the religion; there's nothing more important, after faith, than to fight him*

The saliency of the *topos of threat* is, then, rather evident even from such an early stage of Zarqawi's rhetoric: he had established in this statement the *symbolic* and *realistic threats*, of the Jordanian regime, as well as established the justifications for fighting it. This reminds us of Ibn Taymiyya when he employed a *topos* not dissimilar to that of Zarqawi's: the nation of Islam is under *threat*, both *symbolically* and *realistically*, and resorting to arms is the only way this *threat* can be countered.

This is not to say that Zarqawi was an expert in social psychology; rather that he, like Ibn Taymiyya before him, intuitively realised that accusing their enemies of being a *threat* to Muslims will only help gather support and momentum for their causes by making such attacks morally and religiously justifiable; for the two men, they are nothing but acts of self-defence. The overwhelming reliance on the *topos of threat* is evident throughout the data as I have shown in the analysis' graph, as well as in the<sup>101</sup> example just discussed showing the

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<sup>x</sup> Ibid

saliency of these concepts in Zarqawi's very first statement. Next, I will shed more light on the matter by providing more examples from different statements in different points of time. These quotes belong to a timeline in which Zarqawi was most outspoken, a timeline which correlates with his active years in Iraq stretching between 2003 and 2006, the year in which he was killed by the Allied Forces. These quotes will also show the extent to which Zarqawi depended on the *topos* of *threat* in his rhetoric, and how the *out-groups* in this rhetoric were allocated different priority with time; the enemy under focus slowly, but surely, shifted from the West to Shias as the last three statements were dedicated, almost entirely, to demonizing Shias and calling for their murder. In addition, the quotes will outline the critical role of the allied invasion, like that of the Mongols and the Crusaders for Ibn Taymiyya before him.

Furthermore, a further qualitative investigation reflects our graph as well as the dialectical significance of the material-political developments in the country. The Allies' collaboration with the Shia-dominated Iraqi government only intensified following the invasion, which meant that, increasingly, Shia populations were associated with foreign invaders. This only helped Zarqawi, considering the various reported transgressions against Sunni communities; one infamous example of which was the Badr organisation whose former high ranking member became the Interior Minister, despite the organisation being known for targeting Sunnis and fuelling the sectarian tensions.<sup>102</sup> In a statement in May 2005<sup>xi</sup>, for example, the context of Shia collaboration with the Allies had a prominent presence. Zarqawi declared, this time invoking *realistic threat*, that

وقد رأى العالم بأسره جرائم عباده الصليب... في سجن أبي غريب و بوكا وما فعله أعدائهم الروافض في سجونهم في الجنوب...

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<sup>xi</sup> Statement titled "و عاد أحفاد ابن العلقمي" "And the grandchildren of Ibn Al-Aalkami have returned", (p. 16)

*The whole world saw crimes of the worshipers of the Cross... in Abu Ghraib prison and in  
Buka, and what their Shia collaborators did in their prisons in the south.*

That statement also reiterates the established historical threat of Shias: Zarqawi accused the Badr Brigade of conducting various lethal attacks in the 1980s and 1990s and cited six incidents.<sup>xii</sup>

Like Ibn Taymiyya, by the end the major enemy couldn't be made any clearer: Zarqawi dedicated his last appeal to a scathing criticism of Shias. This statement was titled "Have you received the talk of Shias",<sup>xiii</sup> it was released in June 2006 and is the last statement I have before Zarqawi's death shortly after. The rather long statement went to extreme length to demonize Shias and elaborate on their supposed *threat*. From which I will choose two quotes covering both *realistic* and *symbolic threat*.

Fascinatingly, Zarqawi inadvertently affirmed what I know about the nature of these two types of *threats*: one quote here serves to illustrate how his perception of this topic perfectly corroborates Integrated Threat Theory's categorisation of *threats*, building on both *symbolic* and *realistic* ones. Zarqawi maintained that:

فين الرفض... لم يقم أساسا... الا لغرض هدم الدين من خلال أميين هاميين:

الأول: التشكيك بحقيقة الدين وزعزعة العقيدة...

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<sup>xii</sup> Ibid (p. 17)

<sup>xiii</sup> Title in Arabic is "هل أتاك حديث الرافضة". This is part 1 of the statement, p. 4.

الثاني: ... عن طريق وزعزعة أركان الدولة الإسلامية من الداخل والخارج... من الداخل عن طريق استنارة الشعب... وتحريضهم على الخروج على

خليفة وإمام المسلمين أو اغتياله... وأما من الخارج فمن خلال التعاون مع أعداء الدين... حتى يتمكنوا من إسقاط الدولة الإسلامية

*The Shia religion was only established...to destroy Islam through two important matters:*

*First: doubting the truth of Islam and destabilising faith...*

*Second: through destabilising the foundations of the Muslim state both from inside and outside...from the inside through provoking the people into revolting against the Muslim leader or assassinating him...and from the outside through collaborating with Islam's enemies...so they can destroy the Islamic state*

As Zaraqawi digressed, in that document, on the historical *threat* which Shias posed and their alleged alliance with foreign invaders, he once again sought Ibn Taymiyya for support:

موقف شيخ الإسلام "ابن تيمية" وجهاد الرافضة فقد كان واضحاً في موقفين:

الموقف الأول: برز في جانب التأليف العلمي للرد على بدعهم وكفرناهم، وكشف حقيقة الروافض وبيان أحوالهم وحكم الشرع فيهم

والموقف الثاني: برز في فتاويه العملي لهم... تأييداً لهم بمسار كتحيم وتحريم مع التنازل ضد المسلمين

*Ibn Taymiyya's, Islam's Sheikh, stance and jihad against Shias was evident in two ways:*

*First: in his scientific output to reply to their novelties and heresies, and to expose Shias and clarify how they're to be treated and judged*

*Second: in his actual fight against them...to discipline them for collaborating and allying with the Mongols against Muslims*

## Conclusion

Many of the largest conflicts in the Muslim world find roots, as well as fuel, in existing sectarian tensions. Tensions which may be far from recent; they harken back to the early days of the Sunni-Shia conflict following the death of Prophet Muhammed. This paper discussed the undeniable relevance of these tensions in both historical, and contemporary, times. Such tensions were studied using the example of two of the most famous figures in the Middle East's history; the terrorist leader, and godfather of ISIS, Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi and the 13<sup>th</sup> century renowned scholar Ibn Taymiyya. Both men relied on a simple recipe; aggravating these sectarian tensions in order to mobilize against certain *out-groups* (i.e., non-Sunnis) by way of portraying them as a source of *threat*. Importantly, this article showed the important, though not necessarily conditional, role foreign interventions may play in fuelling these conflicts by, if inadvertently, fortifying extremist rhetoric in the way an invading force chooses its allies and collaborators in the invaded country, leaving the associated communities vulnerable to demonization.

This investigation has revealed the critical importance of the concepts of *out-group* and *threat* in the mobilising rhetoric of two of the most well-known Islamic extremists, separated by seven centuries and united by similar dialectics. If I have succeeded in demonstrating the utility of the two concepts in studying extremist rhetoric; I hope to have, in addition, succeeded in demonstrating the relevance of material conditions in said demonization rhetoric.

The rhetorical relationship between Zarqawi and Ibn Taymiyya cannot be understated. The *topos of threat* was a concept that the former carried from the latter and was meticulously employed with unabridged reference to the 13<sup>th</sup> scholar. The overarching doctrine of the two men was one of exclusion and mobilisation. Said mobilisation depends on establishing *out-groups* and associating them with *threat*. By way of connecting the historical-rhetorical links between Zarqawi and Ibn Taymiyya I outlined an undeniable theme: foreign invasions were taken as a pretext for the demonization of certain local non-Sunni groups by way of associating these groups with the external *realistic threat* stemming from said invasions. In the most recent case, it was Zarqawi who played a key role in drowning Iraq in a brutal civil war the consequences of which are still felt in the Middle East. Zarqawi's rhetoric not only adopted an evidently identical implementation of Ibn Taymiyya's *topos of threat*, but also made no attempt to conceal that fact. A fact which is made clear by the numerous citations of Ibn Taymiyya, reflecting a considerable level of admiration for, and influence thereby, the scholar. Furthermore, Zarqawi's many citations of Ibn Taymiyya seem to serve a larger purpose; not only is the latter a respected Sunni scholar, giving a degree of authority to Zarqawi's rhetoric by way of establishing agency on behalf of the *in-group*. But also, his demonization of Shias came within a context very similar to that of Zarqawi's; that is the context of a foreign invasion and what that brings by way of a fragmented society and the resulting sectarian tensions.

Mobilization rhetoric requires enemies and their associated *threat*: for both men under study the material realities served as an optimal pretext. Such pretext was, largely, provided by foreign invaders (far enemies) and the politics of alliances in the aftermath. The two case studies in this article portray the mechanism by which structurally similar dialectics may cause similar outcomes. Beyond the pure theoretical contribution of this paper; it has outlined the indirect danger of foreign interventions on the social fabric of invaded

communities, at least when it comes to Muslim ones. The sectarian tensions in the Middle East were shown in their long, complicated historical roots. Also shown was the ease with which these tensions can be taken advantage of, and weaponised by, violent extremists who find, in these tensions, fertile ground for planting seeds of division and easy, if perhaps lazy, rhetorical ammunition.

The idea of an interactive relationship between material and discursive realities and the idea of interactive radicalization are ones that would benefit from further research. The metamorphosis of any rhetoric could not take place in a void, and this is certainly the case with violent extremism. This article, eventually, articulates the importance of the dialectical approach, and emphasises its value in providing a more comprehensive analysis, at least in the case of extremist rhetoric.

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Article 2

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## Fragmentation and Grievances as Fuel for Violent Extremism: The Case of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi

### Abstract:

*Violent extremism naturally benefits from any state of fragmentation. This paper focuses on Iraq as an example of a country where societal divides make a fertile ground for such extremism. The rhetoric of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi is used as a case study: analysing his statements between 2003 and 2006 shows his weaponization of the concepts of out-groups and threat. This highlights the saliency of these concepts and the crucial role a group's grievances, and the resulting societal fragmentations, play in Zarqawi's efforts to mobilise his in-group, i.e., Sunni Arab Muslims. The use of Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory outline the grounds for, as well as the mechanism by which, Zarqawi portrayed his enemies. Results show prominent implementation of out-group/threat in the rhetoric, the different out-groups in question, and the types of threats portrayed. In addition, this paper concretely shows the effect of the allied forces/Iraqi government's policies in fortifying Zarqawi's rhetoric by way of adopting hostile and discriminatory measures against Sunni Arabs. This paper also shows an undeniable dialectical relationship between societal fragmentation/grievances and violent-extremist rhetoric and returns the question to policy makers.*

**Keywords:** *Iraq; Middle East, Terrorism, Violent Extremism; Social Identity; Threat; Fragmentation; Grievances; Shia; Sunni.*

## Introduction

In a region infamous for its instability, Iraq has always been one of the most unstable countries, especially ever since Saddam Hussein took to power in 1979. Since then, the country has suffered consecutive catastrophes: two gulf wars followed by paralysing United Nations sanctions left it in shatters. Another factor for Iraq's instability lies in the inner most dynamics of Iraqi society. Saddam's regime was one heavily reliant on elite ethnicity: in fact, all of Iraq's rulers since the 1920s were from the Sunni-Arab community, itself a minority in the country (Rafid Jaboori, 2013). Hussein's regime didn't stop at politically marginalising other factions of Iraqi society, rather it, on multiple occasions, chose to wage war against them. Examples of which are the 1988 offensive against Kurdish forces allied with Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, and the 1990 rebellion by both Kurds in the north and the far outnumbering Shias in the south (Pirnie and O'Connell, 2008).

In turn, this morphed into an active marginalisation of the Sunni community following the Iraq War in 2003 and the resulting toppling of Hussein's regime and, thereby, his Sunni Arab elite of regime figures. At the time, Sunni Arabs largely boycotted the first elections which naturally resulted in an overwhelming win for the Shia majority. They, however, did take part in the 2005 election when they managed to achieve evident success in their regions, but they were, ultimately, denied influential positions which were held by Shia and Kurdish members (Jaboori, 2013). Such an environment of frustration ignited an insurgency of massive scale; Sunni extremist groups launched bombing attacks against U.S troops as well as Shia populations (Pirnie and O'Connell, 2008). The latter, in turn, made sure to take revenge by terrorizing Sunni civilians and utilising murder and intimidation in order to force them to leave their homes (Ibid). The situation concerning Iraqi Sunnis remains concerning, as Renad Mansour (2016) put it "Iraqi Sunnis are disillusioned by the monopolization of power by a

few Shia elite and the impunity of perceived sectarian Shia militias that are part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).”

Following “Operation Iraqi Freedom” in 2003, a fragmented, fragile, and volatile Iraq was left a fertile land for extremists to fester and pursue their agendas. Of these extremists, none was more influential than a Jordanian Al-Qaida member named Abu Musa’ab Al-Zarqawi. He was, perhaps, the key leader of the Arab Sunni insurgency against U.S forces and the Shia-dominated Iraqi government. Zarqawi’s importance in this study stems from the fact that, in a country plagued by all kinds of armed conflicts, Iraq is by far the country with the highest rate of terrorism deaths to conflict deaths in the world. The attached graphs herein show the saliency of terrorist attacks in the context of a civil war, in Figure 1. I chose to highlight the fatalities which took place the year before the start of the War and the year following Zarqawi’s death.

In this paper I analyse how factionalism and grievances lead to conflict by focusing on the very processes which Zarqawi utilised to mobilise his supporters into violence. This way the intention is to move from the correlative relationship between factionalism and organised violence on the one hand, and grievances and violence on the other (Kivimäki, 2021) to the analysis of the mechanism in which factionalism and grievances are being translated into organised violence. The impact of external intervention, also specific for the causal complex in the Middle East and North Africa according to Kivimäki, is also included in the examination of this article.

The focus of this article is on one of the most violent countries in the Middle East, Iraq, during the period of 2003 to 2006, when fatalities of organized violence had sharply increased. I will show how Iraq’s post-war environment created a perfect storm for Zarqawi to capitalise on existing fractions within the Iraqi society and mobilise Arab Sunnis in the

country against American troops as well as their fellow Iraqis. In doing so, I utilise the Integrated Threat and the Social Identify Theories, through which an analysis of Zarqawi statements is presented. This analysis will show the mechanism by which Zarqawi made use of, as well as exacerbated, existing factionalism, and how said factionalism was formulated in Zarqawi's rhetoric. I show, through careful analysis of Zarqawi's statements, a rhetoric empowered by the political chaos left by the U.S invasion of a country blessed, as well as cursed, by a rich and complex history from which the invading powers were mostly blind.

The first included chart shows a success story, so to speak, of terrorism in a country which, at the time, suffered immense violence and instability. Between the time that the Coalition's forces took over Iraq, and the time Zarqawi died, there was an evident rise of terrorism-related deaths. Not long before the war, deaths by terrorist acts were virtually non-existent. After the war, these deaths spiked to constitute up to 4% of total deaths by 2007. To put this into perspective, the country's conflict deaths in the same time frame ranged, approximately, between 8% and 15%. This far exceeds the world average and for comparison, the next country on that chart, Palestine, peaked at 1% in 2003 (Figure 1). The second chart is three dimensional with the time dimension, from 2002 to 2007, indicated by the one-directional arrow; it illustrates the changes in terrorism and conflict deaths with time. It shows that while conflict deaths moved back and forth (declining in 2004 and 2007), fatalities of terror increased consistently following the US-led intervention (Figure 2). Both graphs have been created using a portal provided by Our World in Data. Data on conflict deaths are sourced from The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) dataset, data on terrorist incidents are sourced from the data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) dataset (OWID, 2021; IHME, n.d National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism 2019).

Such a significant proportion of terrorism deaths in Iraq highlight the imperative necessity for studying terrorism in that country; the dialectic between fragmentation and grievances, on the one hand, and terrorism, on the other, implores us to investigate that two-way relationship between reality and rhetoric. Inasmuch as terrorist leaders, like Zarqawi, seek to create their preferred reality, they, in turn, take advantage of the existent reality by way of building on, and then manipulating, it. This paper seeks to expose that very dialectic: In essence, to expose how Zarqawi took advantage of existing fragmentations and grievances in order to plant seeds for more of such.

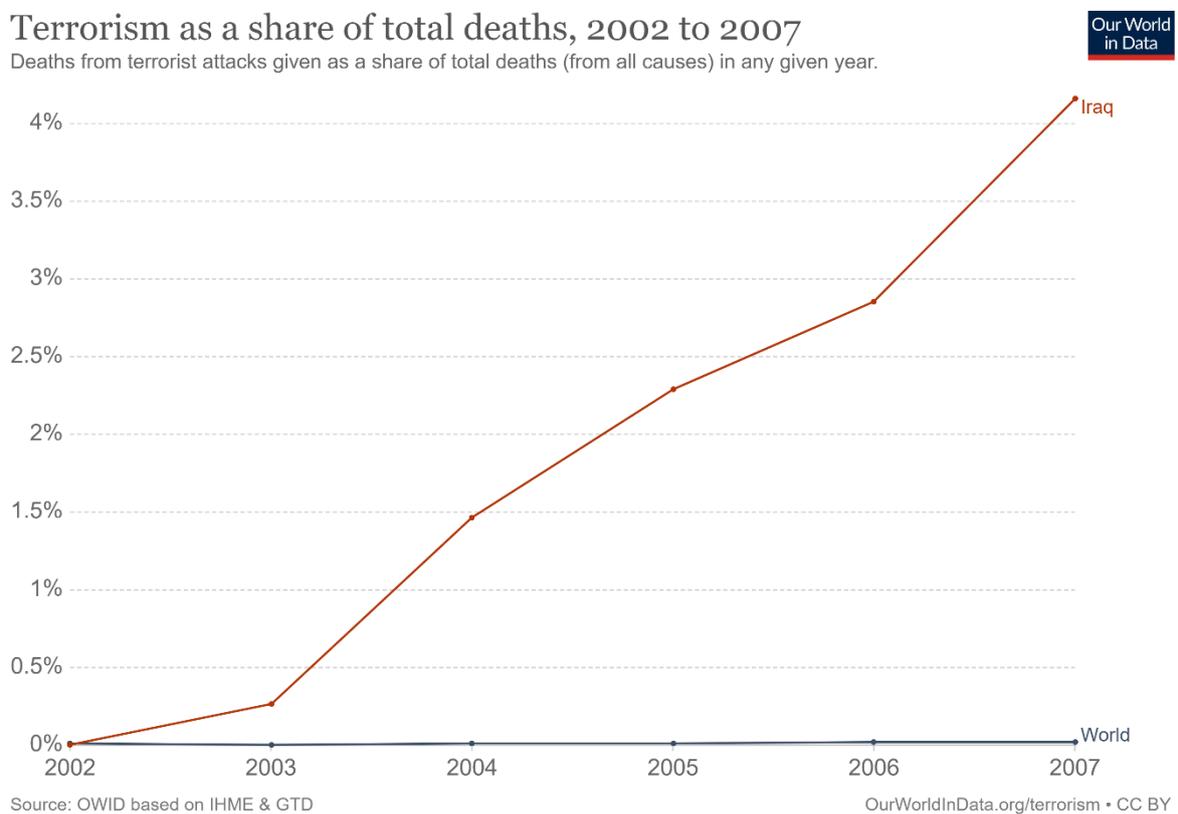
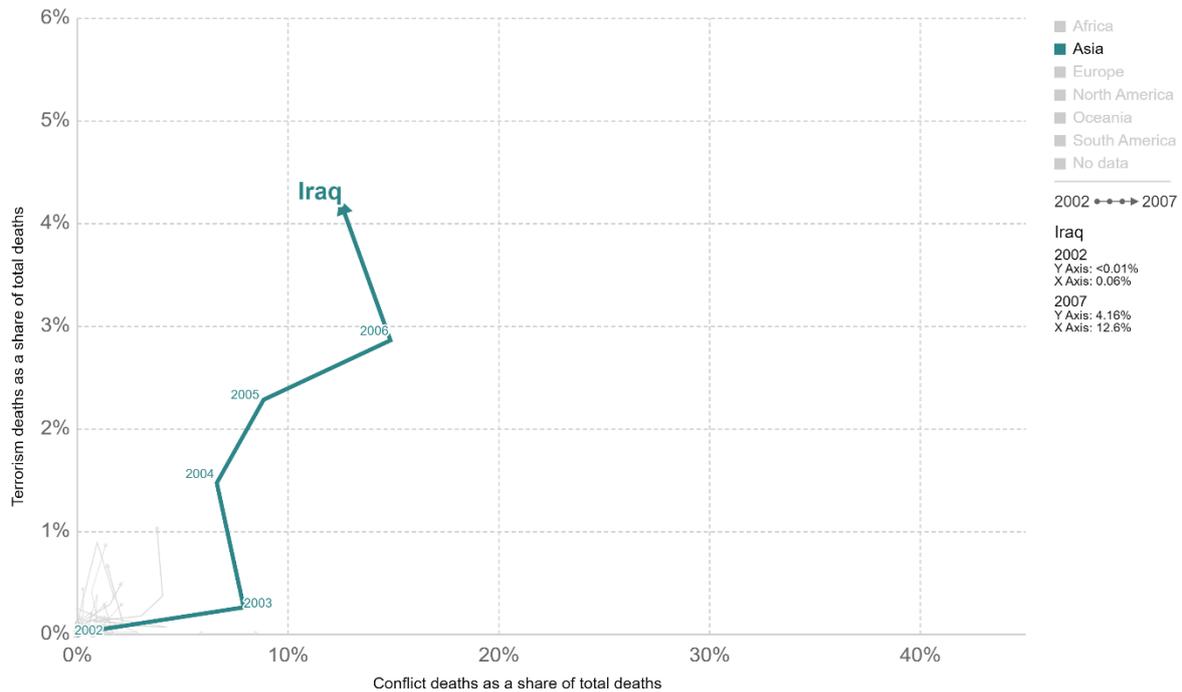


Figure 1: Development of fatalities of terrorism, relative to total deaths in Iraq between 2002 and 2007

## Terrorism deaths vs. conflict deaths, 2002 to 2007

The share of total deaths in a given country from terrorism versus the share from conflict (otherwise not defined as terrorism).



Source: OWID based on IHME & GTD

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Figure 2: Fatalities of terrorism compared to fatalities of conflict in Iraq between 2002 and 2007

### Theoretical Framework

This paper builds on two social psychology theories, Integrated Threat Theory and Social Identity Theory, as a building block in establishing a framework for analysing discriminatory rhetoric of extremists like Zarqawi. For factionalism to be converted into conflict one must establish rhetorical links between the two in order to successfully influence the targeted audience of said rhetoric.

