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**Burning For Allah:
(Mis)Understanding Ties Between Islam and Violence**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Allen Benjamin Johnson III
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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to address what I believe to be an all too frequent misunderstanding. This is the idea that religion generally and Islamic extremism specifically is the primary foundation for suicide terrorism in Iraq. Because of the social and historical demographics of Iraq, I argue that it is necessary to understand Iraqi suicide bombings as a variety of different concurrent movements as opposed to one monolithic phenomenon. Furthermore, it is my assertion that the connection between suicide attacks and Islam has been exaggerated within American public discourse. This discourse has lead to a large and varied body of rhetoric that professes an intimate connection between Islam and violence.

It is not my intention to argue that the relationship between suicide bombers and Islam is purely fallacious. Politicized Islam has achieved a rather high degree of popularity in the Middle East and one would be mistaken if one presupposed that there were no suicide bombers who were strict Islamic adherents. It will be contended therefore that Islam is an element in the propagation of the phenomenon of suicide bombings. However, religion is neither essential nor sufficient for the explanation of such actions.

PREFACE

By mixing religious militants like al-Qaeda together with secular rogue states like Iraq, the doctrine of President George W. Bush has over simplified U.S. understandings of Muslims and the Middle East. Before the current U.S. occupation of Iraq, the president claimed that there were strong ties between al-Qaeda and Iraq. He said that he believed that Iraq was involved in the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 but that he did not have “the evidence” to link Osama bin Laden with Saddam Hussein.¹ President Bush claimed that the al-Qaeda network operated out of a framework of an ideological and religious confrontation with the West rather than through the framework of an individual conflict. Of militant Muslims he said, “Why do they hate us? ... They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemblage.”² However, by not clearly defining who “they” are, ambiguity has allowed Americans to understand any number of Muslim groups, including Muslims as a whole, to be dangerous—with an affinity for violence. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 therefore represented to the average American how very different Islam and the Middle East are from the “secular” West. The onset of suicide bombers in Iraq has only served to deepen those culturally bound assertions.

A practical assessment of the role of religion in conflict cannot be restricted to rudimentary cause-effect equations. Instead, the scientific study of religion should be used to contribute a nuanced approach to how religion adds to other explanatory variables in conflict. What do we mean by religion? Confronting this complex question must involve a multifaceted approach. One way in which this question will be responded to will be by focusing on the role religion has played in moments of violent conflict. Contemporary events where religion has been mixed with violence in Iraq will be of particular interest. Also, religion will be approached as a relational construction. It offers practitioners the possibility of form-

¹ Little, Douglas. *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002), 323

² Ibid, 2

ing profound ties with communities, gods, ancestors, and symbols. This approach exposes the reader to the fact that the bonds that constitute religion are often ambiguous. Therefore, this thesis will not be arguing for a Western conception of privatized religion. Notions of compartmentalizing religion and relegating it to the private sphere reduce religion's relevance since it functions on so many levels.

This thesis represents my attempt to understand the character of religion in conflict. I will venture to name the central components of violence in religion and detail the relation of religion to other facets of culture. Specifically, this paper will assess the record of Islam and suicide terrorism. My examples are drawn from both a historical ideological lineage and from Iraqi Muslim history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is my hope that a broad analysis of religion in the history and causes of suicide terrorism can enable academics, policymakers and the national security establishment to ground policies in real knowledge. Meaningful understanding by U.S. security professionals of the roles that religion plays in international security can save lives in the short term and contribute to peace building initiatives in the long term. This paper situates suicide bombings in their cultural, economic, political, and religious context. This is imperative because security officials and policymakers alike must understand how conflicts in the contemporary global world are—and are not—religious.

A main point of this paper will be to address what I believe to be a frequent misunderstanding. This is the idea that religion generally and Islamic extremism specifically are the primary foundation for suicide terrorism. Political pundits such as Brigitte Gabriel and Daniel Pipes maintain that Muslims are provided by their religious tradition with an irrational mental status.³ They claim this is necessary to execute a suicide attack and that the predisposition of many Iraqi Imams to deemphasize secular societal constructions of right and wrong is particularly appealing to those who end up killing other human beings. One may perhaps presuppose the such arguments are defensible from a wholly deductive standpoint, in

³ The fullest discussions by these two thinkers can be found on their individual websites: Gabriel's website is <http://www.americancongressfortruth.com/>; while Pipes' website is located at <http://www.danielpipes.org/>.

that they reflect beliefs and actions of Muslim suicide bombers. Undeniably, suicide bombers in Iraq are faced with the horrendous assignment of killing other human beings and, seeing themselves as soldiers, are eager to do their part in fighting a war. However, those who take such a stance pay little account to the historical development of suicide bombers in Iraq or to the complexities of the political aspect of Islam. It is my assertion that the connection between suicide attacks and Islam is exaggerated because Westerners want a simplistic solution for avoiding future 9/11s. It is far easier to believe that one can stop violence merely by the transformation of Muslim culture than it is to believe that one has to take a comprehensive approach just to begin to address cultural conflict. People who base their beliefs upon such problematic arguments effectively advance the dissemination of misinformation, leading to a large and varied body of rhetoric that posits an intimate connection between Islam and violence.