Social Identity Theory explains the ease with which individuals can ascribe themselves to an *In-group* which stands unique from *Out-groups*. It is defined as “A social psychological theory of identity formation that privileges the role of large group identities in forming individuals' concepts of self. It has been used, in particular, to examine the formation and forms of adherence to national and ethnic groups.” (Calhoun, 2002b). It was pioneered by

Henry Tajfel in 1970s and 1980s and came as a result of years of academic curiosity regarding how individuals develop their social as well as individual identities, and, therefore, the relationship between that individual and society at large (Baker, 2012. p.130). For Tajfel and Turner (2004), intergroup relations are dominated by bias towards the *In-group*; the mere identification with an *In-group* results in such bias, and, similarly, “the mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the in-group.” (Tajfel and Turner, 2004. p. 281).

Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) adds to Social Identity Theory (SIT) by outlining the importance that *perceived threats* have over that intergroup dynamic. A belief that one’s culture, for example, is under *threat* from another poses a serious impediment in the face of cementing a healthy relationship between these cultures; affecting many aspects of interaction between them, and even encouraging prejudice between members of these different cultures (Stephan et al., 2000, p. 240). The theory has been used in multiple studies, and was updated by Stephan and Renfro to revolve around two key types of threats: *realistic threat* and *symbolic threat* (Stephan and Renfro, 2002). *Realistic threats* are those concerned with the wellbeing of the in-group such as political and economic power, while *symbolic threats* are concerned with the in-groups’ values, beliefs, or worldviews: *realistic threats* are tangible unlike *symbolic* ones, and both, importantly, may only be *perceived* and not necessarily actual (Ibid).

Together, these two theories provide a viable framework for studying the link between societal fragmentation and terrorism. Employing them will highlight the different *out-groups* which pose as a *threat* to Zarqawi’s *in-group*, in addition to the types of such *threats*. Said analysis is then further utilised to illustrate the relationship between changes on the ground and changes in the rhetoric.

I sought to operationalise the Social Identity Theory and the Integrated Threat Theory through the breaking down of SIT and ITT into their basic elements. By searching for, and coding such elements, I draw a picture of factionalism in Iraq as reflected and developed by Zarqawi. Once this picture is clearly drawn, a subsequent analysis is provided to shed light on how Zarqawi took advantage of a divided society in order to plant the seeds of violence and instability: this picture will manifest the different *out-groups* (enemies) in the focus of Zarqawi's rhetoric, as well as the different *threats* posed to Zarqawi's de facto *in-group*.

Before I commence, however, it is important to tackle the question of the historical roots of said factionalism. My analysis of Zarqawi's rhetoric is a window through which I seek to understand the weaponization of existing factionalism in creating a narrative of agency and emergency; Zarqawi sought to speak for his *in-group* and portray the emergency that is the various *threats* he ascribed to the different *out-groups* in the country. Such narrative is, at least partially yet importantly, ingrained in the collective memory of the peoples who live in the region, as well as in the belief system that the likes of Zarqawi adopt. In the next section, I show the conceptual ground upon which Zarqawi built his rhetoric; first, I outline the historical, as well as the theological, background of said rhetoric, and then I provide evidence of the relation between the historical/theological and the very words Zarqawi used, in our database.

## Genealogical Investigation of the Concept of Threat in Zarqawi's Islamic Extremism

If our analysis showed a prominence of the concept of *threat* in Zarqawi's rhetoric, I endeavour to outline the discursive-historical roots of such concept as adopted by Zarqawi.

The importance of said approach is the evident link between creating agency on the one hand and creating emergency on the other: As Zarqawi attempted to speak on behalf of Sunni

Arabs in Iraq and adopted the persona of a devout Muslim, he had to justify killing other Muslims in a manner that is compatible with, as well as convincing for, the targeted audience of Sunni Muslims.

Reisigl and Wodak saw the phenomenon of racism as a social practice and an ideology which is manifested discursively (Reisigl and Wodak, 2005). Similarly, the concept of *threat*, and the phenomenon of discrimination associated with it, as used by Zarqawi, is also manifested discursively. And like racism, which must be put within its political, social, and historical contexts (ibid), *threat* ought to be analysed discursively.

It is of the essence then, before analysing the rhetoric of the man in question, that we understand the societal and cultural discourses which led, or at least aided, in adopting this specific rhetoric which I am later to shed light on.

Religion is perceived by billions of people in the world as a source of morality, something that is of intimate relationship with our subject; religion provides believers a framework, so to speak. John Locke, for example, viewed religion as a source of moral law, coming directly from the commandants of God (West, 2013, p. 474). The importance of Islam as a religion in this project comes clear as the man under study, and therefore his rhetoric, is fundamentally influenced by Islam; for him Islam is indeed a source of moral law.

Furthermore, Islam's influence here extends beyond mere theology; the history of Islam and its politics play a key role in shaping the world in which we live, and which, certainly, shaped the very identity of Zarqawi. The concepts of jihad, people of the book, and very importantly, the Sunni-Shia divide are integral concepts in this project. Of course, I am not the first nor the last to acknowledge the strong sectarian identification of many extremist organisations; the CIA's 2007 National Intelligence Estimate, for instance, asserted that Al-Qaida works to include some Sunni communities in its efforts and from which to seek support (Hoffman, 2008, p. 134). Others showed that Lebanon's Hezbollah enjoys large support in the country's

Shia community (Norton, 2007) as Shias in Lebanon are likely to support Hezbollah, its expansion, and its use of force (Haddad, 2006, p. 21).

In their attempt to understand jihadi rhetoric, some seek to find direct links between the use of the Quran and such rhetoric. Donald Holbrook, for instance, draws our attention to the employment, and alteration, of the Quran and the Hadith by jihadis for the purpose of the latter's discourse; Holbrook, very helpfully, outlined how Ayman Al-Zawahiri relies often on verses from the Al-Mā'idah chapter of Quran which declares "O believers, do not hold Jews and Christians as your allies. They are allies of one another; and anyone who makes them his friends is surely one of them" (Holbrook, 2010, p. 16). Others complemented this addition to the literature by analysing the tools which jihadis use in order to manipulate and shape certain religious texts into supporting these jihadis' narratives: Ijtihad, for example, which is a "term in Islamic law that allows for the process of religious decision making by independent interpretations of the Quran and the Shariat" (Venkatraman, 2007, p. 236) was shown to have historically been useful in mobilising Muslims against the Crusaders, something which jihadis later were inspired by, and made use of (Ibid). Wiktorowicz found that jihadists expanded the concept of the apostates, from those who defect from Islam or reject essential teachings such as prayer, to leaders who refuse to implement Islamic law as jihadis see it; Wiktorowicz correctly forecasted that jihadis' targets will include a wider range of categories, mainly Shias in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and in Iraq due to Zarqawi's influence (Wiktorowicz, 2005, p. 94).

It is evident, then, that Islam plays a significant role in the discourse of jihadis worldwide, and that such role has, indeed, drawn attention from scholars who studied it from a wide variety of angles and methodologies. This paper, therefore, will provide a fresh and deep analysis of this link between Islam, its history and theology, and jihadist rhetoric; fundamentally speaking, this research will make evident that, when it comes to said

rhetoric, much of it comes down to the concept of *threat* and the utilisation of that *threat* in that rhetoric. This utilisation, in turn, needs the second key concept which is out-group; whether a certain jihadist depends on the Quran, the Hadith, or Ijtihad, there are two essential ingredients; and these are *threat*, and *out-group* as we shall see.

Jihad is considered, for the purposes of this paper, as Islam's mechanism of collective self-defence and is traditionally seen as a collective duty, something that jihadis, including Bin Laden, sought to elevate to the ranks of individual duties; in fact, Bin Laden insisted that jihad be categorised as one of Islam's five pillars and second to belief (Gerges, 2009, p. 3). This defensive and collective nature of jihad, according to the classical interpretation, is bound by strict rules and regulations, something that jihadists advocated to change, inspired by Sayyid Qutb, into an individual and permanent revolution against infidels (Gerges, 2009). Jihad, then, is done against the *out-group* as defined by the jihadist implementing it; how *out-groups* are defined and categorised by jihadists, and what the justifications are for waging war against them, lies at the heart of our project's research question.

*Out-groups* in Islam constitute, naturally, non-Muslims who are perceived in relatively simple terms in Islamic theology: There are the infidels (kuffar) and there are Ahl-Alkitab, or people of the book, a Quranic term used to refer to Christians and Jews. The Quran was persistent in using the term Ahl-Alkitab to describe followers of the two other Ibrahimic religions, and when it comes to Christianity, it was more interested in showing the misconceptions and errors that Islam maintained Christians have about their own religion (Griffith, 2013). Islam's relationship with Jews, on the other hand, was more troublesome; Prophet Muhammad had a series of treaties and wars with the Jews of Arabia. One notable incident was the attack against the Jews of Khaybar which ended in the latter's defeat and the capture of their leader (Carimokan, 2010, p. 401). In any case, the rule towards the people of the book was, generally speaking, that they are to be offered peace and tolerance as long as

they pay their special taxes (Jizya) and abide by the few restrictions imposed upon them (Long, 2013, p, 283).

To consider Christians and Jews, for the purposes of this study, as *out-groups* is a relatively straight forward logical step. What is more difficult, and perhaps more interesting, is searching for the theological, discursive, and historical building blocks with which extremists like Zarqawi build their narrative for excluding other Muslims, and therefore, portraying them as part of the *out-group* and a source of *threat*. In this context, the concept of the *Munafiq* becomes very useful.

## *Converting the In-Group to the Out-Group: The Concept of the Munafiq*

Between fragmentation and grievances exists a dialectic which I endeavour to uncover; the grievances, stimulated by certain policies or developments, are adopted, moulded, and reshaped by terrorists seeking further fragmentation. Such fragmentation, when intended to target a specific group, largely depends on the establishment of said group as an enemy (*out-group*); that, in turn, benefits from the portrayal of that group as a source of *threat*.

Drawing the lines of fragmentation, in the case of Zarqawi, required the exclusion of groups from the existing *in-group*; Shias and Kurds were a prime example. Here I explore a rather important concept: the term *Munafiq* lays the ground for such fragmentation by way of categorising people accused of it as a source of *threat* (therefore belonging to the *out-group*) to Islam and Muslims.

Munafiq (Plural Munafiqoon or Munafiqeen) is an Arabic word for ‘hypocrite’, a word which carries a rather heavy weight in Islamic theology. It is a “polemical term applied to Muslims who possess weak faith or who profess Islam while secretly working against it...the Quran equates hypocrisy with unbelief (kufr) and condemns hypocrites to hellfire for their failure to fully support the Muslim cause financially, bodily, and morally.” (Esposito, 2003).

The evident importance of this term does not come as a surprise when I remember that the Quran has an entire chapter titled “al-Munāfiqūn” or “The Hypocrites”:

The conceptual origin lies clear as the Quran defines hypocrites as those who “يَفْقَهُونَ”

“Believed then blasphemed thus their hearts are sealed and they cannot understand” (*Surah Al-Munafiqun [63]*, n.d.) The concept of the Munafiq, then, leaves the door wide open for any who wish to demonise a certain group for one reason or another; it is a great discursive

tool which justifies a narrative of discrimination for individuals who are happy to employ such concepts for the purposes of solidifying their rhetoric, whether justifiably or not. Those portrayed as Munafiqs are beyond redemption and can never acquire God's forgiveness: "سواءً"

عَلَيْهِمْ أَشْتَعَفَرْتُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ لَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ

"It is all the same for them whether you ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; never will Allah forgive them. Indeed, Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people." (Ibid).

This term acts as a conceptual framework for a discriminatory rhetoric weaponised against certain individuals or groups of people. Scholars have noted the significance of this term and its uses in different contexts and by different characters: Achmad Ubaedillah outlined how Abdullah Bin Abd Al-Razzaq, the Grand Shaykh of Khalawatiyah Samman in Maros, Indonesia, used the word Munafiq to describe those who denounce him, his followers, and his order; the word served as a double edged weapon both to boost his religious authority, and to undermine his opponents (Ubaedillah, 2014). A well-known Chechen Mujahid against the Russian state, Dokka Umarov, also used the word Munafiq to describe his enemies, the word also was applied to those who doubted his ambitions of establishing an Islamic Commonwealth within the Russian Federation (Knysh, 2012, p. 316). In fact, Umarov, categorized people into four distinct groups; Mujahideen, Kuffar (Infidels), Murtads (Apostates), and Munafiqs; Knysh noted the saliency of the word and how it was used to describe even observant Muslims; as long as they criticised Umarov or refused to join his fighters (ibid, p. 323)

Zarqawi himself often utilised this word in his rhetoric, and for the same purposes: in a letter he addressed to Osama Bin Laden, Zarqawi described Shias as Munafiqs who aid the Kuffar against Muslims, who assisted the Mongol invasion in their conquest of Iraq and Aleppo, etc;

citing a verse of the Quran, from the Munafiqoon chapter of course, advising “they are the enemy so be wary of them, god will fight them wherever they are”<sup>xiv</sup>. The use of *Munafiq* as a tool to demonise other Muslims is operated in parallel with associating them with the more traditional enemy (Christians or the West) and manifests itself in another example:

Zarqawi urged his Mujahideen in another statement maintaining that

فِيْشْتَا لَكُمْ حَامِلِي لَوَاءِ الصَّلِيْبِ وَمَنْ سَارَ تَحْتَ هَذَا اللُّوَاءِ مِنَ الْمُنَافِقِيْنَ وَالْمُرْتَدِيْنَ مِنْ اَبْنَاءِ جَلَدَتْنَا فَاَنْتُمْ لَا تَزُووْنَ عَنْ حِمِّي الرَّافِدِيْنَ  
فَسَبِّ؛ وَلَكُمْ تَدْرَفَعُوْنَ عَنِ الْاُمَّةِ بِاَسْرَهَا.

“In your fight against carriers of the Cross flag, and those who marched under this flag of munafiqeen and apostates of our countrymen, you’re not just defending Mesopotamia alone, but you’re defending the entire nation”<sup>xv</sup>

The concept of the *Munafiq*, then, opens the door to a flexible definition of the enemy and provides the framework for categorising other Muslims as sources of *threat*. The *Munafiq* pretends to be a Muslim, works with the enemies of Islam, and seeks to destroy the creed of Islam and those who follow it. Fundamentally, the *Munafiq* is part of the *out-group* and therefore can be accused of being a source of *threat*: Every *in-group* requires an *out-group*, and if one is to portray certain groups as the enemy it is imperative that these groups are portrayed as *out-groups* first, before outlining their supposed *threat*. To accuse a specific group of hypocrisy may not, in itself, be a sufficient factor in the effort of creating an enemy of that group. This is accompanied and fortified by a *threat*-focused argumentation as we shall see in this paper.

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<sup>xiv</sup> Data base document titled “A letter from Abu Musa’ab to Osama Bin Laden God protect him”

<sup>xv</sup> Data base document titled “People of Islam seek strength”

As an addition, and not substitution, historical contexts are integrated here as supporting evidence which shed light on the historical developments which shaped the rhetoric of the man under study; any rhetoric cannot be born in isolation of the times in which it was born. In fact, using non-discursive rhetoric is especially useful here, as it helps us better understand rhetoric when it is studied in multiple and layered texts such as the data I employ in this project. In essence, this is what Foucault would call the pre-discursive level of reality: “A discourse is defined in terms of statements (énoncés) of ‘things said’. Statements are events of certain kinds once tied to a historical context and capable of repetition; the position in discourse is defined as a consequence of their functional use” (Olssen, 2014, p. 28).

In the next section I show the empirical application for the concepts discussed above, which are, later, linked to the real-world events. The relevance of these concepts is shown over a considerable amount of data, as well as the dialectical relationship therebetween those events and the rhetoric itself.

## The Big Picture: The Totality of Zarqawi’s Discourse on Out-groups and their Threat

### Out-groups:

My analysis of the different *out-groups* manifested in Zarqawi’s rhetoric showed a clear categorization of four different groups of enemies portrayed: Shias (or Rawafid according to Zarqawi), the West with which Christians and Jews are merged, local ruling regimes, and Kurds. Figure 3 shows the occurrence rate of each node through time and in each individual statement, while figure 4 shows these rates relative to the average percentage of yearly occurrences. The charts resulting from our analysis paint an interesting picture of Zarqawi’s priorities when it comes to whom he identified as enemies. In said picture, two categories of enemies appear as most salient: The West-Christians-Jews and the Shias. What is especially

noticeable is the evolution of the Shia node through the coding process. Shias appear to evermore gain a greater role as Zarqawi’s enemies through time. Starting from 2005 they begin gaining prominence, with the W-C-J category leading the charts, before becoming the unquestionable centre of focus in 2006.

Overall, the analysis shows a prominent role of *out-groups* in the formation of Zarqawi’s discriminatory rhetoric; they were featured in every statement, and in a few they took a substantial share of these statements. An example of which is a document titled “الحق بالقافلة” or “join the caravan”, in which W-C-J nodes were present in 9 out of 11 pages, and local regimes were mentioned in 6 pages. My charts demonstrate the relevance of *out-groups* in our database; while the W-C-J category is ever prominent, I find a clear sharp rise in the prominence of the Rawafid (Shias) category.

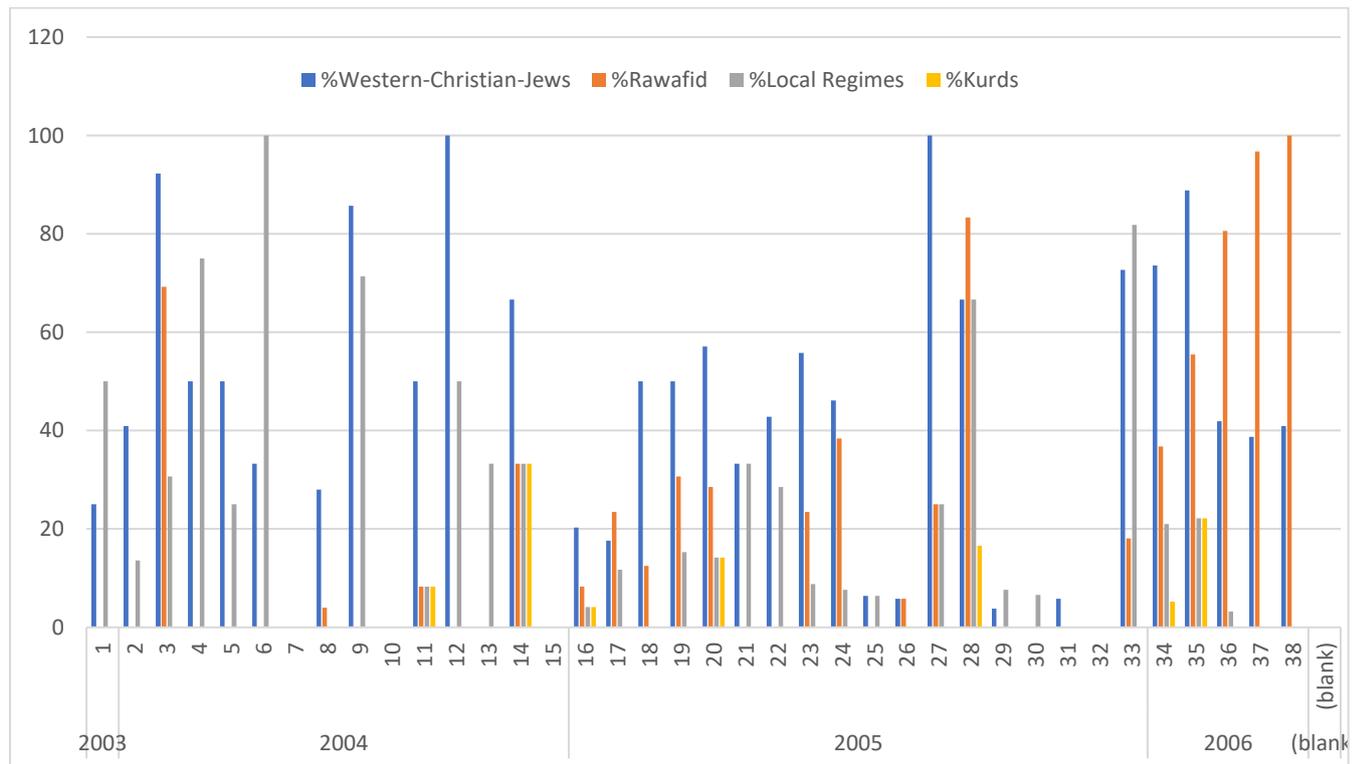


Figure 3: Out-Groups in Zarqawi’s statements in percentage points (relative to number of pages-by title)

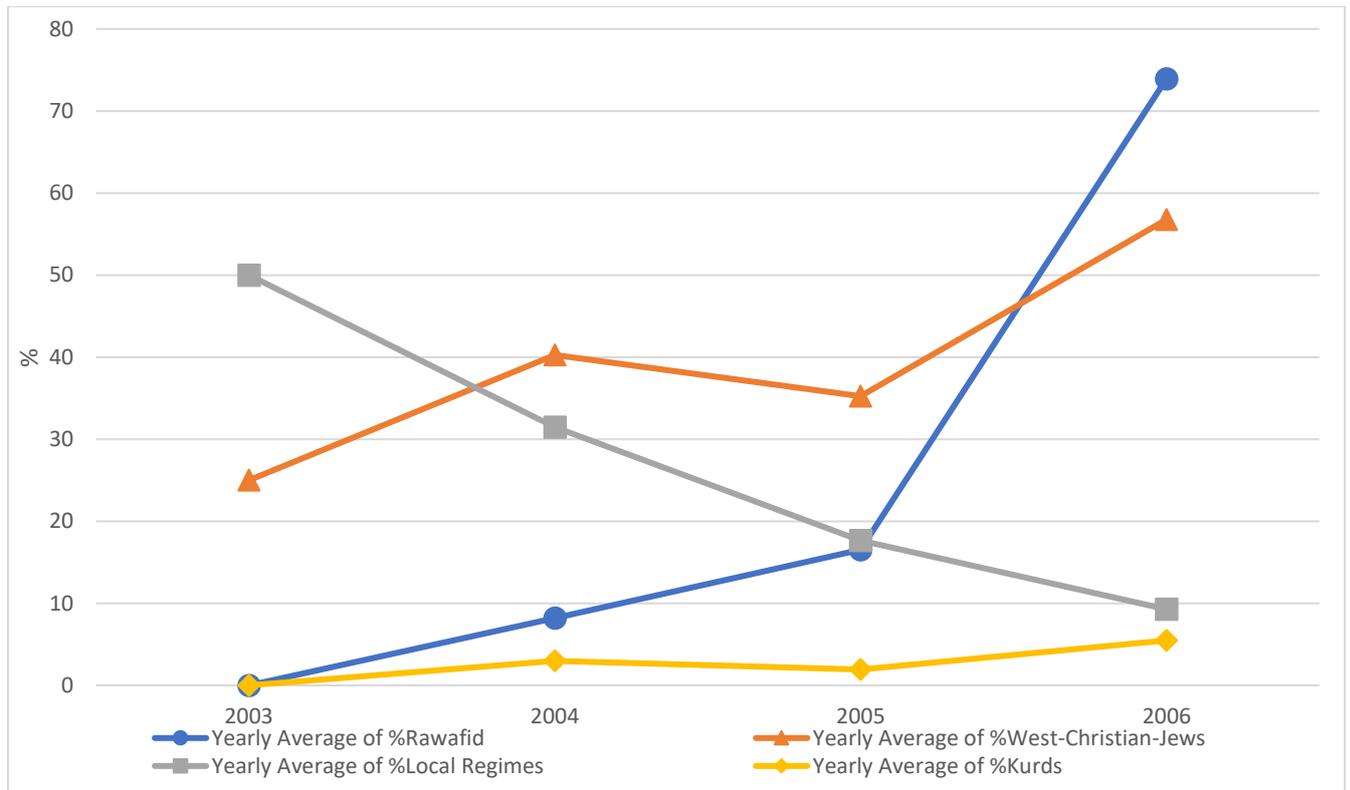


Figure 4: Development of Out-Groups in Zarqawi's statements in yearly average percentage of occurrences.

### Threats:

In June 2006, a report produced at the Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point Academy, highlighted an analysis in which Zarqawi's, then newly released statement was the focus. The author stipulated that "Although attacks continued as Zarqawi lowered his profile, his reduced media presence left them disassociated from a larger strategic purpose. This statement is intended to rectify that situation by clearly explaining the "apostasy" and danger posed by the Shi'a." (Fishman, 2006, p.1). This report referred to one of the statements under

study in this project and reflected a parallel with our research goals. Indeed, linking *out-groups* to *threats* was a strategic decision made by Zarqawi; a strategy that I, here, uncover.

For example, a 2004 statement titled “رسالة إلى الأمة” or “letter to the nation”, was constituted in 13 pages, 12 of which mentioned *realistic threats*, and 8 mentioned *symbolic threats*. A 2005

statement titled “سيف الدين وأنا حي” or “would the religion be harmed while I’m alive” was

spread over 34 pages, 24 mentioned *realistic threats* and 13 mentioned *symbolic threats*.

Figures 5 and 6 show the saliency of *realistic* and *symbolic threats*: in both I encounter the importance of *threat* as a building stone upon which Zarqawi’s rhetoric was established.

Both *realistic* and *symbolic threats* were consistently present throughout the data, although *realistic threats* seem to be slightly more dominant. This, interestingly, shows the limitations of dependence on discourse per se: The religious order upon which Zarqawi built his legitimacy was of evident value in these texts. However, the reliance on *symbolic threats* was clearly far from sufficient for Zarqawi; *realistic threats* were shown to be more salient in the vast majority of statements analysed. This highlights the direct relationship between developments in the political sphere and the rhetoric of a terrorist leader willing to use these developments by way of lyrical weaponization.

Now that I have established the various ways Zarqawi’s rhetoric was engaged with, as well as affected by, historical developments in post-war Iraq, I discuss next, the particularities of this dialectic in a time specific manner. Linking our findings to these developments shall shed light on the mechanisms by which said developments fortify, if perhaps inadvertently, terrorist rhetoric and, therefore, fuel violent conflict through further inflammation of grievances and fragmentation.

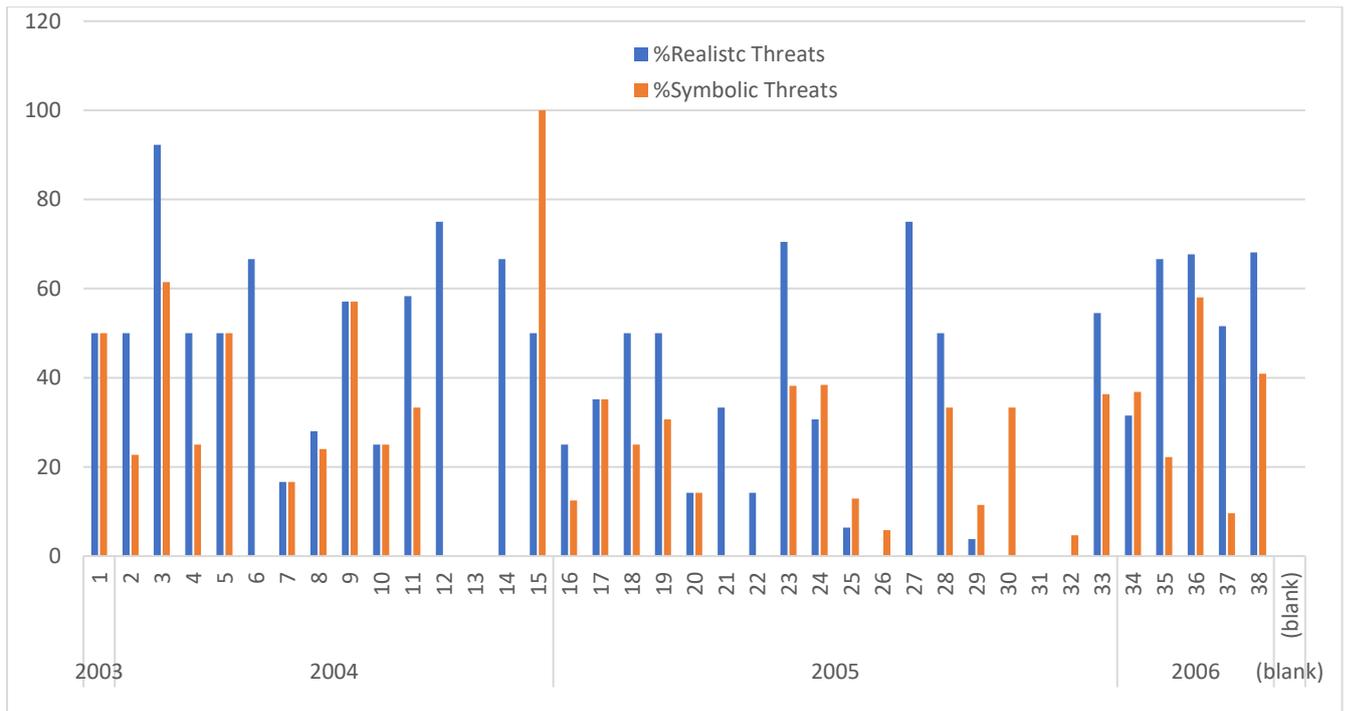


Figure 5: Realistic VS Symbolic Threats in Zargawi's statements in percentage points (relative to number of pages).

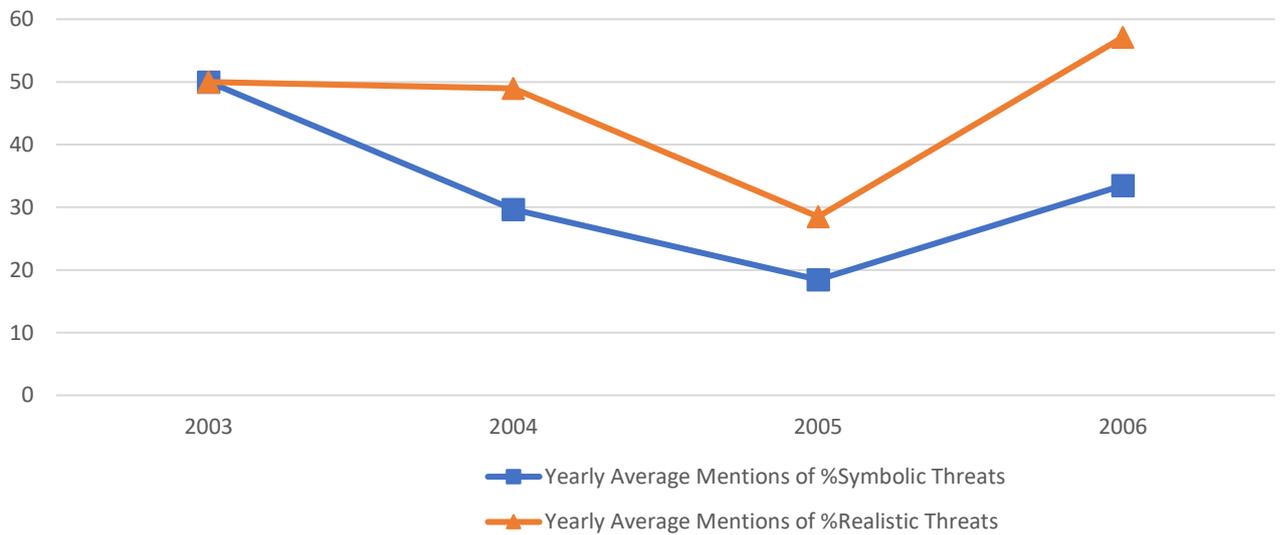


Figure 6: Development of Threats in Zargawi's statements in yearly average percentage of occurrences.

## Discussion: The Vicious Circle: How Allies' Policies Emboldened Sectarian Violence

My research shows a clear correlation between the developments on the Iraqi land and Zarqawi's formatting of the *out-group* (enemy). At the early stages of the occupation the rhetoric was evidently keen on defining the far enemy (W-C-J). That, however, began to change by the year 2005; such change can be better understood by linking the historical events on the ground with the rhetoric as analysed. Such linkage may also demonstrate how hasty policy making can deliver monumental damage to the fabric of society and, therefore, open the door for terrorists such as Zarqawi to capitalise on the societal void and the chaos resulting thereof.

In May 2003, the U.S government appointed Paul Bremer which effectively made him the ruler of Iraq, in his capacity as head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, who, in turn, appointed 25 Iraqis as members of the Iraqi Governing Council (Katzman, 2009). The CPA's carried a process of "de-Baathification" of the country and rejected the return of armed forces members to service; such measures were taken to assure Shias and Kurds of the democratic process (Ibid). At such an early stage, as we see, sectarian and ethnic considerations were given absolute priority for a country trying to recover from war and chaos; the roots of societal divisions in Iraq were re-planted and replenished.

Zarqawi's statements often kept with the political developments on the ground and provided commentary on them; they constitute a rather useful tool for tracking how these developments influenced, as well as were used by his rhetoric. For 2003 I only have one statement which, naturally, focused on the external *threat* posed by the far enemy: In fact, we see in this analysis that Zarqawi focused on the W-C-J and the local regime (the Jordanian King) which worked with the allies.

By the year 2004, the Shia-dominated Iraqi government had started to fight the insurgency together with the allied forces. Zarqawi was already making himself infamous as Iraq's most wanted man: Newsweek magazine described him as "The World's Most Dangerous Terrorist" after U.S officials accused him of personally beheading Nicholas Berg an American hostage (Isikoff and Hosenball, 2007). Zarqawi indeed issued a statement following the murder of Berg in which, our analysis shows, he blamed the W-C-J citing, amongst others, the torture stories leaked from Abu Ghraib prison: "As for you, mothers and wives of American soldiers...we tell you that the honour of Muslims in Abu Ghraib prison is defended with blood and souls" a clear reference to a *symbolic threat*.<sup>xvi</sup>

Indeed, the years following the Iraq War witnessed an evident dominance of Shias over the Iraqi government, its army, and its security forces. Case in point was that of Interior Minister Baqir Jabr al-Zubeidi: a former high-ranking commander of the Shia Badr Organization who was accused by Sunni Arab notables of turning a blind eye to the torture, kidnapping and murder of Sunnis in the country; crimes committed by the Iraqi Security Forces which were dominated by Shia militias (Beehner, 2006). Such Shia militias were fighting the Sunni-led insurgency alongside the U.S forces, despite the former's role in the worsening sectarian tensions: These militias were officially banned but the U.S Defence Department continued to encourage them and were seen as an Iraqi problem rather than an American one (Ibid).

Zarqawi, consequently, made sure to tackle the Badr Organization's activities: "Everybody knows the truth about the demonic alliance...First, Americans, the carriers of the crucifix banner, Second, Kurds in the form of Peshmerga forces...Third, Rawafid, the enemies of the Sunni people represented by the Badr Brigade"<sup>xvii</sup>. By that time, our analysis shows, Shias had started to be mentioned in Zarqawi's rhetoric.

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<sup>xvi</sup> Document titled "a short word on the video tape of butchering Nicholas Berg" dated 11/05/2004

<sup>xvii</sup> Document titled "Where are the people of courage?" dated 11/09/2004

Sunni Arabs were left in a hostile environment in which even the government is an oppressor. Such developments left Zarqawi great opportunities on which he could capitalise. By 2005, Shias, as our chart shows, became a constant target in his rhetoric; this correlated with a major transition of power from the allies to Shias by way of elections in which Shias won the vast majority while Sunnis boycotted; the latter were not helped by Zarqawi's threats against the democratic process and those who took part of it (Gonzales et al., 2007). In fact, Zarqawi had started demonising Shias in 2004, if on fewer instances: in a statement in October 2004, he commented on the battle of Fallujah "It's you I address, my nation, as your sons' blood is spilled in Iraq all over, and in Fallujah especially, after the worshippers of the crucifix and those with them of our skin, who...betrayed God and his Prophet, such as the Peshmerga, and Rawafid"<sup>xviii</sup>.

Zarqawi, then, was able to frame a narrative of *realistic* and *symbolic threats*, to which he linked the various factions of Iraqi society which he wanted demonised and outcasted, further adding fuel to the fire of the civil war and reverse engineering the allies' and Iraqi government's narratives of fighting extremism. Legitimate existing grievances were aligned with a discriminatory rhetoric, giving the former a weight of legitimacy and authority. This pattern became far more prominent by the year 2005. For example, in the first statement of that year, Zarqawi addressed the then on-going Fallujah battle; portraying an infidel army seeking the harm of Muslims. He stated that "The battle uncovered the ugly face of Rawafid...they had a large role in the enactment of killing, robbery, vandalism, and the murder of unarmed children, women, and elderly...and for the record, 90% of the profane army is from Rawafid and 10% are of Kurdish Peshmerga."<sup>xix</sup>

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<sup>xviii</sup> Document titled "Letter to the nation and Mujahideen inside Fallujah" dated 12/11/2004

<sup>xix</sup> Document titled "Thus are messengers tested then the reward is theirs" dated 21/01/2005

A Shia dominated government, and the associated Sunni complaints thereabout, constituted rhetorical fuel for Zarqawi which nurtured the latter's discourse against Shias and Kurds. The end of 2005 witnessed parliamentary elections which resulted in an overwhelming win for the Shia-led United Iraqi Alliance, followed by the Sunni Arab Iraqi Accord Front, which won 58% and 18.6% of the votes, respectively (BBC, 2005). These elections, this time, enjoyed a large Sunni Arab presence but suffered a crisis of its own; the Iraqi Front Accord rejected the results and complained the elections had been rigged; the secretary general of the Iraqi Islamic Party was quoted as warning the electoral commission "not to play with fire" (ibid). That again, reflects the relevance of these developments in shaping, and helping, Zarqawi's rhetoric: in a statement issued a few months later, he reminded his audience that "the follower of the political map of Iraq knows that the majority of parliamentary seats are occupied by Shias, and Kurdish and Sunni secularists...and this tells us that parliaments will always be ruled by tyrants"<sup>xx</sup>.

In fact, Zarqawi's focus on the Shia had only intensified by 2006, during which the very last three statements featured in our analysis were solely addressed to the portrayed danger of Shias. These documents were in three parts and titled "Have you received the talk of Rawafid". Quantitatively, our analysis shows this focus as paramount, with the first document mentioning Shias as an enemy in around 80% of all pages, the second document 96%, and the third statement at 100%. This later emphasis on Shias as a predominant enemy is well demonstrated in figure 4.

The justification, which comes at the end of the third part linked by a long historical lesson on Shias' past infractions against Islam and Sunnis, is eventually associated with claimed breaches of the Iraqi government and its associated organisations. Zarqawi maintained that

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<sup>xx</sup> Document titled "This is a message for people" dated 24/04/2006

“if we consider...the reality of Shias in Iraq today, we find that the Badr Brigade and the Mahdi Army...raid Sunnis’ homes with the pretence of looking for jihadists...they kill the men, imprison women and harass them...these tragedies are committed by Shia militias alone, or with the help of occupying American forces”<sup>xxi</sup> and follows by calling Sunnis to arms “Sunni people wake up and rise, and be prepared to get rid of Shia snakes’ poison”<sup>xxii</sup>

Having established Shias’ *realistic threat*, Zarqawi complements his arguments with establishing *symbolic threat*. At this stage, there exists a remark which supports our quantitative findings highlighting the prominence of Shias as the main enemy: Zarqawi maintained that “They committed a hideous act...by committing blasphemous deeds *which exceeded those of the deeds of this religion’s original enemies*, as they tore Qurans apart as well as dozens of important mosques until they proved that they are, indeed, God’s enemies”<sup>xxiii</sup>. Here Zarqawi clearly distinguishes Shias from the far enemy (*W-C-J*) and puts them in the position of Sunnis’ largest enemy before all others. Zarqawi concluded this last statement, issued a few months before his death, calling Shias, namely their spiritual leader Muqtada al-Sadr, to war: “Based on what has been said so far, we have accepted to join the battle against you and your flock of sheep”<sup>xxiv</sup>.

## Conclusion

Iraq, following the invasion of 2003, plunged into a vicious circle of sectarian violence, the aftermath of which is still felt to this day. Within those years the first three were of particular importance as they set the tone for the country’s political environment. An overarching sectarian war took hold; one of its key players was Abu Musa’ab Al-Zarqawi.

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<sup>xxi</sup> Document titled “Have you received the talk of Rawafid part 3”, dated 01/06/2006

<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid

In this paper I sought to shed light on the dialectical relationship between reality and rhetoric; that is to say, on the effects of grievances and fragmentation in aiding terrorist rhetoric. I showed how Zarqawi took advantage of an existing fragmented environment, that was charged with sectarianism and racism, in order to fortify a rhetoric of exclusion and violence. I also showed how the Sunni Arab community's grievances constituted fuel, for Zarqawi, for the purposes of cementing said fragmentation.

With the help of Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory, I analysed 38 statements by Zarqawi which permeated his active insurgency in Iraq between 2003 and 2006. In this analysis I demonstrated the relevance of these two theories in studying the rhetoric of violent extremism: the value of the concept of the *out-group* was evident in the form of taking advantage of existing fragmentations to create a narrative of 'us vs them', while the concept of *threat* was weaponised in the context of existing grievances.

Furthermore, in Zarqawi's process of creating agency and emergency, I found that the occupation forces and its allied Shia-dominated government committed mistakes, as well as transgressions, against Arab Sunni communities which were quickly and concretely taken advantage of by Zarqawi. Through careful analysis of Zarqawi's statements, I tracked the development of his narrative through time and linked the fulcrum of his rhetoric, wholly as well as within individual statements, to developments which happened on the ground.

A sectarian-focused political system only aggravated the existing fragmentations in an already unstable country; while an increasingly Shia-dominated political regime aggravated grievances within the Sunni Arab community. As Shia domination over the political scene, as well as over the security forces, became obvious, Shias gradually became Zarqawi's main target as his rhetoric portrayed them as the most salient of dangers. All this indeed, correlated

with one of the country's bloodiest years, and which at the same time, saw the world's highest number of terrorism related deaths.

This paper outlined the fact that terrorism doesn't take place in isolation of its environment; government actions and policies were proved to provide a fertile ground in which terrorism prospers and upon which terrorist rhetoric can be built. The allies' transgressions in Abu Ghraib prison and the Iraqi government's tolerance, if not adoption, of Shia militias such as the Badr Brigade, I proved, were invaluable rhetorical capital for Zarqawi to launch his attacks on the status quo and to call for the murder of Westerners as well as Iraqis alike. Counter terrorism efforts, subsequently, ought to consider the internal policies and living environments under which communities under threat of radicalisation live.

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Article 3

<b>This declaration concerns the article entitled:</b>	
The Word and the Bullet: Out-Grouping and Threat Framing as a Terrorism Prediction Model of ISIS 2015-2019	
<b>Publication status (tick one)</b>	
<b>Draft manuscript</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Submitted</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>In review</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Accepted</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Published</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	
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The material has been published with a CC-BY license <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The publisher has granted permission to replicate the material included here <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Candidate's contribution to the paper (provide details, and also indicate as a percentage)</b>	<p>The candidate contributed to / considerably contributed to / predominantly executed the...</p> <p>Formulation of ideas: 70% The theoretical framework, data selection and sourcing, the integration of Machine Learning Natural Language Processing, and the idea of producing a prediction model were introduced by the candidate.</p> <p>Design of methodology: 30% The design of the Machine Learning algorithm was introduced by my co-authors Christopher Weisser and Gillian Kant. The idea of focusing on the interaction between topics and targeting decisions was introduced by Timo Kivimäki</p> <p>Experimental work: 50% The data collection, the literature review, and refining the list of Arabic words, and writing the Do-File are conducted by the candidate. Do-File: analysis of the associations between targeting and topics was conducted by Timo Kivimäki; definition of targets was conducted in collaboration between the author and Timo Kivimäki. The testing and implementation of the NLP was conducted by Gillian Kant, while the writing of the "Machine Learning Topic Modelling Framework" section was done by Chris Weisser.</p> <p>Presentation of data in journal format: 70% The candidate produces the initial draft of the paper. Several revisions to the article were made to fit journal formatting style, based on discussions among co-authors.</p>

<b>Statement from Candidate</b>	This paper reports on original research I conducted during the period of my Higher Degree by Research candidature.		
<b>Signed (typed signature)</b>	Talip Alkhayer	<b>Date</b>	15/08/2022

## The Word and the Bullet: Out-Grouping and Threat Framing as a Terrorism Prediction Model of ISIS 2015-2019

### Introduction:

In the effort to predict violent conflicts, researchers provide multiple forms of conflict prediction models that depend on multiple kinds of variables and data sources. Most of the predictive models are based on causal thinking in which the focus is on regular empirical associations between independent and dependent variables, and on the interpretation of the mechanisms with which the independent variables produce the dependent variable. In earlier studies roots of conflict onset or escalation were studied by looking at conditions that explain such developments. In this paper we focus on prediction rather than explanation, meaning that we do not necessarily aim at revealing causal, but rather constitutive processes (Wendt, 1998). Furthermore, instead of predicting conflict onset or escalation, we predict targeting decisions by terrorists. Finally, instead of focusing on material conditions in prediction, we focus on terrorist rhetoric. In this paper we introduce an approach in which machine-coded texts, rather than measurable material conditions, are being focused on as predictors of the targeting practices of terrorists. In this article we add to the literature by providing an innovative analytical tool that dissects the Arabic language rhetoric of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as the latter manifests in the terrorist organization's weekly magazine "Al-Naba". This covered the magazine's issues from its first edition in October 2015 to

September 2021, constituting 316 issues. We also use an extensive data base of ISIS attacks provided by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).