It should be stated from the outset that it is not my intention to argue that the relationship between suicide bombers and Islam is purely fallacious. Politicized Islam has achieved a rather high degree of popularity in the Middle East and one would be mistaken if one presupposed that there were no suicide bombers who adopted Islamist practices, Islamism is being defined here in its most basic sense as Islam narrowed down to an ideology. Iraqi suicide bombers are from all parts of society like other citizens, and their religious practices coincide with the social attitudes towards Islam that dominate the Iraqi populace in any given place. In other words, suicide bombers in Iraq are no more and no less religious than other individuals. In fact, there are interviews with failed suicide bombers who claim to be everything from devout believers to being not religious at all.⁴ Thus, those who claim some intimate connection between Islam and suicide bombers are not wrong in every instance. However, these American politicians and security officials have used these basic associations to construct an unbalanced foundation for their argument that suicide bombers have some special affinity to Islamic ideology or that Islamism is the de facto form of Islam to which suicide bombers subscribe. It is this misrepresentation or misunderstanding and the creation of tangential asso-

⁴ Miller, Judith. *The Bomb Under the Abaya*. Policy Review. No. 143, June & July 2007.

ciations between suicide bombers and Islam that will be a major focus of this thesis. This thesis will also focus on the ways that Islam and Islamism do affect the suicide bomber phenomenon. It is important to think about how various forms of Islam have sought to upset the status quo in Iraq in order to better understand the rhetoric and political trends that coincide with the phenomena of suicide bombers. Because of the social and historical demographics of Iraq, I argue that it is necessary to understand Iraqi suicide bombings as a variety of different concurrent movements as opposed to one monolithic phenomenon. Suicide bombings have been reduced to a product of religion in American discourse. This thesis seeks to fissure such arguments and construct a more accurate depiction of the roles that religion provides in suicide attacks.

In many ways, my arguments do not depart from the mainstream of contemporary scholarship on the topics of Arab terrorism and religious studies. There are those who have touched on the topic of suicide bombers' religious practices or on the problem centered approach of scholarship which has to dispel common falsities regarding the practice of Islamic traditions and explain what Islam isn't before it can explain what Islam is.⁵ However, most scholars deal with this issue as an extension of a separate argument, such as solely a security-centric variable in international relations, or during investigations of religious militancy. These scholars normally do not expound on the topic at any great length. Regardless, the myth of a connection between Islam and violence as the exclusive contributory factor in suicide attacks is still very much alive among those who are not specialists in the area of Middle Eastern studies or Islam.

Methodology

Writing this thesis has not been without its difficulties. The first and most apparent problem is the fact that my Arabic is limited. Obviously, Arab culture has undergone significant changes which allow for English translations of many of the primary sources which may be of interest to our research. Indeed, even those electronic sources that are not translated can be understood with the use of language

⁵ Capan, Ergun. Ed. *An Islamic Perspective: Terror and Suicide Attacks*. (New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2004)

software. Nonetheless, language is an issue that can ease or hamper any gation.

One must also recognize the fact that suicide bombers in Iraq have emerged as a reaction to the status quo since 2003. Although many historians begin their investigation of these phenomena only in light of America's recent postwar invasion, it is important to investigate and understand the social, political, and religious issues both within the country and throughout the region within a context of Arab and Islamic culture and not see such actions simply as a reaction to Western occupation and interference. Suicide bombers are a type of ideological mercenary who, while sometimes sacrificing themselves for nationalist or religious reasons, are members of small cells that recruit and maintain suicide bombers for any number of reasons. Therefore, in order to get a clearer and superior understanding of the frameworks in which suicide bombers operate, one must investigate pre-invasion issues along with the postwar invasion issues.

My investigation will require a reexamination of the relationship between Islam and the suicide bomber, a relationship it must be understood which has only existed for a short period of time. In order to address the historical development of Iraqi suicide bombers and an Iraqi political form of Islam, I have divided this thesis into five major chapters. The first chapter will focus on how Islam has been equated with violence in American popular, political, and military discourse. I will argue that it is Western analysts and media who, writing from a standpoint that tends to homogenize Muslims and Islamic practice, have helped create the image of the Islamist suicide bomber and propagated this image to other cultures, leading to the popular notion that suicide bombers are strict Islamic adherents. The second chapter will deal with the rhetorical relationships between Middle Eastern governments and Islamist thinkers prior to the rise of suicide attacks in the early 1980s. I will argue that the alliances created between emerging Islamist schools are not an indication of any extraordinary religious fervor on the part of Islamist architects and followers, but represented a style of communication and association between religious groups and government that filled a void left by failed ideologies such as Marxism, Secularism and Arab nationalism. The third chapter will examine the politics of religious persecution in Iraq. I will argue that events within this sphere of understanding have led to the romantic notion of a suicide bomber

such as having absolute devotion to Allah, selflessness, and deep religious viction. It has only been after the disintegration of a unitary government and with the rise of sectarianism that we see the emergence of the suicide bomber as a truly distinctive icon, an image that would capture the imagination of the media. The fourth and arguably most important chapter will deal with the rise of suicide bombings in Iraq since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The fifth and final chapter will conclude my work and summarize up my arguments.