Such analysis draws from the findings of our second article in tracing successful terrorist mobilization from terrorists' ability to create conceptual threats as such to make the latter originate from outgroups and directed towards the audience. The analysis is conducted with the help of the field of social psychology: namely the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the Integrated Threat Theory (ITT). The period investigated here can be characterised as one in which ISIS was in decline, and the rhetoric of the organisation managed to motivate a decreasing amount of violence (see Graph 7 below). This is contrasted with the study by Alkhayer (2021) focusing on the period (2003-2006) of rise of Islamic terrorism.

Interestingly, the same theories explain the development of violence equally well.

Together, the two theories outline the importance of group identity in inter-group conflicts: we are using the two theories here to establish connections between the out-grouping and threat framing of a group and its targeting. In light of this, we trained our topic modelling machine learning algorithm to focus on various out-groups in ISIS's main region of activities (Syria and Iraq) and, subsequently, produce a series of the most common topics as they appear in the database. This algorithm is designed to put the two theories into practice by way of highlighting how certain groups are perceived by ISIS rhetoric, and to what extent these groups are positioned within the threat-framing model.

This research also contributes to the literature by way of introducing a theoretical framework to Topic Modelling Natural Language Processing: our models showed the prominent relevance of group-identity and threat-framing in ISIS' rhetoric as portrayed in its magazine issues: they show the extent to which these ISIS rhetorical strategies succeed in their mobilization efforts, in addition to providing convincing prediction capabilities. While such

models tend to be atheoretical, we introduced theory to the framework and illustrated the evident potential for such models in providing a systematic analysis of the rhetoric, as well as proving significant correlations between the rhetoric and physical attacks on the ground.

This article introduces novel methodological tools, for not only it illustrates the importance and utility of introducing theory to the Machine Learning models, but it also innovates by training these models on analysing Arabic text. Existing Arabic text code-dictionaries were rather lacking. As a result, we generated our own bag-of-words, cleaned it from stop words and misspellings, and ultimately succeeded in producing a highly functional model that works with Arabic.

The growing availability of disaggregated data helps such prediction models; such prediction models are making conflict forecasting models increasingly accurate, which, in turn, “helps to prevent overfitting and reduces confirmation bias.” (Ward et al., 2012, p.474). We contribute to the literature by providing a rhetoric-oriented prediction model which, for the first time, is conducted on Arabic-speaking texts.

Our research resulted in strong evidence suggesting the prominence of such out-groups in said rhetoric: Christians, Shias, Alawites, and Kurds were found to be the focus of these magazine issues. Furthermore, their portrayal by the magazine was undeniably negative: these out-groups were predominantly associated with threat and aggression. The resulting topics were measured against an extensive record of ISIS attacks obtained from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). We explain how such a model may serve as a good prediction model when it comes to ISIS attacks on certain groups; that Al-Naba primarily focuses on realistic threats, that ISIS’ mobilizing threat-framing strategy is associated with its aggression rather than with victimhood, that rhetorical targeting primarily correlates with the physical targeting of reachable enemies rather than unreachable ones; that government constituents are

far more targeted both rhetorically and physically, and that ISIS' mentions of religious groups is highly correlated with attacks, as opposed to mentions of religion.

### The Current State of Conflict Prediction Literature:

Studying the causes and nuances of violent conflict is a matter which has been drawing evermore interest within the academic community. Such a critically relevant topic is multifaceted and can be studied from a variety of angles: terrorism was found to be weakly correlated with poverty and largely perpetrated in the terrorist's country of origin, (Krueger, 2018, p.71); suicide attacks tend to target relatively hard targets (Berman and Laitin, 2008, p.1960); game theoretical models succeeded in predicting terrorist groups' varying clout over time (Mesquita, 2011, p.84); price shocks and rising prices have no and little effect on probability of war, respectively (Bazzi and Blattman, 2014); climatological effects were found to be less relevant than economic and socio-political ones (Wischnath and Buhaug, 2014, p.709); Miguel, et al, (2004, p.745), however, maintained that " a five-percentage-point negative growth shock increases the likelihood of a civil war the following year by nearly one-half"; Esteban, et al (2012) focused on ethnic divisions and analysed the role of polarization and fractionalization in conflict as they maintained that conflict over public goods magnifies the effects of the former, while conflict over private ones magnifies the latter.; democratic institutions decrease the risk of civil war (Gleditsch and Ruggeri, 2010) while religious polarization positively correlates with the probability of it (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005, p.311) and so does the availability of primary commodities (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, p.588). In this article, however, we endeavour to provide a different model which focuses on the role of extremist rhetoric in identifying out-groups and associating them with threat.

In our focus on the rhetorical role of group identity and the portrayed threat associated thereof, we maintain that violent extremists pay special attention to out-groups in their rhetoric, and often weaponize them by associating them with threats against the in-group. While some argued that “violence arises due to the structure of boundaries between groups rather than as a result of inherent conflicts between the groups themselves” (Lim et al, 2007, p.1540) others have shown that ethnicity is a major factor in the context of targeting civilians by state and non-state actors alike (Fjelde et al., 2021a). Unsurprisingly, the Middle East has the highest share of ethnic violence in the world (Ibid). Fjelde et al’s research corroborates a hypothesis which we aim to test in this paper: government ethnic constituents were shown to be almost twice as likely to be attacked by rebel groups than those with no ethnic ties to the government (Ibid). This later point is rather potent, for in both countries under study, Iraq and Syria, governments are dominated by sects different to that of ISIS’. We aim, therefore, to extend this model to sectarian groups as well, i.e., Kurds, Shias and Alawites.

When it comes to applying sophisticated computer models in studying extremism, the literature of the recent years has shown a tendency towards the implementation of highly complex models which provide insights into a phenomenon that is extraordinarily complex itself. These prediction models are gaining popularity and relevance in the field of political science. Ward et al. (2012) maintained that conflict research can benefit from such prediction efforts, and that the accuracy of said efforts will only become more accurate, aided by more available disaggregated data and advanced estimation techniques. In addition, they found that such efforts prove themselves as an asset when it comes to preventing over-fitting, and assessing the validity of models, which, in turn, can be utilised by policy makers (ibid).

Spatial-temporal models are one popular method in conflict prediction. Weidmann and Ward (2010) used an autoregressive discrete regression model to show evident spatial and temporal aspect of the Bosnian conflict between 1992 and 1995: their introduction of spatial

dependence to the model was found to improve the model's predictive capabilities. Another article undertook the task of predicting non-state terrorist attacks globally, a Spatial-temporal model depended on the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (Python et al., 2021): it sought to maximise the accuracy of the prediction model by introducing various controls: population density, distance to the capital as well as to international borders, density of roads at grid-level, etc. That article provides an encouraging model, proving that prediction models can, indeed, be proven reliable and replicable; it does, however, highlight the challenges such research can face: from faulty data, to biased reporting, to the key issue of defining terrorism itself. In addition, while the best model was shown to be up to 97 percent accurate, the authors maintained that accuracy varies considerably depending on the variable controls aforementioned (ibid).

In an article in the journal *Science*, for instance, the authors focused on the social media presence of ISIS online supporters. Ad-hoc self-organised aggregates were analysed on both Facebook and its Russian rival VK. The authors manually identified pro-ISIS aggregates using trendy hashtags over the period of eight months in the year 2015. The article concluded that targeting said aggregates would be more sensible when it comes to dismantling these ISIS online support networks, than to target individual users; the larger aggregates themselves, the authors maintained, can be dismantled by targeting the smaller ones constituting them (Johnson et al., 2016).

Such increasing popularity of computer assisted models have, indeed, been gaining traction in the last few years. Many different models are employed nowadays to varying extents and for varying purposes: amongst them are Social Network Analysis (SNA); Shaping Terrorist Organisation Network Efficacy (STONE); Dynamic Bayesian Network (DBN); Terrorist Group Prediction Model (TGPM); Mathematical Models for Understanding Radicalization and Terrorism (MMURT); and Hawkes Process Modelling (Collins et al., 2020).

Furthermore, there exist other tools to extract such predictive results from texts such as Global Data on Events, Location and Tone (GDELT) and Integrated Conflict Early Warning System (ICEWS) (Mueller and Rauh, 2018).

In our endeavour, we rely on the analysis of language as a basis for our investigation. The data base of choice is a collection of all issues of ISIS magazine (Al-Naba). The use of language as a vehicle for the prediction of conflict is well established in the literature. Mueller and Rauh (2018), for example, utilised English-speaking newspapers using a latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model. Their research showed the promise of topic models in such conflict-prediction efforts, despite acknowledging the limitations of these models and recommending care when implementing them for policy purposes. Furthermore, the aid of machine learning (ML) models have added to the literature by way of providing a more reliable and contextually nuanced explanations and, therefore, adds further scientific rigor to the terrorism research field (Basuchoudhary and Bang, 2018). These ML algorithms are theoretically agnostic, however, and are best mated to a theory in order to unlock their predictive potential (ibid).

Our article complements this growing body of literature that works on improving conflict prediction models and does so via a cooperation of automated methods, social-psychology theories, and databases. As Mueller and Rauh (2018) share our belief in the value of topic models “Topics provide depth because they consist of changing, long lists of terms that make them able to capture the changing context of conflict. At the same time, topics provide width because they are summaries of the full text, including stabilizing factors.” (p.358) as well as the use of LDA models in quantifying the content of newspapers; our analysis builds on Mueller and Rauh (2018) and introduces a theoretical element in the form of Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory which will be introduced in the next section. We, however, differ from that study in main ways: while the latter uses English-language Western

newspapers to predict conflict in general, we use Arabic-language newspapers (first effort of its nature) that are issued by the perpetrators and train the algorithm to focus on certain groups known as ISIS enemies.

This article comes complimentary to other studies such as that of Chadeaux (2014) who also used historical newspapers and compared them to a database of all wars since 1900 and found that “conflict-related news items increases dramatically prior to the onset of conflict” (p.5); (Quinn et al., 2010) who used topic models to analyse the U.S Senate agenda between 1997 and 2004 by utilising the texts of speeches from the Congressional Record (p.209), and Hansen, et. al (2018) used LDA to analyse meeting transcripts of the bank of England. We contribute to this conflict forecasting literature in three regards: first, we implement our model on a vast and specific source of text as found in Al-Naba magazine. Second, we develop a more targeting-decision approach by identifying major groups known to be targeted by ISIS and identifying their targeting by the latter’s rhetoric. Third, this model innovates by conducting its analysis on Arabic-language texts; such is especially unique since all the aforementioned literature was conducted solely on English-speaking sources. Fourth, with the help of exhaustive data from the Global Terrorism Database, we were able to establish the predictive potential of our model when applied between certain kinds of rhetorical treatment of certain groups and their physical targeting on the conflict’s ground: when ISIS emphasises a group as an outgroup, and when it considers this group as a threat, it targets it, if the group is accessible to it. This outgroup-centric prediction was emphasised by the fact that references to religion were not associated with the targeting of groups, or the association was negative, whereas mentions of these groups as threats was statistically very significantly associated with targeting of these groups. Fifth, we provide a theoretical framework for this prediction model with the assistance of the Social Identity Theory and the Integrated Threat Theory.

## Theoretical Framework:

Identifying as a member of an in-group is a corner stone in the theoretical framework of this article. Extremists' rhetoric, in the case of Zarqawi, was found to rely heavily on creating a constituency which Zarqawi had claimed to defend (as we found in our second article): SIT is "a social psychological theory of identity formation that privileges the role of large group identities in forming individuals' concepts of self. It has been used, in particular, to examine the formation and forms of adherence to national and ethnic groups"(Calhoun, 2002, p.447). The importance of this identification with the in-group, according to the Tajfel and Turner, comes as it promotes bias against the out-group as well as competition and discrimination against them (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). Even randomly assigning people in groups leads to such effects: "there is considerable evidence for intergroup discrimination, or the favouring of one's own group in the allocation of rewards" (McKeown, et al, 2016, p.xv). This theory has been used in studying various topics from tyranny and leadership to reintegration of child soldiers to psychological health; it has also been specifically utilised in understanding conflicts in different geographies such as Northern Uganda, Rwanda, Mexico, Cyprus, United Arab Emirates, and Northern Ireland, amongst others (ibid)<sup>1</sup>.

Once one's identification with the ingroup is established as well as outgroups recognised, ITT maintains that perceiving an outgroup as a threat fundamentally changes intergroup relations which promotes further prejudice against it. Interaction with members of an outgroup causes anxiety: "when intergroup anxiety is high, people display exaggerated responses, usually negative ones, rely on cognitive heuristics such as stereotypes, and express polarized emotions and evaluations, typically negative ones." (Stephan, et al, 1999, p. 618). This theory categorises two kinds of threats: one is symbolic threats that "primarily involve perceived group differences in morals, values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes. Symbolic threats are threats to the worldview of the ingroup. These threats arise, in part, because the ingroup

believes in the moral rightness of its system of values.” (Stephan, et al., 1999, p.619); while realistic threats “concern threats to the very existence of the ingroup (e.g., through warfare), threats to the political and economic power of the ingroup, and threats to the physical or material well-being of the ingroup or its members” (Stephan, et al., 1999, pp.618–619). The theory has been beneficial in studying women’s attitude towards men where one study found that symbolic threats play a larger role than realistic ones in predicting negative attitudes towards men (Stephan et al., 2000); also in predicting Islamophobic conspiracy stereotypes where high education and left leaning individuals are found to be less amenable to believing such theories as well as perceiving Muslims as a threat (Uenal, 2016).

Within the ethno-sectarian landscape in which ISIS operates, its enemies (outgroups) are, unsurprisingly, rather similar to the organization’s godfather’s, Abu Musa’ab Al-Zarqawi. This is where Alkhayer (2021) works as a steppingstone of this investigation: its use of SIT and ITT on the statements of Zarqawi illustrated the utility of these theories in the context of violent extremism in the region and highlighted the prominent role that threat framing of certain groups has in the rhetoric, and the corresponding violence against said groups. From the outset, our goal was to conduct a similarly oriented analysis on a far larger dataset and doing so by utilising a topic modelling technique called Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA). This technique was guided by our identification of known ISIS outgroups which resulted in a number of illuminating topics which that around these outgroups and illustrated the extent to which they fit within the threat framing hypothesis.

### Data Sources, Variables, and the Advantages of Studying ISIS’ Media Outlets:

The data gathered for the purposes of this project is sourced from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and Jiahdology.net. In the latter researchers have access to a reliable source for such delicate material, in a safe and secure manner. The website provides trust worthy

primary material and has, as of 2020, over 15,000 posts (Zelin, 2021, p.227); from this website we gained access to Al-Naba's issues starting from October 2015. From GTD we sourced a detailed account of ISIS attacks in both Syria and Iraq that span until 2019 (Global Terrorism Database (GTD), 2021). It is a "comprehensive collection of terrorist events including both domestic and international incidents for several decades" (LaFree and Dugan, 2007, p.198). This database has been a valuable asset in studying terrorism within a variety of disciplines: from characterizing chemical terrorism incidents (Santos et al., 2019) to the classification of domestic terrorism (Berkebile, 2017) to analysing terrorism on terrorism violence (Atsa'am, et al., 2021). ISIS, indeed, uses its magazines for various purposes, including to provide detailed instructions on how to conduct certain terrorist attacks: from knife and arson, to taking hostages (McAvoy, 2017). In this article we endeavour to explore what ISIS magazine "Al-Naba" has to uncover. We analyse the GTD and categorise targets of ISIS violence into five out-groups as follows: "far enemies" to which belong individuals from non-Muslim countries such as the United States, "near enemies" to which belong individuals from Islamic countries (Gerges, 2009), "Peshmerga" to refer to Kurds, "Rawafid" to refer to Shias and Alawites, and "near enemies 2" a special category we created by combining Peshmerga with Shias and Alawites:

Such media outlets can prove as an essential asset in any extremist group's outreach and mobilization efforts. The mere use of images, for example, shapes the readers' perceptions and judgments (Domke et al. 2002, p.142). In this article's specific example, the distribution of images of death may be aimed at evoking strong response, whether individual or institutional (Gaines, 2007; Griffin, 2010; Keith et al., 2006). For example, research was conducted on images distributed by ISIS through one of its Telegram channels; there, ISIS military-media nexus was analysed following the launch of the Mosul Operation (El Damanhoury et al., 2018). Images in Al-Naba were analysed to indicate that the magazine

advocated for “the antithesis of the nation-state by portraying ISIS militants and followers on transnational territory holding one banner and living in a sharia-abiding, economically independent community.”( El Damanhoury, 2020, p.275). In fact, the use of dynamic imagery has been found to be heavily relied upon in all of ISIS’ magazines Dabiq, Rumiya, and al-Naba (Winkler et al., 2021, p.1323).

These magazines have proved to be rather useful for researchers; having provided a rich source of information through which ISIS can be better understood and analysed; a lens through which the inner most credence of the terrorist organisation can be revealed. Winkler et al. (2019) compared Al-Naba with Dabiq in their portrayal of images of death and dying. The authors found that in both publications, the group was reluctant to publish images of death; such was closer to the Western media’s tradition than that of the Arab media’s which tends to be less reluctant to show images of death in time of war. These findings were interpreted as ISIS’ effort not to dissuade global followers from joining the organisation or providing support, or as an attempt to maintain a decorum imitating that of world powers. Differences between the two magazines, however, were clear; Dabiq had more graphic images of dead civilians, while Al-Naba showed more visual indicators of dominance (ibid). Some analysed the three magazines to reveal the importance of an ISIS coin as an attempt to portray the organisation as a sovereign entity and as a continuation of Islamic governance (Lokmanoglu, 2021).

While the use of imagery, and its study, yielded evident scholarly results, it is the study of these magazines’ texts that we are most interested in within the framework of this investigation. Next, we will outline the various scholarly attempts at making sense of the texts in these media outlets: we show the extent to which these texts have been utilised for research purposes and, most importantly, how they leave a gap in the literature that this article aims to fill.

As the source we chose to select, it was decided to focus on ISIS' Arabic-language magazine "Al-Naba" or "The News". This choice came as a result of one significant factor: while ISIS did produce other magazines such as multi-language Rumiya, the English-language Dabiq, and the French-language-Dar al-Islam. They only had 13, 15, and 10 issues, respectively (Jihadology.net, 2022). Choosing said sources would have meant that the dataset is statistically insignificant for a reliable and robust analysis. Al-Naba, on the other hand, is a weekly magazine and has been in issuance for years. Ultimately, our model analysed 316 issues spanning the period between October 2015 to September 2021.

One element which proves limiting for current research on ISIS rhetoric is the language barrier: scholars who attempted to analyse the rhetoric of the organisation's rhetoric tend to focus on its English-speaking outlets as such is the case with the literature mentioned in this article. This is limiting for the prominent reason that these outlets are rather limited in publications, as discussed above. That didn't prevent the literature from producing helpful insights and analyses: Frissen et al. (2018) focused on the Koranic depictions in Dabiq magazine and outlined that the verses that were quoted from Al-Baqara chapter were "verses that discuss a legal framework in which fighting may be socially and morally acceptable. In addition, they tend to be quoted in abstract debate to legitimize acts of killing as an answer to oppression, which is more in line with their historical meaning" (p.496). Dabiq and Rumiya showed differences in their recruitment and violence incitement messages: the former emphasised calling for joining ISIS in the Middle East, while the latter emphasised promoting lone-wolf attacks (Lakomy, 2019). In general, the focus on the foreign-speaking magazines is noteworthy (Ingram, 2017; Colas, 2017; Lorenzo-Dus and Macdonald, 2018; Droogan and Peattie, 2017).

These apparent core differences between various ISIS media outlets reflect differences in objectives and governance. They are not merely unlike in portraying images of death as

mentioned earlier, but also in their rhetoric and audience targeting. The aforementioned limitations regarding the non-Arabic magazines are one major restriction we tackle by choosing Al-Naba: combined with social-psychology theories and sophisticated Machine Learning models we aim to provide a valuable contribution to the literature, as we will discuss next.

### Group Identity in the Context of ISIS Media Outlets:

The concept of group identity is integral to the purposes on this study: extremists, in their rhetoric, aim to construct a reality in which they are the defenders of a certain stratosphere of people whom they aim to have as constituents. For Zarqawi, we found in the second article, the in-group was Sunni Muslims everywhere; he claimed the responsibility to defend them against various kinds of threats posed by certain out-groups. An analysis of his statements showed undeniable reliance on this framework, and a willingness to shift the focus from one group to another as mandated by political development in post “Operation Iraqi Freedom” Iraq (ibid). The conceptual framework upon which this article rests is one of multidisciplinary roots and depends on a growing body of literature that acknowledges identity construction as a pillar of radicalisation processes: the concept of identity within terrorism studies, and its weaponization by terrorist organisations, is rather relevant and is often used (Sedgwick, 2010; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2008; King and Taylor, 2011; Perry and Hasisi, 2015; Hafez, 2006; Johnson, 2007).

For its contribution, this article, endeavours to analyse this framework within Al-Naba magazine. ISIS’ reliance on group identity is one topic that has been tackled by existing literature, and said analyses establish the relevance of this concept to varying purposes. ISIS’ mantra, in that regard, can be summarised as “we are the epitome of the ingroup identity, the ingroup's crises are due to malevolent others, so support us because we are your champions

and protectors who will confront our enemies and restore the ingroup's glory with our political agenda” (Ingram, 2017, p.360). An analysis of Dabiq, for example, showed ISIS’ primary focus to be on providing solutions for the *in-group*, and linking outgroups to perceptions of crisis (ibid, p.364).

We build on the work of our second article in its utilisation of the concepts of group identity, perceived threat posed by outgroups, and their interrelation with relevant material conditions and dialectical developments. Indeed, other scholars have corroborated this framework and emphasised, as discussed above, its importance in understanding any radicalisation process. According to Ingram (2015), for example, “the complex interplay of identity, crisis, and solution constructs is crucial to understanding the radicalization process” (p.561). Our second article found that Zarqawi categorised his enemies (*out-groups*) into Western (Christians and Jews), Shia Muslims, Kurds, and local governing regimes. These groups, in turn, posed *realistic* and *symbolic threats*, according to Zarqawi; Westerners were the main target of his rhetoric, which later gave way to Shias as the latter took power over in Iraq, largely empowered by the former (ibid). Next, we take these findings as a guiding compass for our conflict forecasting model and illustrate their relevance as a tool for understanding the interrelationship between rhetorical targeting and physical targeting within the context of civil conflict.

### How Do Topics on Out-groups and Threats in ISIS Rhetoric Predict ISIS Targeting?

The relationship between rhetoric and targeting decisions is not causal from rhetoric to action: by repeating some words, ISIS does not create successful mobilization. An intentional act of targeting and the intention expressed in a publication are also not conceptually separate the way in which the Humean concept of causality suggests (Hume, 2000; Kurki, 2008, p.61).

Rather, certain rhetoric and aggressive actions are part of the same framing and approach. Speech, in its interpretation of *out-groups* and *threats*, belong to the process of mobilisation. Wendt called this kind of relationship mutual constitution (Wendt, 1998b, p.105). Rhetoric that defines someone as an outsider and sees them as a threat, are part of the conflict escalation that is also expressed by targeting, while targeting is then also part of the communication/rhetoric that declares someone an outgroup: killing someone for the sake of their group identity communicates that people in that group do not belong to “us”. Wendt maintained “when constituting conditions vary, then so do their constitutive effects” (Ibid, p.106). Consequently, we can expect influence from rhetoric to targeting decisions and from targeting decisions to rhetoric.

The fact that the relationship between rhetoric and targeting decisions is not causal does not reduce the value of rhetoric as a tool for prediction. The analysis of this paper shows how ISIS rhetoric in a certain month can produce strong predictions of ISIS’ targeting decisions the next month.

The purpose of this study regarding this aspect of violent extremist rhetoric, then, is to analyse the various *out-groups* mentioned in Al-Naba magazine. Having this in mind, the research questions are as follows: to what extent does this magazine focus on topics that render different groups as not belonging to the audience of ISIS, and that define such groups as a *threat* to the audience of ISIS? Does such out-grouping correlate with physical attacks on these *out-groups*? And does the analysis of ISIS rhetoric, through this magazine, provide a valid prediction model of actual attacks against these groups? Said questions are the focus of our Machine Learning Topic Modelling framework.

As a few of our topics showed significant correlations, it could be argued that the analysis of a certain extremist group’s rhetoric can, indeed, give a good indicator as to the outgroups

most vulnerable to attacks at any given time. These correlations didn't only show in regard to more broad defined groups such as near enemies, but also in regard to far more strictly defined groups such as Shias and Alawites. This apparent mutually constitutive relationship between rhetoric and reality demonstrates the critical importance of taking the former into consideration in the context of violent extremism, at least.

Our results show a promising potential for these out-groups-focused topics to provide reliable predictions as to which groups are most vulnerable to physical attacks on a conflict's ground. Identifying such groups from the outset, and analysing extremist rhetoric with them in mind, may provide a rather useful tool to guide policy makers and humanitarian organisations alike. We have shown how extremist rhetoric relies heavily on out-grouping and threat-framing in its effort to mobilise and gain support from its targeted audience: whether in the case of Zarqawi in post "Operation Iraqi Freedom" Iraq, as shown in our second article, or in the case of ISIS following its rise and the consequential international alliance against it in 2015: extremists' main goal, before everything, is to rally their supporters to their cause by scapegoating certain groups and blaming them for claimed grievances by way of portraying them as a source of threat to the *in-group*.

This may agree with much of the literature which focuses on discrimination: targeting Jews in Nazi Germany according to scapegoating theory ( Newman and Erber, 2002) was clearly conducted under the pretence of self-defence in the face of claimed Jewish threat "In the case of a Holocaust perpetrator, that would have meant dehumanizing one's victims and convincing oneself that they presented a terrible threat to Germany and Europe" (ibid, p.55). Another parallel analogy is the role of media during the Rwandan genocide: "The newspaper and the radio explicitly and repeatedly, in fact relentlessly, targeted the Tutsi population for destruction. Demonizing the Tutsi as having inherently evil qualities, equating the ethnic group with 'the enemy' ... the media called for the extermination of the Tutsi ethnic group as

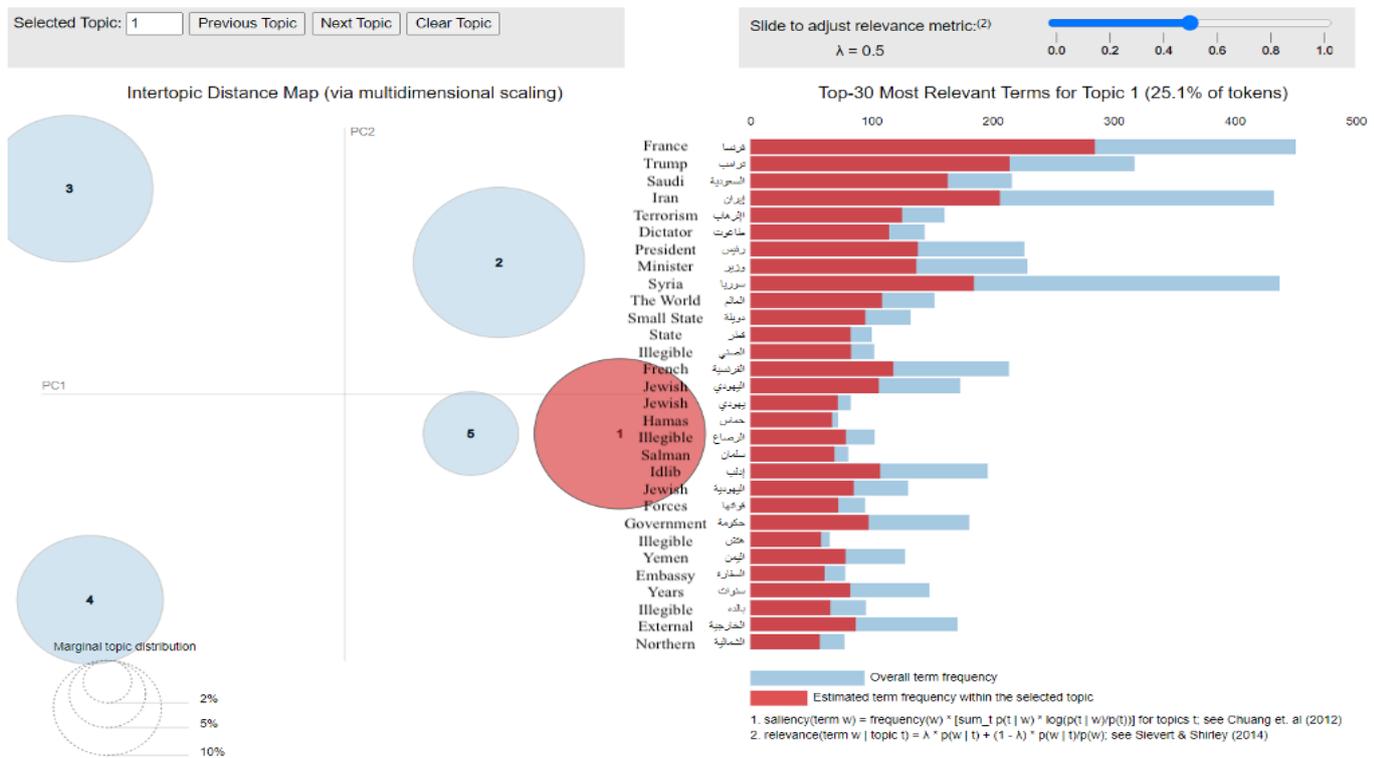
a response to the political threat that they associated with Tutsi ethnicity”(Thompson, 2007, p.205)

The aforementioned examples of the importance of rhetoric in advocating for the demonization of a people and, therefore, their murder, is sufficient indication for the promising potential that analysing rhetoric can lead to predicting conflict and may very well help protect the communities under rhetorical attacks from eventually becoming victims of an escalating rhetoric into physical attacks. These models illustrate that groups which are rhetorically targeted and are of reachable proximity to ISIS’ forces had a significantly higher chance of suffering attacks and fatalities.

Our efforts resulted in a number of illuminating topics which revolve around distinguishable themes, so were the correlations between the frequency of these topics and the GTD’s account of physical attacks. Each topic came with a list of thirty words which constitute the topmost relevant terms for that topic. These words are used to make sense of the topic and to recognise its overarching theme.<sup>1</sup> We compare the prominence of topics with attacks over the same periods, and we lag the prominence of these topics to see how it predicts targeting decisions and vice versa.

*Topic 1* takes the theme of mostly *unreachable* enemies: France, Trump, Saudi Arabia and Iran were at the top of the relevant terms. The next two relevant terms were used to refer to these outgroups’ threat: “tyrant” and “terrorism”. We maintain those are unreachable due to the physical distance separating them from the reach of ISIS’ forces; their rhetorical targeting couldn’t possibly be matched by an equally physical one. Due to the fact that these enemies were not within the ISIS reach, references to them, even as outgroups and sources of threat did not result in targeting decisions: there was no correlative relationship between the

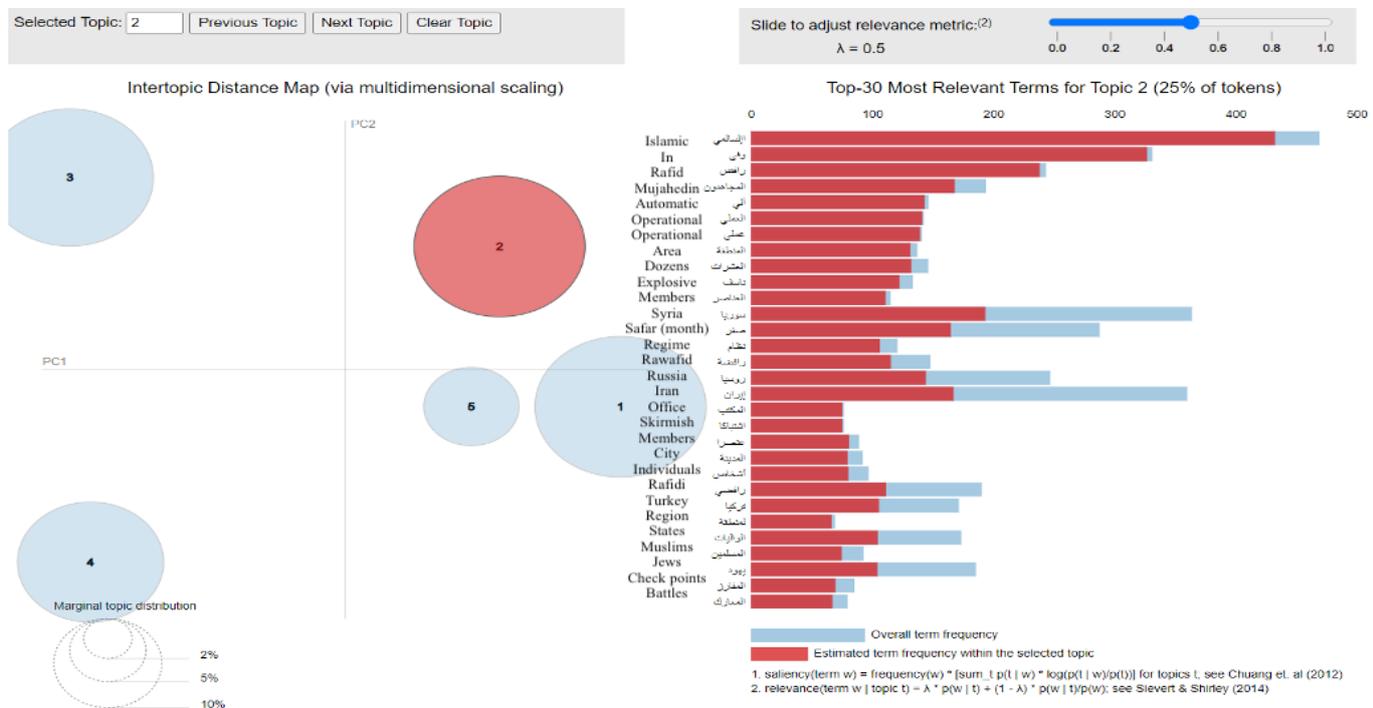
frequency of mentions of these unreachable enemies and the ISIS attacks on these far-enemies.



Graph 1: Topic 1 and its key words

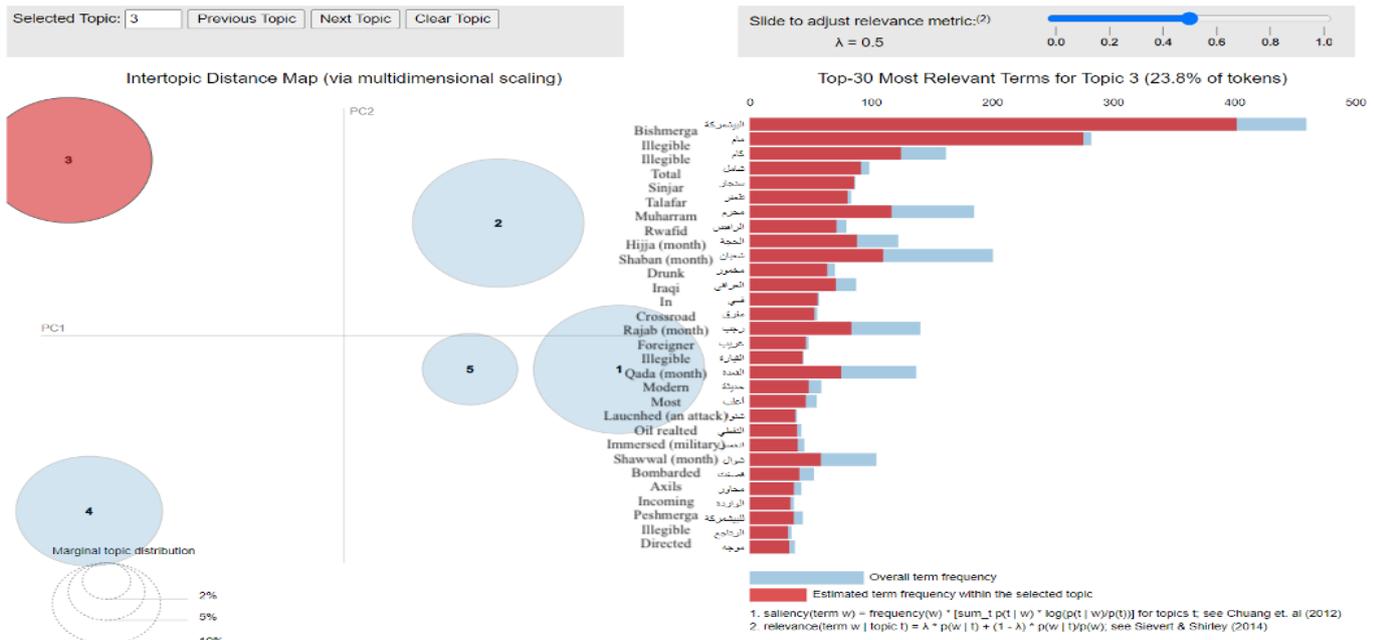
Topic 2 focuses on the word “Islamic” which is, by far, the most salient term there. In this topic certain outgroups such as Alawites, Shias, Russia, Turkey, and Jews are present. While words such as “skirmish”, and “explosive” exist, they are not very salient. While this topic focuses on outgroups, it does not focus on threats from these groups. Thus, it is only weakly positively associated with ISIS fatalities among near enemies of ISIS, Despite the association in this topic of Russia with Alawites and Shias, this topic does not predict targeting of Alawites and Shias with any significance (correlation= 0.1276, lag correlation<sup>i</sup>= 0.1282, lead correlation<sup>i</sup>= 0.0157). It seems, therefore, that a focus on outgroups alone does not predict targeting of such outgroups, it is only when such focus is associated with a threat that a topic starts strongly predicting targeting decisions, as we will find in conjunction with topic 4.

Topic 2 also mentions *unreachable* enemies such as Iran, Russia, and Turkey, which may explain the weak correlations in a similar manner to that topic 1.



Graph 2: Topic 2 and its key words

Topic 3 focuses on Peshmerga as an outgroup which is most salient. Similarly, to topic 2, however, words referring to threat and conflict are existent yet not salient.



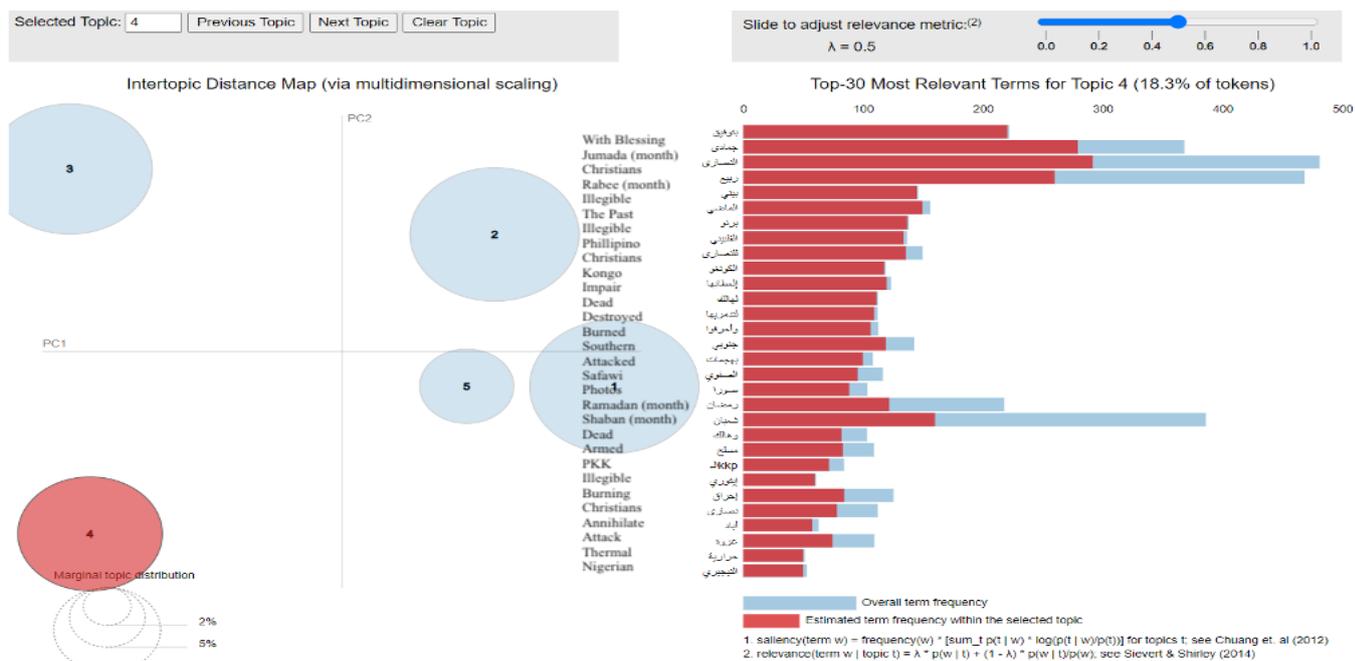
Graph 3: Topic 3 and its key words

This topic takes a special position in the model as it shows strong characteristics of a “residual topic”. While the topic itself includes some keywords with regards to the Outgroups (Shia, Peshmerga) it is nevertheless less coherent as the other topics. We find many words that hold few valuable information, like the names of the months of the year.

While a glance at the excerpts of the topics top words does not make it obvious in first sight, we claim this topic is a by-product of the training design of the LDA model. We have to keep in mind that the Bubble-Plots only provide an excerpt of the whole vocabulary of each topic. A look on the temporal development, however, gives us additional information on how to interpret the topic as a whole in relation to all other topics. We therefore state a technical reason as explanation for our decision to interpret topic 3 as a “residual topic”: as stated above, the model was trained only on pages on which outgroup-signalling words are present more than three times. For these pages, all tokens were added to the vocabulary. However, this obviously does not ensure that every paragraph on every page used in the training process is covering an outgroup-related topic. We claim that this fact leads to a “residual

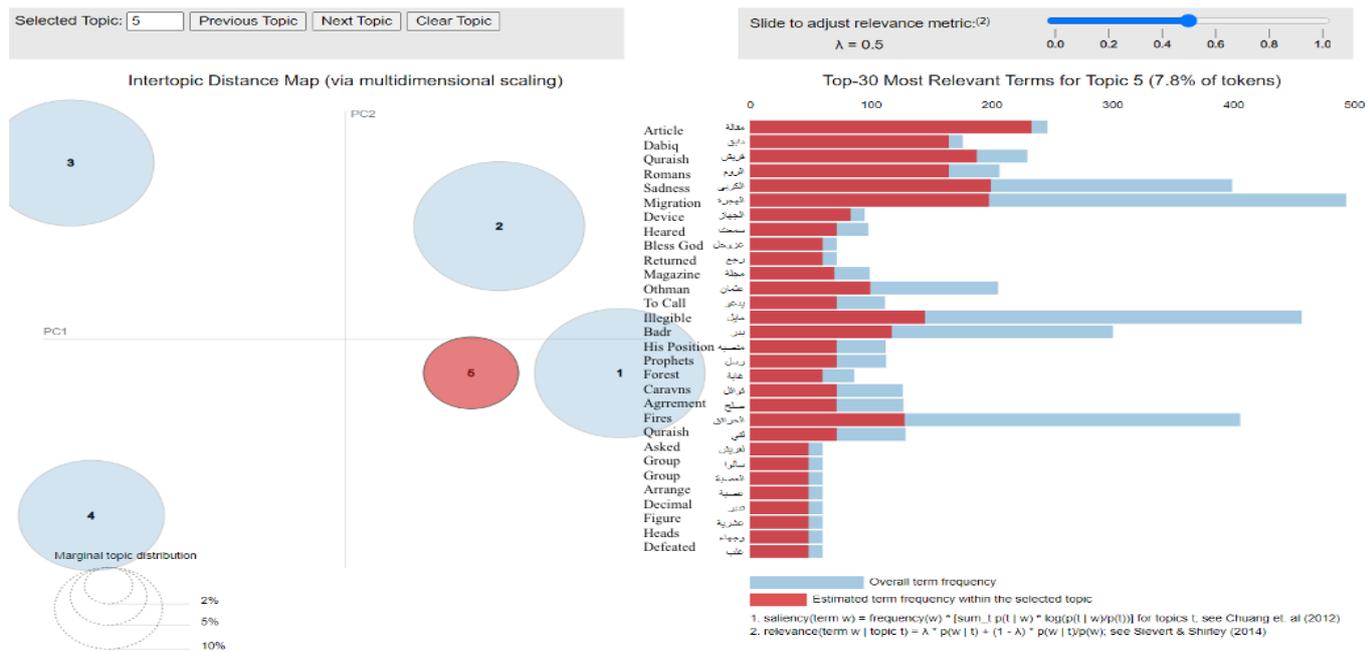


*Topic 4* is highly predictive of targeting decisions. It focuses on Christians as a primary enemy as the term is significantly salient. It also does categorise Shias and the PKK forces as second to Christians in saliency. This topic clearly revolves around threat framing: words such as “destroy”, “burn”, “attacks”, “armed”, “annihilate”, and “raid” are the core focus of this topic. It is, by far, the most aggressive topic we have: the focus on this topic is clearly on outgroups and threats, and thus it predicts targets very strongly. The out-grouping of Shias and Kurds that is associated with Christians suggests an association of them with far-enemies despite their native Syrian and Iraqi citizenship, due to the support they get against ISIS from the Christian far enemies. The monthly prominence of this topic predicts very strongly the targeting of Alawites and Shias especially, but strongly also Kurds, while the value of this topic in predicting attacks on Christians is marginal. The Spearman coefficient between the prominence of this topic and the number of near enemy fatalities is 0.8364 (N=51,  $p < 0.0005$ ), while that between the topic and the number of fatalities of Alawites and Shias is 0.7571 (N=51,  $p < 0.0005$ ). The direction of influence from the topic to targeting and from targeting to rhetoric is roughly equally strong, except that the correlation between Kurdish targeting and the prominence of this topic is stronger from rhetoric to targeting. The correlation coefficient between monthly topic prominence to the number of Kurdish fatalities in the following month is 0.5165\*\*\*<sup>i</sup>, whereas the coefficient if we lag the variables the other way around is 0.4131\*\*.<sup>i</sup>



Graph 5: Topic 4 and its key words

Topic 5 is one which seems to be revolved around a theme of a religious sermon: it focuses on historical terms that refer to Islamic religious/historical incidents and concepts rather than outline specific outgroups and their threats. While this topic in ISIS rhetoric perhaps focuses on the religious differences and differences in the interpretation of religion between ISIS and other groups it does not focus on other groups as religious groups or focus on them as threats. Thus, predictably, this topic was not correlatively associated positively with violence against groups that ISIS had religious differences.



Graph 6: Topic 5 and its key words

## Conclusions

As these topics reveal to us the rhetorical priorities of Al-Naba magazine and, therefore, ISIS leadership, we are rewarded with insights into ISIS' propaganda machine. Next, I dive into the statistical insights provided by our STATA analysis through comparing the monthly prominence of each of these topics on the one hand and the number of people killed in attacks against Kurd, Alawite, far enemy and near enemy (=Kurds and Alawites) targets. We obtained this data from the GTD's database by coding certain types of attacks into these target categories by means of coding rules that are revealed in the data annex of this article. There I discuss the most interesting correlations where I have direct ones, lagged ones that investigate how physical attacks affect rhetoric, and lead ones that investigate rhetoric's effect on physical attacks.

When I look at the associations between monthly data on the prominence of these four topics and the monthly data on fatalities of attacks against the four target groups, Far enemies

(Christians, Jews, Americans, Russians, Turks, etc), Near enemies (Kurds and Alawites), Kurds and Alawites, I can see that rhetoric predicts targeting decisions in a very impressive manner. I found very strong correlations with coefficients above .7, and even .8, that are statistically very significant.

Secondly, I find that topics that can be interpreted as relating to outgroups which pose threats to the audiences of ISIS publication predict targeting decisions best. The influence goes both ways. The struggle (targeting action) and the rhetoric (topic prominence) are part of the same violent illogic. In general, the relationship between the two is roughly equally strong both ways.

However, the data revealed interesting further details that further details that nuance our understanding of how out-grouping and the creation of threat perceptions facilitate mobilisation and predict targeting decisions. While none of these details challenged overall predictive theory, they emphasise different aspects of, as well as add some elements to, it. We will next detail these contributions shortly.

## Government vs Non-Government Constituents

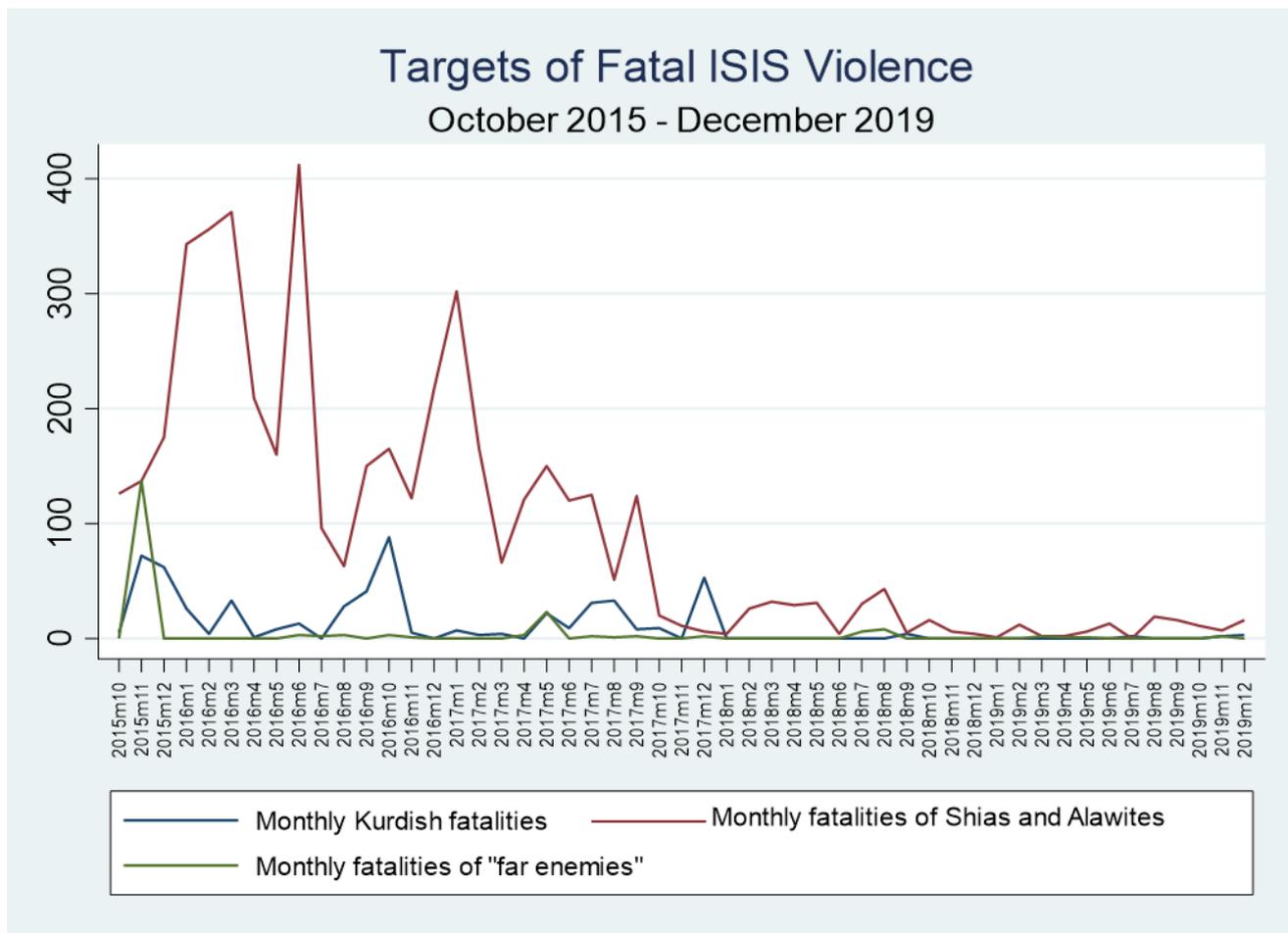
While terrorist targeting is often focused, as it was certainly in the case of ISIS, on different religious group, this does not mean that targets of terror were not somehow related to states and regimes. Certain ethnicities or religious groups can become symbols of the government, and then their targeting serves the purpose of anti-government struggle for terrorist groups. According to Fjelde, this can be seen in the fact that government ethnic constituents are twice as likely to be targeted by rebels (Fjelde et al., 2021a). In this paper I find that mentions of government sectarian constituents occupy a large space in our topics: *topic 2* has three entries that refer to Shias and Alawites (Shias who are the constituency of the Iraqi government and Alawites who are the constituency of the Syrian government) and entries for Syria, Iran,

Russia, and regime (the Syrian one that is). This topic extensively discusses those sects and their allies as an enemy. Furthermore, a closer look at these key words and their overall frequency within the corpus (Lambda <sup>xxv</sup>value  $\lambda = 0.5$ ) shows an overwhelming presence throughout all the magazine issues. The same applies to Kurds when examining *topic 3* and Christians in *topic 4*. The presence of these outgroups seems to be prominent regardless of their ties to the Iraqi or Syrian governments.

A different story, however, appears when examining physical targeting of these outgroups: our analysis of the GTD database shows how Shias and Alawites are, by far, the largest victims of ISIS violence between the years 2015 and 2019. Nevertheless, attacks against Shia and Alawite associated targets are shown to be the undisputed primary targets of violence as graph 7 demonstrates:

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<sup>xxv</sup> low Lamda allows for an analysis that focuses more strictly on the frequency of words that are the most relevant in defining a topics (most frequent in topic and least likely to be used in other topics), while higher Lamda values allows for an analysis that is more inclusive of the words that belong to the topic, i.e. it measures also frequencies of words that are more common also in other topics and that are less frequent in texts on this topic. Choosing the Lamda focuses the analysis either to the core words or to more inclusive treatment.” See (Sievert and Shirley, 2014; Chuang, et al., 2012)



Graph 7: Targets of Fatal ISIS Violence

One factor to be considered here is the relative presence of, and physical distance to, these outgroups: Shias and Alawites are far more in reach than far-enemies and are larger in numbers than Peshmerga, which brings us to differentiate between reachable and unreachable enemies; a matter I discuss next.

#### Reachable vs Unreachable Enemies:

The investigation of the relationship between topics in terrorist rhetoric and the actual terrorist violence also reveals a level of opportunity orientation in terrorist targeting decisions. *Topic 1* revolves around mainly unreachable enemies; I say so due to the physical

distances and power disparities between ISIS and these enemies. ISIS could not realistically expect to be able to target President Trump, for example. Nor was ISIS capable of carrying on any significant attacks on France or Saudi Arabia, aside from minor attacks conducted by lone wolfers as happened in France. Correlations between this topic and the GTD database show weak to moderate negative correlations with all categorised groups in all direct, lag, and lead ones.

By contrast, *topic 4*, as mentioned above, shows significant correlations between the rhetorical targeting of reachable enemies and the physical targeting thereof. These topic models, then, appear to have significant predictive potential and a strong relation, so to speak, to the realities on the ground. When *topic 4* is concerned with enemies who are within reach of ISIS' forces, it shows a correlation with the fatalities of these groups. But when *topic 1* is concerned with enemies beyond the scope of ISIS' forces, it shows no positive correlations whatsoever: in fact, and as an example, lag correlation between *topic 1* and fatalities of the near-enemies group showed the strongest correlation: a strong negative correlation of -0.4225.

## Religion vs. Religious Groups

A comparison between *topics 4* and *5* illustrate a fascinating detail regarding the difference in correlations with physical attacks between a topic which focuses on religion vs a topic which focuses on religious groups perse. While *topic 4* is concerned with Christians, Shias, and Kurds as outgroups, *topic 5* mainly looks closer to a religious sermon and religion itself, as mentioned before. *Topic 5* shows weak to moderate negative correlations with attacks on all groups, while *topic 4* shows significant positive correlations with near enemies (direct:0.8364), (lag: 0.7484), (lead: 0.8123) and Shias and Alawites (direct:0.7571), (lag:

0.7484), (lead: 0.7366). *Topic 4* also shows significant correlations with near enemies 2: (lag: 0.7370), (lead: 0.7412). This illustrates how rhetoric affects fatalities and vice versa.

The fact that a topic which is concerned with Islam as a religion shows no significant correlations with fatalities, as opposed to a topic concerned with out-grouping, threat, and aggression is indicative of the notion that ISIS isn't necessarily concerned with protecting Islam per se, rather it emphasises on a certain out-group's threat to Islam only as part of a *threat* framing designed to demonise said group. While Alkhayer (2021) showed the importance of symbolic threat in terrorist rhetoric by way of demonstrating how out-groups were portrayed as a threat to the ingroup's (Sunni Muslims) customs, traditions, and religion, this comparison between the two topics shows how religion is only a subject of protection as long as it is framed within the context of being under threat from enemies. Thus, what matters is the terrorists' loyalty to a religious group, not the religion itself. Differences in religious interpretations do not trigger violence, whereas threat perceptions between religious groups do. This finding corresponds to the previous finding according to which terrorist groups do not tend to adhere very closely to religious teachings, and that they are therefore not very motivated to defend religion itself, but that they are more interested in defending their own religious group (Kivimäki, 2005).

### Symbolic vs Realistic Threats

The constituting key words in these topics reveal a surprising discovery: they point to the overwhelming utilisation of realistic threats as opposed to symbolic ones. In contrast to the rhetoric of Zarqawi who used both categories of threats despite preferring realistic ones (Alkhayer, 2021, p.14), ISIS seems to have a clear inclination to primarily use realistic threats and avoid symbolic ones.

While Zarqawi, for instance, uses terms such as “blasphemous” (ibid, p.16) and sentences such as “betrayed God and his Prophet” (ibid, p.15) to refer to the same outgroups with whom ISIS was, later, waging war. The latter’s magazine, as shown by our Bubble-Plots, focused solely on realistic threats: words such as “destroy”, “burn”, “armed”, “attacks”, etc, give these topics an undeniable realistic-threat focus. In fact, at a lambda value of  $\lambda = 0.5$ , no reference to symbolic threats can be found in any of these topics. This point leads us to the conclusion that ISIS is far more concerned with the war activities taking place in real time which reflects in a more aggressive tone and a strong connection between aggression and realistic threats, as I will discuss in the next section.

This focus on realistic threats illustrates ISIS’ principles and priorities within the parameters of the war it was waging, as well as the push back from the local communities, governing regimes, and the international community: the organization’s core concern was maintaining power and mobilizing supporters for its war effort. This is not to say that ISIS wasn’t concerned with religious matters, for I have found a dedicated topic for this purpose that is *topic 5*. We are led, therefore, to speculate that ISIS’ lack of the use of *symbolic threats* as a means for mobilization is reflective of its belief in the superiority of using *realistic threats* for its purposes, at least within the confines of a newspaper such as Al-Naba.

## Limitations and Further Research

This article highlighted the significant potential for a rhetorical analysis of extremists’ rhetoric by focusing on groups most vulnerable to be targeted. The resulting topic models showed a clear correlation between rhetorical targeting and physical one. However, these topics need further refinement as this constitutes the first of such attempts.

We have found that *topic 4*, for example, shows significant correlations with the GTD’s data on ISIS attacks on near enemies both in Syria and Iraq. Not all other topics showed the same

potential which prompts an opportunity to further refine the topic modelling algorithm and maximise its promise. Furthermore, conducting such analysis on Arabic language texts, and the lack of extensive libraries therefor, means that these models can be further improved, and their accuracy further refined.

The introduction of an Arabic language model here provides an opportunity for the analysis of other extremist groups' rhetoric: through our code which is available on the GitHub repository, researchers can apply such models on a variety of Arabic language texts and take advantage of the various extremist media outlets available on the internet; whether its magazines such as Al-Naba, blogs, or twitter feeds. The novelty of this model, however, presented technical challenges in the form of replicated, illegible, and stop words in the Bubble-Plots which had to be cleaned manually from the bag-of-words: the model was, consequently, further improved but still suffers from minor issues such as the occasional two consecutive letters switching places in certain words; although that doesn't pose as an issue for an Arabic speaker who's familiar with the corpus. After repeated revisions of the model the number of illegible words was greatly reduced but can still be perfected in future efforts.

Another limitation has to do with the nature of the GTD database. It has numerous categorical options from which I could narrow our selected data down. However, these categories do not always match our criteria: for example, targets can be differentiated based on the official entities they belong to, such as certain army brigades or government institutions, but differentiation based on sect was not available. We opted, in the case of Shias and Alawites for example, to include Syrian and Iraqi armies in that category despite them having Sunni members amongst them; this decision was made based on the knowledge that ISIS refers to these forces as Shias and Alawites and makes no exception for their Sunni members.

Despite this article's innovation regarding the prediction of targeting decisions, use of LDA on Arabic texts; its approach in utilising group/threat-framing rhetoric may be useful in analysing texts in other languages. English language texts are especially eligible due to the more mature computer models which deal with that language, Furthermore, our model may be used in research that stretches beyond the topic of violent extremism.

In the effort to analyse the role of rhetoric in terrorist mobilisation, and the role group identity and threat-framing in said rhetoric, I incorporated a theoretical framework into our LDA model and utilised the valuable contribution of the Social Identity Theory and the Integrated Threat Theory.

Within the terrorism prediction field, many models exist in the literature which utilise various angles of study, from economic, to geographical, to demographical variables. On the other hand, good literature exist which point to the utility of using ISIS media as a source of scholarly work in addition to the important role of group identity in that source. Here, I opt to link these dots together and introduce a rhetoric-oriented terrorism prediction model.

This article's contribution to the literature started by implementing computerised analysis onto hundreds of issues of ISIS magazine Al-Naba. This was achieved by introducing a novel approach to the LDA model by way of training the latter to analyse Arabic language text. Our collaboration led to an exhaustive and cutting-edge study of ISIS rhetoric culminating in a number of novel conclusions. This task came with its own set of challenges; chief of which was the aforementioned Arabic language text analysis which required a number of revised attempts before the model was ready.

By subjecting the Al-Naba magazine to a Natural Language Processing program, and by orienting said program towards recognising the topics most linked to known ISIS enemies (*out-groups*), I found an undeniable association between the out-grouping of a people and the

threat framing thereof: the key words provided in these topics provide insights into the way in which these groups are portrayed by ISIS within these magazine issues. Furthermore, with the help of the Global Terrorism Database, I established the potential predictive properties of these topic models.

Once the association between a certain group and threat was established, within a certain topic, I endeavoured to explore the potential of this topic in predicting violence against that group. Indeed, a few of these topics uncovered a variety of valuable, and sometimes surprising, insights. At first glance, our analysis supplied us with significant correlations between the rhetorical targeting of a group (by way of out-grouping and threat-framing) and physical targeting that group; such correlations still subsisted when considering a one-month lag between the rhetoric and the attacks, and vice versa. However, a second glance at the results led to further revelations: physical attacks were correlated with mentioning of the (religious) *out-groups* but not with mentioning of religion; reachable enemies were far more likely to be targeted than unreachable enemies regardless of their mentioning in the rhetoric; government sectarian constituents were more physically targeted than the others, and realistic threat was the clear dominant threat in the rhetoric.

This article serves as a reminder that rhetoric does not occur in a vacuum, but rather it affects and is affected by tangible changes on the conflict's ground. The analysis of rhetoric, I showed, may serve as a valuable tool in the effort of studying terrorism and identifying the latter's potential victims. Our model was able to produce a number of encouraging results despite being the first attempt of its kind; further research and refinement can be valuable in uncovering the full potential this model.

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## Thesis' Conclusions

This PhD thesis analysed the interconnection between terrorists' mobilization efforts, their violence, and their rhetoric. Terrorist rhetoric depends on group identity and threat framing as a building block of its mobilization, this group identity is portrayed to be the common denominator between terrorist leaders and their targeted audience. In it doing so, said rhetoric, I have shown, is not created in isolation from the historical context of the land on which terrorism operates. The association of *Out-groups* with *Threat* is built on existing fragmentations in society and the grievances that come accompanied with. This theoretical framework was implemented using various methodologies in various contexts relating to the Middle East, namely Syria and Iraq. Discourse Historical Analysis, NVivo text analysis, and Machine Learning Natural Language Processing were utilised to employ the Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory over the historical roots of terrorism in Syria and Iraq,

as well as its rise and fall. In all our case studies; out-grouping and threat-framing were disclosed to constitute the backbone of terrorist mobilization.

Research shows the critical role of group identity in shaping human behaviour. In the introduction I outlined the socio-psychological literature explicating the mechanism and consequences of social identity in creating inter-group conflict. This is also shown to be proven at the physiological level within the realm of neuroscience: “Social identity is that part of the self-derived from group membership (e.g., identity as ‘female’ or ‘European’). The cognitive basis of social identity is reflected in self-categorization (seeing oneself as a member of the group) and social categorization (determining who is part of the ingroup and who is not). Social identity derives further meaning and valence by comparing the ingroup with relevant out-groups” (Scheepers and Derks, 2016, p.74). The influence of group identification is established at a fundamental neuroscientific level. When individuals meet new individuals, their brains give preference to processing in-group over out-group faces as they show a “greater activation in the fusiform gyri, amygdala, orbitofrontal cortex and dorsal striatum” (ibid, p.75). These mechanisms at the neuro-level naturally influence the way we perceive the world and our relationship to others: in an article titled “The neuroscience of group membership”, the authors maintained that “we perceive in-group members as more like the self, and out-groups members as less individuated...the human brain seem to have more cortical facilities that are used to process in-group related stimuli” (Morrison et al, 2012, p. 2119).

In this thesis I endeavoured to show the potential of social identity, by way of out-grouping and threat framing, in analysing terrorist rhetoric. My case studies focused on the rhetoric of Abu Musa’ab Al-Zarqawi, as well as that of the terrorist organisation whose creed was primarily influenced by his rhetoric: the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria “ISIS”. The starting point of this project was the two social-psychology theories Social Identity Theory (SIT) and

Integrated Threat Theory (ITT): These two theories highlighted the important role of group identity in intergroup conflict. Individuals, according to SIT, develop an identification with a certain group as soon as they deem themselves to be part of, so it becomes their *in-group* and, as a result, develop a prejudice against other groups that they deem to be *out-groups*. This prejudice is only intensified by the perceived *threat* that these *out-groups* pose towards the Ingroup (Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Calhoun, 2002a; Stephan and Stephan, 2000). The primary objective of this project was to reveal the role of these theories in understanding terrorist rhetoric in the latter's mobilisation efforts.

The use of socio-psychological approaches to understanding terrorism is established in literature: from the role of fear and trauma, to self-categorisation, to patterns of radicalisation phases, to mechanisms of avoiding the psychological barriers against terrorist violence (Beyer, 2016; Sageman, 2017; Precht, 2007; Borum, 2011). This thesis will outline the promising nature of such an approach in understanding terrorist rhetoric in its effort to mobilise and appeal to its constituents. Terrorist rhetoric is found to portray its constituents as the *in-group* and its enemies as *out-groups*; the latter are established as enemies by associating them with threat against the in-group, or what can be called threat-framing (Shesterinina, 2016).

The data set used in the application of SIT and ITT was analysed through the lens of a variety different methodologies; from Discourse Historical Analysis to NVivo text analysis and Machine Learning assisted Topic Modelling. These diversified methodological tools produced a consistent picture of the determinants of success in violent mobilization. These methodologies were applied on the rhetoric of Ibn Taymiyya, Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi, and ISIS magazine Al-Naba. Together, they revealed the rhetorical nature of extremist leaders' mobilization efforts, as well as the role of out-grouping and threat-framing in explicating the

logic behind said rhetoric, the mechanisms in which it operates, and the predictive potential of such concepts when applied to that rhetoric.

### A Discourse Historical Approach:

The first article “Know Thine Enemy. Zaraqawi Ibn Taymiyya and the Discourse of Exclusion” was conducted through a Discourse Historical Analysis of the origins of Zaraqawi’s rhetoric and the influence that of the 13<sup>th</sup> century famous scholar Ibn Taymiyya. In that article the focus was on the weaponization of out-grouping and threat framing within a historical context: Zaraqawi, as well as Ibn Taymiyya before him, sought to demonize their enemies by establishing a historical *threat* that these *out-groups* supposedly posed. The threat that out-groups such as Shias and Alawites constituted, according to the two men, was not merely a recent phenomenon but rather part of a long history of conflict with their in-group (Sunni Muslims). The study of Ibn Taymiyya’s rhetoric was rather established in the literature concerned with extremist rhetoric. His influence over various terrorist groups remains notable: Boko Haram, Wahhabism, and even the assassins of Egyptian President Anwar Al-Sadat all adopted his creed of exclusion and prejudice (Barkindo, 2013; Delong-Bas, 2004; Ansari, 1984). The influence of Ibn Taymiyya over Zaraqawi’s rhetoric was undeniable: Zaraqawi’s thirty-seven statements showed that the scholar was mentioned fifty-two times, while the second most mentioned influencer, Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, was only mentioned twice.

The historical angle of that article was deemed important due to the structural-historical similarities that Zaraqawi and Ibn Taymiyya shared. While the latter lived in the times rife with uncertainty and conflict triggered by the Crusaders’ and the Mongols’ invasions (Laoust, 2012; Maalouf, 1984), the former lived to undertake a key role in post “Operation Iraqi Freedom” Iraq as he spear headed the insurgency against the Allies’ forces from the year

2003 until his killing by those forces in 2006. In fact, his presence in Iraq was one of the main justification of the country's invasion, according to the then U.S Secretary of State Colin Powel (Guardian, 2003). These similarities don't end with foreign invasions, but rather extend to the conflict that they aggravated with minorities in the region; for reasons the study of which is beyond the scope of this thesis, few Alawites, Shias and Christians welcomed the Mongols and Crusaders (Chambers, 1979; Capar, 2013); similarly, many Shias in Iraq welcomed the Allies' invasion as a way to get rid of the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein.

In parallel with SIT and ITT, the *topos of threat* was investigated in more depth as the part of argumentation that justifies discrimination against the *out-group*. A *topos* connects arguments with conclusions and justifies the transition from the former to the latter (Raknes and Ihlen, 2020) and is a concept that is used extensively in the literature (e.g. see MacDonald, 2011; Kite, 2000). In this regard, I found the *topos of threat* to be a primary tool in the rhetoric of both Ibn Taymiyya and Zarqawi: for the former, that *topos* I summarised as "if a certain act or group supposedly pose a *threat* to Muslims, the act must be abolished, and the group boycotted or fought". He used both Realistic and Symbolic Threats in his deployment of said *topos*; Shias and Alawites, according to Ibn Taymiyya, would kill Sunni Muslims and cooperate with the Mongol invaders, as well as attack Islam by consciously misinterpreting Prophet Muhammad's words. For Zarqawi, on the other hand, Shias of Iraq tortured Sunnis and cast doubts on the principles of Islam. The first article in this thesis, then, aimed to highlight the exact line of argumentation used to frame the two men's *out-groups* within the context of *threat* that these *out-groups* represented. Furthermore, the article showed the importance of the historical-structural similarities between the times of both men, and the way in which Zarqawi used these similarities to fortify his exclusionary rhetoric as he cited Ibn Taymiyya for that purpose.

Zarqawi's evident admiration for Ibn Taymiyya aided this project in tracking the historical origins of modern Islamic extremism's rhetoric of exclusion. Not only that Zarqawi's rhetoric was found to be adamant on demonizing Shias of Iraq, but it was traced back to find its roots in the rhetoric of Ibn Taymiyya's: the analogies that Zarqawi made in his statements attempted to prove to his in-group of Sunni Muslims that not only are Shias a threat to them, but that this threat is part of a historical pattern that Shias manifest and which harkens back to the days of Mongol and Crusade invasions as evident in Ibn Taymiyya's rhetoric seven centuries before.

This exclusionary rhetoric was adopted and updated by Zarqawi in post-war Iraq. An analysis of his statements<sup>1</sup> (in moving averages) showed a significant correlation between *realistic* and *symbolic threats*: a Spearman's  $RHO=0.7385$  where  $p < 0.00005$  ( $N=37$ ). These *threats* proved to be rather prominent for Zarqawi in his mobilisation efforts. The test of these *threats*, the details of their saliency, and the effects thereof were discussed thoroughly in the second article of this thesis.

### [A Mixed Method Analysis of Zarqawi's Statements and their Deployment of Out-grouping and Threat Framing:](#)

In our second article "Fragmentation and Grievances as Fuel for Violent Extremism: The Case of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi", I opted for an NVivo analysis of Zarqawi's statements between the start of the war and his death in 2006. These statements were coded page by page for references to various out-groups and the threat that they were claimed to pose against Sunni Muslims of Iraq, according to Zarqawi.

Iraq, for a long time and until the invasion in 2003, was largely ruled by individuals from within the minority Sunni Arab community (Jaboori, 2013). Saddam Hussein's regime left the country with critical societal fragmentations between various sects and ethnicities and the

Sunni Arab community to which Hussein belonged. Following the invasion the majority Shia population took power over as the environment of the country became less and less secure: an insurgency, largely led by Zarqawi, was taking place against the Allies' forces and Shias alike (Pirnie and O'Connell, 2008). The country was plunged into a brutal conflict which made Iraq, by far, the country with the most terrorism related deaths as a share of total deaths (Ritchie et al., 2013).

A fragmented society, rife with grievances, was a fertile environment for Zarqawi to advocate for his extremist rhetoric. I endeavoured to investigate how SIT and ITT can be used to analyse his statements and reveal the extent to which his rhetoric capitalised on these fragmentations and grievances, which out-groups were focused upon, and to what extent said rhetoric was successful in its mobilisation efforts.

A combination of Discourse Historical Analysis and an NVivo text analysis was used for that article. Out-groups were revealed to be Kurds, local rulers, Shias, and West/Jews/Christians; the latter constituted the "far enemy" while the others were the "near enemy" (Gerges, 2009). The second article builds on the first one by outlining Zarqawi's weaponization of the Sunni-Shia divide. One key term in his efforts to do so was the that of the "Munafiq": it's an Arabic word for "hypocrite" and was used by Zarqawi to paint Shias as enemies of Islam and to alienate them further from his constituency of Sunni Muslims. Such label held significant importance as it puts those accused of it in the category of "Kuffar" or infidels (Esposito, 2003); this, in turn, ultimately justifies their murder. Zarqawi, however, was not the first extremist leaders to use the term (Ubaedillah, 2014; Knysh, 2012).

The second article highlighted the development of concepts of out-groups and threats in Zarqawi's statement with time. Calculating the yearly average percentages of occurrences of these concepts produced findings that showed the shifting focus of his rhetoric: as the country

was increasingly being led by a Shia dominated government, the focus on Shias as an out-group had risen sharply to become, by the time of Zarqawi's death, the undisputed leading enemy of his. While Realistic Threats were found to be most prominent, Symbolic Threats were also significantly present throughout the corpus. The analysis of these statements was put in within their historical context which revealed the key role that the invasion, the Allied forces, and the following Shia dominance over the Iraqi state changed Zarqawi's rhetoric: as the Allies transferred more power to the Shia-dominated elected government, and as that government took larger parts in fighting the Sunni Arab insurgency, his statements showed a strong and rapid shift from viewing the West and local political regimes as the leading enemy to establishing Shias in that role.

This aforementioned shift was a direct result of the Allies' and Iraqi government's policies. The sectarian-ethnic based political system established historical grievances and aggravated the fragmentation of Iraqi society; the transgressions against the Sunni Arab community under the pretence of fighting the insurgency only fortified Zarqawi's rhetoric as he appealed to Sunni Arabs to join him and fight those he regarded as a mortal enemy, Shias. The Iraqi government turned a blind eye to the activities of certain Shia militias to torture kidnapping, and even murder of individuals belonging to the Sunni Arab community; an example of which was Baqir Jabr al-Zubeidi who was appointed as Interior Minister despite having been a high ranking commander of the Badr Brigades which committed many of these transgressions (Beehner, 2006). Zarqawi was keen to exploit these events in proving his claims correct: that sectarian/ethnic based political system in the country, established with the patronage of the Allied forces, more specifically the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority Paul Bremer, dissolved the existing Iraqi army and sought to ensure a place for Shias and Kurds in the new democratic system (Katzman, 2009).

In the context of these political developments, Zarqawi's rhetoric of exclusion found fertile grounds; as he endeavoured to out-group Shias and frame them within what he perceived are historical trends, influenced by Ibn Taymiyya as I discussed earlier. A foreign invasion by Western forces (far enemies) led to the collapse of a Sunni regime and its replacement with a Shia dominated state (near enemies) was clearly analogous to the Mongol and Crusade invasion centuries earlier. The more established Shias were in power, the more they were portrayed as enemies in Zarqawi's statement, the more sectarian violence was taking the country over. This only emboldened Zarqawi's rhetoric in framing Shias as a Threat equal, if not superior, to that of American forces'; their out-grouping also correlated with mentions of Threat within the corpus, whether Realistic or Symbolic. The association between out-grouping and threat framing within the corpus was rather evident: by the time of his death, Zarqawi's mentions of Shias and West/Christians/Jews as enemies exceeded an average of seventy percent and fifty percent, respectively; while mentions of Realistic and Symbolic Threats exceeded fifty and thirty percent, respectively.

This article not only highlighted the relevance of SIT and ITT in explicating terrorist rhetoric, but also the role of the Allied invasion in terms of aggravating existing historical fragmentations and grievances and, in doing so, providing rhetorical fuel for Zarqawi to fortify his exclusionary rhetoric against Shias and escalate sectarian violence in the country. The article concluded with a call for policy makers to carefully study societal fragmentations and grievances when considering counter extremism measures: the counter insurgency policies in Iraq were shown to had been counterproductive and produced the opposite outcomes for these policies were, instead, valuable rhetorical fuel for Zarqawi and his call for indiscriminatory violence against Iraqi citizens, mainly Shia Muslims.

### [Machine Learning Application to the Theoretical Framework](#)

In the third article “The Word and the Bullet Predicting Terrorist Targeting Decisions from ISIS Publications”, the author collaborated with a number of researchers who enriched the project with their contribution, especially that to the methodological part. Roughly ninety percent of it was led and written down by the author; while the topic analysis and the design and implementation of the correlation tests between topics and fatalities, as well as part of the interpretation of the results, were done collectively while the author learned, in the process, to do much of the analysis individually.

After establishing the clear relevance of group identity and threat-framing in the mobilisation efforts of extremist rhetoric as seen with Zarqawi and Ibn Taymiyya. I endeavoured to provide a more quantitative test of this project’s theoretical framework. The natural next step was an analysis of ISIS rhetoric: being the successor of Zarqawi’s organisation in Iraq; it has adopted his rhetoric and achieved successes that far exceeded what Zarqawi managed to achieve within his short time leading the insurgency against the Allied forces and the Iraqi state.

As the author aspired to analyse ISIS’ magazine “Al-Naba” and wanted a more robust methodology which is able to analyse large amounts of data with which an NVivo analysis was not possible; he collaborated with his co-authors to apply Topic Modelling Natural Language Processing to extend the theoretical framework used in the previous two papers to 316 magazine issues and provide a primarily quantitative methodology to test such framework within the much larger corpus. Furthermore, I opted to measure the results of the Topic Modelling against an extensive list of ISIS attacks provided by the Global Terrorism Database. The relationship between ISIS rhetoric and its physical attacks, I argued, were not just causal but also constitutive (Wendt, 1998b). I also outlined the recent conflict prediction literature and showed the various variable approaches can be used for that purpose; such were effects of climate, economy, politics, poverty, rising prices, and ethnic divisions on the

predicting terrorist attacks (Bazzi and Blattman, 2014; Wischnath and Buhaug, 2014; Miguel, Satyanath and Sergenti, 2004; Berman and Laitin, 2008; Krueger, 2018).

One goal for this investigation was to analyse how ISIS perceived its established out-groups as similar to those in the case of Zarqawi. Those out-groups were used as a starting point of our model. In this effort, I selected a certain part of the corpus as the initial training model so to avoid over-fitting and, therefore, improve the models' predictive capabilities (Ward et al., 2012). Having trained the Latent Dirichlet Algorithm (LDA), after overcoming the Arabic-text related technical challenges, I succeeded in producing five topics that were presented in the form of Bubble-Plots. These topics revealed the saliency of these out-groups within the rhetoric and the overarching themes around them: the key words in each of these topics illustrated the degree to which each out-group occupied space in the magazine issues, and the themes within which these out-groups are located.

Another goal was to test the predictive potential of these models by analysing correlations between the produced topics and physical attacks on the ground provided by the GTD. I discussed existing conflict prediction literature such as that of Weidmann and Ward (2010); Python et al.(2021); Collins et al. (2020); and Basuchoudhary and Bang (2018). Since our study depended on the use of LDA and Topic Models in analysing out-grouping and threat framing within the context of Al-Naba magazine; I opted to build on the research of our second article Alkhayer (2021); Mueller and Rauh (2018); Quinn et al. (2010) and Chadeaux (2014).

After producing these topics, I compared their prominence within the corpus with the GTD's record of physical attacks against out-groups discussed in each topic, and by lagging such prominence I were able to explore the predictive promise of these topics. The Global

Terrorism Database provided us with an account of ISIS attacks until the year 2019 (Global Terrorism Database (GTD), 2021).

The results of our topic modelling were in the form of five topics which showed the key words each topic revolved around and the position which each out-group took within the threat framing rhetoric. The mentioning of these out-groups within the Bubble-Plots illustrated what the literature already established as the critical role of media outlets in demonizing out-groups as similar to the Jews in Nazi Germany or the Tutsis during the Rwandan genocide (Newman and Erber, 2002; Thompson, 2007). Topics came accompanied with a list of the thirty most relevant words at each Lambda value; such words aided us in determining the overarching theme of each topic and, as a result, make sense of it.

I separated targets of ISIS violence into five groups by developing rules distinguishing the Global Terrorism Data entries on individual ISIS attacks into five different categories, each in accordance with their targets: this allowed us to test how different topics in ISIS rhetoric were associated, in time, with targeting decisions of ISIS: the categories were Shias and Alawites, Peshmerga (Kurdish forces), far enemies, near enemies, and near enemies 2. By calculating correlations between the occurrences of a certain topic which discusses a certain group, and the physical attacks against said group; I was able to show a clear potential for these topics to produce accurate predictions. These predictions were accurate both ways, the rhetoric predicted physical attacks, and vice versa. This relationship between rhetoric and targeting decision, I argued, is not causal in the Humean sense (Hume, 2000; Kurki, 2008) but rather a relationship of mutual constitution (Wendt, 1998b).<sup>xxvi</sup>

*Topic 1* highlighted unreachable enemies such as Trump and France: as it revolves around enemies beyond the physical reach of ISIS, I found that this topic showed no correlative

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<sup>xxvi</sup> Programming of the LDA was done by Chris Weisser and Gillian Kant, while comparison between rhetoric and fatalities had the advantage of Timo Kivimäki's input.

relationship with attacks on these enemies. *Topic 2* discussed both far and near enemies but was largely revolved around the word “Islamic” and showed weak positive correlation, and therefore weak predictive potential, with attacks against Alawites and Shias. It also showed that the mere mentioning of out-groups doesn’t lead to targeting of these groups without the company of threat framing; the topics mentioning of unreachable enemies may also explain such weak correlations as it is the case with *Topic 1*. Similar to *Topic 2*, *Topic 3* revolves around Peshmergas as an out-group but reference to threats was weak; I categorised this topic as a “residual” one due to the presence of many irrelevant words such as names of months. The technical justifications of such categorisation were referred to the training of the model itself; mainly the reassignment of content, that which doesn’t relate to the other topics, towards this topic. *Topic 4* showed the most promise when it comes to predictive potential: it focuses on out-groups Christians, Shias, and Peshmergas as enemies which are located within a strong threat framing context. In this topic the latter two out-groups “near enemies” were associated with far enemies; the spearman coefficient analysis showed strong predictions between this topic and attacks against Shias and Alawites, and this correlative influence between rhetoric and targeting decision was seen to be almost equally strong with the exception of Kurdish forces. *Topic 5* has a religious theme which dealt more with historical-Islamic terminologies and less with out-groups and their threats as such. The topic, consequently, produces no predictive capabilities.

A closer look at the results of the Topic Modelling LDA and the correlative relationship therewith the GTD’s account of attacks reveal further discoveries which highlight the potential of such analytical approaches: the results supported Fjelde et al.’s (2021) notion that government ethnic constituents are more likely to be targeted by rebels; I have found that Shias and Alawites from within whom come the ruling classes of Iraq and Syria, respectively, are prominently discussed in these topics and are far more likely to be targeted by ISIS

violence. Differentiation between reachable and unreachable enemies was deduced from a comparison between the predictive capabilities of topics 1 and 4: the former show how out-grouping and threat-framing do not lead to physical attacks against said out-group unless they're within physical reach of ISIS forces, while the latter shows strong predictive potential when it comes to out-groups that are within that physical reach. A comparison between topics 4 and 5 showed that ISIS focus on religion as a topic does not produce predictive potential as opposed to having religious groups as a topic; religion matters in the context of an out-group posing threat to that religion's and/or its believers (*in-group*) by way of *symbolic threat* as it was the case for Zarqawi (Alkhayer, 2021) which supported previous research findings that terrorists care less for adherence to, and defence of, religion and more for loyalty to their religious group (Kivimäki, 2005). *Realistic Threats* were also shown to be far more salient than *Symbolic Threats* within the rhetorical framework of mobilization in Al-Naba despite having topic 5 which is primarily concerned with religion.

### Threat vs Aggression

In comparison to the case of Zarqawi as analysed by our second article, it appears that ISIS rhetoric in Al-Naba magazine steers away from the victimhood-centric rhetoric of Zarqawi's. While the latter focused on portraying these out-groups as a primary source of threat, the former concentrate on their threat by way of showing aggression towards, as well as power over, them.

An example of this is Zarqawi's claim that "if we consider . . . the reality of Shias in Iraq today, we find that the Badr Brigade and the Mahdi Army . . . raid Sunnis' homes with the pretence of looking for jihadists . . . they kill the men, imprison women and harass them. . . these tragedies are committed by Shia militias alone, or with the help of occupying American forces" (Alkhayer, 2021, p.16). By contrast, outgroups in topic 4 are framed within a hawkish

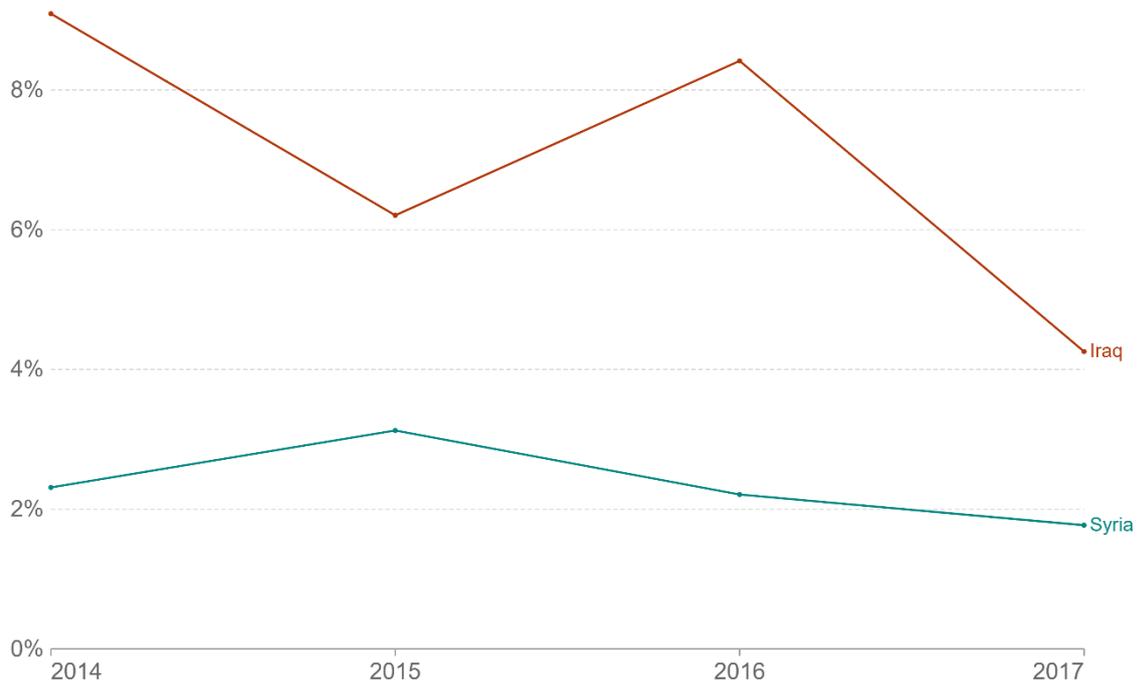
rhetoric which endeavours to portray these groups as enemies and a source of threat, but, at the same time, ISIS is the one with the upper hand. In the 15<sup>th</sup> issue of the magazine, for example, the two main headlines, describing skirmishes in Iraq, read as follows: “Rawafid’s army and police suffer more than a hundred casualties in Ramadi” and “The Diala Mujahideen suppress an attack from Rawafid on the areas of Azim”

This emphasis on demonstrating a dominant position, even when framing threat, could be interpreted as ISIS’ attempts to lift the morale of its fighters and constituency. ISIS, after the resurrection of Al-Naba in 2015, was facing significant push back from the international community which launched air raids, sent land forces, and channelled arms and resources towards ISIS enemies such as the Kurdish forces in Syria. In other words, these magazine issues reflect an entity which was under severe pressure and was losing ground and influence on a daily basis. This rhetorical show of dominance comes unsurprising given the visual show of dominance that Winkler et al (2019) found in Al-Naba.

When comparing the GTD’s death from terrorism graph in our second article which covered Zarqawi’s active years between 2003 and 2006, to the following graphs which show deaths at the time of Al-Naba magazine issues; I find a clear decline in the effectiveness of terrorist attacks which, all variables considered, may indicate that a rhetoric that focuses on aggression rather than victimhood as a basis of establishing threat against the ingroup is far less effective in its mobilization efforts.<sup>1</sup>

## Terrorism as a share of total deaths, 2014 to 2017

Deaths from terrorist attacks given as a share of total deaths (from all causes) in any given year.

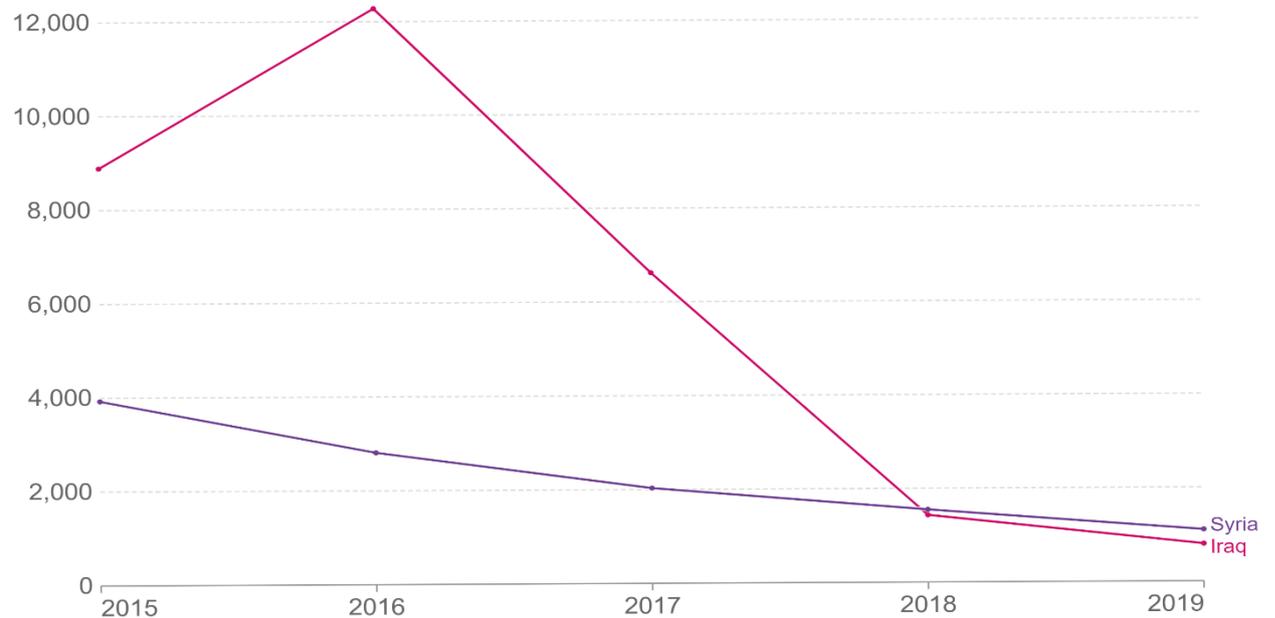


Source: OWID based on IHME & GTD

OurWorldInData.org/terrorism • CC BY

## Deaths from terrorism, 2015 to 2019

Confirmed deaths, including all victims and attackers who died as a result of the incident.



Source: Global Terrorism Database (2021)

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ISIS had, with the help of the internet, far more far-reaching media outlets such as the Al-Naba which I studied here. However, Despite ISIS' superior resources compared to

Zarqawi's "Jama'at Al-Tawheed wal Jihad", it seems that its rhetoric somewhat failed at achieving optimal mobilization, especially in Iraq. The extent to which this difference in the threat-framing approach influenced the success of mobilization remains to be analysed.

### Summary of Contributions to Literature

In this thesis I carefully examined relatively similar textual material in the form of statements by Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi and the issues of ISIS magazine Al-Naba. Their examination was conducted with vastly different methodological tools; these tools proved complimentary and provided us with a consistent picture of the determinants of success in violent mobilization. The basic tents of our theoretical framework were tested and proven to be rather valuable by these radically different methodologies which were applied, in turn, in different contexts ranging from the rise to the fall of Islamic terrorist mobilization in the region.

Discourse Historical Analysis revealed the historical genesis of today's Islamic terrorist rhetoric as well as revealed the critical role of foreign interventions in inflaming domestic conflicts and, as a result, encouraging violent extremist mobilization: by tracing Zarqawi's rhetoric back to its original influence, Ibn Taymiyya, and by illustrating the dialectical similarities between the two men's rhetoric, I was able to show the importance of history in determining the nature of extremist rhetoric. Namely, Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory can explicate the role of out-grouping and threat framing and the fact that they, in our case studies, can be traced back to historical grievances and were used in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the renowned scholar Ibn Taymiyya.

The NVivo-based analysis revealed in detail the extent to which SIT and ITT can together explain and predict terrorist violence: the meticulous study of Zarqawi's statements

highlighted the relevance of these theories in his rhetoric and the reflection thereof on the developments on the conflict's ground.

The Machine Learning Topic Modelling allowed us to conduct an exhaustive application of these theories over hundreds of ISIS magazine issues and illustrated the predictive capabilities of such application when it comes to forecasting terrorist violence. Such arrangement taught the author valuable lessons in the benefits of inter-disciplinary collaboration; in addition to valuable skills necessitated by such collaboration: for example, the author sought to learn the principles of coding language Python which facilitated the collaboration as well as the subsequent writing of the command language of STATA 17 with which Python has much in common.

This thesis, along with its inter-disciplinary collaboration, culminated in the introduction of a new methodology of discourse analysis as well as contributing to terrorist studies with the introduction of a new terrorism prediction model. Two main factors were identified as key to terrorist rhetoric and mobilization: out-grouping and threat framing uncover the groups most likely to be physically targeted and can predict which groups to be targeted next, based on the saliency of that group in the rhetoric and the extent to which said rhetoric locates it within its threat frame.

Historically, this thesis examined the relationship between rhetorical mobilization and violence within the contexts of two different time windows; the first with that in a time of successful rhetorical mobilisation in the case of Zarqawi between 2003 and 2006; while the second was during the time of ISIS' decline between 2015 and 2019.

This PhD project has aimed at analysing terrorist rhetoric through the lens of group identity. It has showed the saliency of this identity as a primary concept within terrorist rhetoric which was shown in the case of Ibn Taymiyya, Zarqawi, and ISIS. Its saliency was proven not only

theoretically in fatwas, statements, and magazine issues, but also on the ground as the analysis of out-grouping and threat framing showed immense predictive capabilities when it comes to physical attacks on these *out-groups*. This potential leaves much room for development and opens windows to entirely new study approaches; for researchers, this framework can be extended to other case studies outside the geographical confines of the Middle East and Islamic extremism. Furthermore, the explications and predictions, that this thesis was able to provide, can constitute an important step in the efforts to developing counter-terrorism policies. The uncovering of terrorist mobilization rhetoric opens the door to defeating it, as much as the revealing of terrorism's next potential targets raises hopes of our ability to protect them.

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## Annex 1

### NVivo Coding Results of Zargawi Statements

Title	Month	Number of Pages	Realisitc	Symbolic	W-C-J	Rawafid	L-Regimes	Kurds
رسالة الى عشائر بني حسن	10052003	12	6	6	3	0	6	0
الحق بالقافلة	40012004	22	11	5	9	0	3	0
رسالة الى الأمة	50042004	13	12	8	12	9	4	0
الرد على كذب المخابرات الأردنية	30042004	4	2	1	2	0	3	0
كلمة قصيرة في شريط نحر نيكولاس بيرج	10102004	4	2	2	2	0	1	0
من ابي مصعب الزرقاوي لكب الأردن	15052004	3	2	0	1	0	3	0
عندما يبكي الرجال	19062004	6	1	1	0	0	0	0
وصايا هامة للمجاهدين	16072004	25	7	6	7	1	0	0
الموقف الشرعي من حكومة كرزاي العراق	23072004	7	4	4	6	0	5	0
كلمة الشيخ أبي مصعب عبر شريط (رياح النصر)	8082004	4	1	1	0	0	0	0
أين أهل المروءات	11092004	12	7	4	6	1	1	1
كلمة قصيرة في شريط نحر ألن أرمسترونج	10102004	4	3	0	4	0	2	0
بيان البيعة لتنظيم القاعدة بقيادة الشيخ أسامة	17102004	3	0	0	0	0	1	0
رسالة إلى الأمة والمجاهدين داخل الفلوجة	12112004	3	2	0	2	1	1	1
رسالة إلى المجاهدين خارج الفلوجة	23122004	2	1	2	0		0	0
وكذلك الرسل تبئلي ثم تكون لها العاقبة	21012005	24	6	3	5	2	1	1
ولستبين سبيل المجرمين	23012005	17	6	6	3	4	2	0
يا أهل الإسلام الشدة الشدة	29042005	8	4	2	4	1	0	0
وعاد أحفاد ابن العلقمي	18052005	26	13	8	13	8	4	0
رسالة من جندي	30052005	7	1	1	4	2	1	1
أبو مصعب يبشر بإستشهاد الشيخ عبدالله الرشود	23062005	3	1	0	1	0	1	0
دعوا عطية الله فهو أعلم بما يقول	5072005	7	1	0	3	0	2	0
أينقص الدين وأنا حي	7072005	34	24	13	19	8	3	0
بيان وتوضيح لما أثاره المقدسي في لقاءه مع قناة الجزيرة	12072005	13	4	5	6	5	1	0
لايضرهم من خذلهم (القتال قدر الطائفة المنصورة)	6092005	31	2	4	2	0	2	0
لايضرهم من خذلهم (قل أنتم أعلم أم الله)	7102005	17	0	1	1	1	0	0
أحداث تل أعفر	11092005	4	3	0	4	1	1	0
هذا بيان للناس ولينذروا به	15092005	6	3	2	4	5	4	1
لايضرهم من خذلهم (وطواعية الله ورسوله أنفع لنا)	19092005	26	1	3	1	0	2	0
لايضرهم من خذلهم (القابضون على الجمر)	30092005	15	0	5	0	0	1	0
لايضرهم من خذلهم (والله أحق أن تخشوه)	14102005	21	0	1	0	0	0	0
ذق إنك أنت العزيز الكريم	18112005	11	6	4	8	2	9	0
فسيكفيكم الله	8012006	19	6	7	14	7	4	1
هذا بلاغ للناس	24042006	9	6	2	8	5	2	2
هل أتاك حديث الرافضة جزء أول	1062006	31	21	18	13	25	1	0
هل أتاك حديث الرافضة جزء ثاني	1062006	31	16	3	12	30	0	0
هل أتاك حديث الرافضة جزء ثالث	1062006	22	15	9	9	22	0	0

## Annex 2

### Do-File

\*DO FILE FOR ANALYSIS OF TARGETS AND TOPICS

\*import GTD data

drop if gname != "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)"

drop iday approxdate extended resolution specificity vicinity location summary crit1 crit2  
crit3 doubtterr alternative alternative\_txt multiple success suicide attacktype1 attacktype2  
attacktype1\_txt attacktype2\_txt attacktype3 attacktype3\_txt motive guncertain1 guncertain2  
guncertain3 nperps individual nperpcap claimed claimmode claimmode\_txt claim2  
claimmode2 claimmode2\_txt claim3 claimmode3 claimmode3\_txt complclaim weaptype1  
weaptype1\_txt weaptype2 weaptype2\_txt weaptype3 weaptype3\_txt weaptype4  
weaptype4\_txt weapsubtype1 weapsubtype1\_txt weapsubtype2 weapsubtype2\_txt  
weapsubtype3 weapsubtype3\_txt weapsubtype4 weapsubtype4\_txt weapdetail property  
propextent propextent\_txt propvalue propcomment ishostkid nhostkid nhostkidus nhours  
ndays divert kidhijcountry ransom ransomamt ransomamtus ransompaid ransompaidus  
ransomnote hostkidoutcome hostkidoutcome\_txt nreleased addnotes scite1 scite2 scite3  
dbsource INT\_LOG INT\_IDEO INT\_MISC INT\_ANY related

gen help = 0

replace help = 1 if country\_txt == "Syria"

replace help = 1 if country\_txt == "Iraq"

drop if help == 0

drop help

gen nearenemy = 0

replace nearenemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Iraq"

replace nearenemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Syria"

replace nearenemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Iran"

replace nearenemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Jordan"

replace nearenemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Pakistan"

replace nearenemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Turkey"

replace nearenemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Turkey"

replace nearenemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "West Bank and Gaza Strip"

gen farEnemy = 0

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Armenia"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "Denmark"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1\_txt == "France"

```
replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "Georgia"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "Germany"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "Great Britain"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "Italy"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "Norway"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "Russia"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "Spain"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "Sweden"

replace farEnemy = 1 if natlty1_txt == "United States"

drop if iyear < 2015

drop if iyear == 2015 & imonth < 10

gen month = 0

replace month=201510 if iyear ==2015 & imonth ==10

replace month=201511 if iyear == 2015 & imonth ==11

replace month=201512 if iyear == 2015 & imonth ==12

replace month=201601 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==1

replace month=201602 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==2

replace month=201603 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==3

replace month=201604 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==4
```

replace month=201605 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==5

replace month=201606 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==6

replace month=201607 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==7

replace month=201608 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==8

replace month=201609 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==9

replace month=201610 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==10

replace month=201611 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==11

replace month=201612 if iyear == 2016 & imonth ==12

replace month=201701 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==1

replace month=201702 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==2

replace month=201703 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==3

replace month=201704 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==4

replace month=201705 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==5

replace month=201706 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==6

replace month=201707 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==7

replace month=201708 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==8

replace month=201709 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==9

replace month=201710 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==10

replace month=201711 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==11

replace month=201712 if iyear == 2017 & imonth ==12

replace month=201801 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==1

replace month=201802 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==2

replace month=201803 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==3

replace month=201804 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==4

replace month=201805 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==5

replace month=201806 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==6

replace month=201807 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==7

replace month=201808 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==8

replace month=201809 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==9

replace month=201810 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==10

replace month=201811 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==11

replace month=201812 if iyear == 2018 & imonth ==12

replace month=201901 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==1

replace month=201902 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==2

replace month=201903 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==3

replace month=201904 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==4

replace month=201905 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==5

replace month=201906 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==6

replace month=201907 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==7

replace month=201908 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==8

replace month=201909 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==9

replace month=201910 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==10

replace month=201911 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==11

replace month=201912 if iyear == 2019 & imonth ==12

gen Peshmerga = 0

replace Peshmerga = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Peshmerga"

gen Rawafid = 0

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt== "Government (General)" & corp1 != "United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt== "Government (General)" & corp1 != "United States Department of State"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "12 Brigade"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Armed Forces of Iraq"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Criminal Security Services"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Ayn al-Arab Airbase"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS)"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Dijla Operations Command"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Golden Division"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Hama Military Airport"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Hizballah Battalions"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iranian revolutionary guards Corps (IRGC)"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iraq Volunteer Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iraqi Armed Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iraqi Army"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iraqi Air Force"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF)"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iraqi Volunteer Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Military Engineering Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Military Intelligence Directorate"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Military Syrian Armed Forces (SAF)"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF)"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Operation Euphrates Shield"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "National Defence Force"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Popular Mobilization Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Rapid Reaction Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Rapid Response division"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Syrian Air and Air defence Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Syrian Armed Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Syrian Democratic Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Tribal Mobilisation Forces"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Rapid Response division"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Rapid Response division"

replace Rawafid = 1 if targtype1\_txt == "Military" & corp1 == "Rapid Response division"

gen nearenemy2 = 0

replace nearenemy2 = 1 if Rawafid == 1

replace nearenemy2 = 1 if Peshmerga == 1

```

egen SumMonthFar =sum (nkill) if farEnemy == 1, by (month)

egen SumMonthNear =sum (nkill) if nearenemy == 1, by (month)

egen SumMonthPeshmerga = sum (nkill) if Peshmerga == 1, by (month)

egen SumMonthRawafid = sum (nkill) if Rawafid == 1, by (month)

egen sumMonth = sum (nkill), by (month)

egen SumMonthNear2 =sum (nkill) if nearenemy2 == 1, by (month)

egen sumFar = mean (SumMonthFar), by (month)

replace sumFar = 0 if sumFar == .

egen sumNear = mean (SumMonthNear), by (month)

replace sumNear = 0 if sumNear == .

egen sumPeshmerga = mean (SumMonthPeshmerga), by (month)

replace sumPeshmerga = 0 if sumPeshmerga == .

egen sumRawafid = mean (SumMonthRawafid), by (month)

replace sumRawafid = 0 if sumRawafid == .

egen sumNear2 = mean (SumMonthNear2), by (month)

replace sumNear2 = 0 if sumNear2 == .

sort month

quietly by month: gen dub = cond( _N==1,0,_n)

```

drop if dub>1

drop dub

drop SumMonthFar SumMonthNear SumMonthPeshmerga SumMonthRawafid Rawafid  
Peshmerga imonth country country\_txt region region\_txt city latitude longitude targtype1  
targtype1\_txt corp1 target1 natlty1\_txt natlty1 targtype1 targtype1\_txt targtype2  
targtype2\_txt provstate targsubtype1 targsubtype1\_txt targsubtype2 targsubtype2\_txt corp2  
target2 natlty2 natlty2\_txt targtype3 targtype3\_txt targsubtype3 targsubtype3\_txt corp3  
target3 natlty3 natlty3\_txt gname gsubname gname2 gsubname2 gname3 gsubname3 nkill  
nkillus nwoundus nwoundte nearenemy farEnemy

sort month

gen lagsumPeshmerga = sumPeshmerga[\_n-1]

gen leadsumPeshmerga = sumPeshmerga[\_n+1]

gen lagsumRawafid = sumRawafid[\_n-1]

gen leadsumRawafid = sumRawafid[\_n+1]

gen lagsumFar = sumFar[\_n-1]

gen leadsumFar = sumFar[\_n+1]

gen lagsumNear = sumNear[\_n-1]

gen leadsumNear = sumNear[\_n+1]

gen lagsumNear2 = sumNear2[\_n-1]

```
gen leadsumNear2 = sumNear2[_n+1]
```

```
*-----
```

```
merge m:1 month using "C:\Users\tak35\OneDrive - University of Bath\Teaching\Talip\Joint  
publication\shared folder\topic months.dta"
```

```
. gen Months = tm(2015m10)+_n-1
```

```
. format %tm Months
```

```
. tsset Months
```

## Annex 3

### Correlations

Rawafid= Shias and Alawites

line sumPeshmerga sumRawafid sumFar Months

spearman sumFar sumNear sumPeshmerga sumRawafid C D E F G

(obs=51)

	sumFar	sumNear	sumPeshmerga	sumRawafid	C	D	E	F	G
sumFar	1.0000								
sumNear	0.1142	1.0000							
sumPeshmerga	0.2508	0.5614	1.0000						
sumRawafid	0.1162	0.8573	0.5829	1.0000					
C	-0.1989	-0.4504	-0.2884	-0.3910	1.0000				
D	-0.1961	0.2887	-0.0951	0.1276	-0.2230	1.0000			
E	-0.1420	-0.8507	-0.6000	-0.7997	0.3226	-0.3561	1.0000		
F	0.1928	0.8364	0.4467	0.7571	-0.5833	0.2775	-0.7906	1.0000	
G	-0.2071	-0.3493	-0.2397	-0.4307	0.0622	0.2500	0.3078	-0.3477	1.0000

Investigation of how fatalities affect rhetoric:

spearman C D E F G lagsumPeshmerga lagsumRawafid lagsumFar lagsumNear lagsumNear2

(obs=50)

	C	D	E	F	G	lagsum~a	lagsum~d	lags~Far	lags~ear	lagsum~2
C	1.0000									
D	-0.1844	1.0000								
E	0.3227	-0.3623	1.0000							
F	-0.6027	0.2904	-0.7897	1.0000						
G	0.1272	0.2076	0.3240	-0.3538	1.0000					
lagsumPesh~a	-0.2596	0.1694	-0.6620	0.4131	-0.0847	1.0000				
lagsumRawa~d	-0.4229	0.1282	-0.8045	0.7484	-0.4168	0.5859	1.0000			
lagsumFar	-0.0381	-0.1083	-0.1319	0.0668	-0.1581	0.2573	0.1081	1.0000		
lagsumNear	-0.4225	0.2121	-0.8176	0.8273	-0.4038	0.5700	0.8599	0.1010	1.0000	
lagsumNear2	-0.3865	0.1342	-0.8180	0.7370	-0.3840	0.6805	0.9820	0.1661	0.8641	1.0000

Investigation on how rhetoric affects targeting:

spearman C D E F G leadsumPeshmerga leadsumRawafid leadsumFar leadsumNear

leadsumNear2

(obs=50)

	C	D	E	F	G	leadsumPeshmerga	leadsumRawafid	leadsumFar	leadsumNear	leadsumNear2
C	1.0000									
D	-0.2150	1.0000								
E	0.3200	-0.3279	1.0000							
F	-0.5904	0.2424	-0.7782	1.0000						
G	0.0584	0.2705	0.3025	-0.3389	1.0000					
leadsumPeshmerga	-0.3812	-0.0132	-0.5933	0.5165	-0.3779	1.0000				
leadsumRawafid	-0.2992	0.0157	-0.8063	0.7366	-0.4705	0.5751	1.0000			
leadsumFar	-0.2772	0.1033	-0.0983	0.2860	-0.2237	0.2584	0.1331	1.0000		
leadsumNear	-0.3746	0.1299	-0.8590	0.8123	-0.4567	0.5572	0.8539	0.1272	1.0000	
leadsumNear2	-0.3143	0.0481	-0.8269	0.7412	-0.4531	0.6724	0.9805	0.1886	0.8601	1.0000