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Chapter 1

Islamofascist Bombers:

Popular American Discourses on Islam and Violence

Violence is a recurrent theme in American popular notions of Muslim politics. Suicide bombings are viewed as a chief component of modern Muslim-Western engagements. Americans imagine militant Muslims being suicide bombers to the point that this understanding has achieved normative status. As with all information, there are elements of truth to such an idea. However, acceptable analysis necessitates a fuller examination of the contexts in which suicide bombers operate. Additionally, it is necessary to understand what kinds of rhetoric about religion's role in suicide bombings are advanced in popular, security, and military discourse. This chapter will review some American notions of Islam and violence in order to understand how Iraqi suicide bombings have come to be seen as a religiously inspired movement.

1.1 Discourse Analysis

The discourse on suicide bombers presented in this chapter articulates certain worldviews which rest on particular assumptions and beliefs. Language is thus the focal point of this chapter's analysis, taking as a starting point the general idea that language is structured according to different patterns, and that it is in the concrete use of language that such patterns are created, reproduced, and changed. Discourse analysis is the analysis of language patterns. However, as Jørgensen and Phillips argue, discourse analysis is a heterogeneous field—that is, it is not just one approach but rather a series of inter-disciplinary approaches. It can be applied to various social domains in several different types of studies including the discipline of religious studies.⁶

⁶ Jørgensen, Marianne W. and Louise J Phillips. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. (New York: Sage Publications, 2002) 1

In discourse analysis, theory and method are inter-twined. This implies that researchers have to accept a ‘complete package’ which includes four elements: epistemology; theoretical models; methodological guidelines; and specific techniques for analysis (methods).⁷ This means that discourse analysis cannot just be applied as a method for analyzing data, in a more technical sense, but it has to be viewed as a theoretical and methodological whole.⁸ The categories and representations that people use to understand the world are historically and culturally specific.⁹ The term ‘discourse’ is used abstractly for ‘the general domain of statements’ and more specifically for ‘groups of statements’ or for the ‘regulated practice’, meaning the rules that govern such a group of statements. In Constructionism, truth is regarded as a discursive construct and different regimes of knowledge establish what is true and false. Foucault defines discourse as:

[A] group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation... Discourse is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form... it is, from the beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history... posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality.¹⁰

This chapter will follow Jørgensen and Phillips’ preliminary definition of discourse, understood “as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or aspects of the world).”¹¹ Here, information that is transmitted is not seen as neutrally reflecting our world, identities, and social relations. Rather,

⁷ Ibid, 3

⁸ Jørgensen, 4

⁹ Burr, Vivien. *Social Constructionism*. (New York: Routledge, 2003) 3-4

¹⁰ Jørgensen, 12

¹¹ Jørgensen, 1

people's ways of understanding have an active role in creating and changing the image people have of our world, identities, and social relations. Interpreting the world relates to the view that discourses are to be seen as ways of representing aspects of the world while different knowledge claims struggle to appear as *the* understanding of the world. The interest here is how categories and perspectives are discursively constructed. The categories and perspectives focused on in this chapter are mainly related to how Americans categorize terms related to religion, Islam, violence, and Iraq. This includes an examination of the discursive practices and range of discourses that Americans employ in their everyday practice and the way in which these practices and discourses reflect values and attitudes to meaning, power, and the use of knowledge and assigning illegitimacy to particular actions such as suicidal attacks.

1.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

The empirical material analyzed in this chapter consists of written documents which contain concepts, beliefs, and understandings. When analyzing documents such as these it is possible to approach the material either in a qualitative or a quantitative manner. Within these two main categories there are a multitude of different methodologies, but generally speaking it is possible to talk of quantitative approaches and qualitative approaches. A general point is that quantitative strategies have their strength in their structured approach and their ability to make statistical generalizations. More to the point, these approaches take their starting point in the positivistic tradition where the ideal is that social sciences can and should use the same criteria for knowledge production as natural sciences. At the base of this view of science is the belief that it is possible to establish an absolute distinction between fact and value. In the qualitative approaches, however, these ideas are seen as problematic. The critique is that one cannot view the social world in terms of a fact-value distinction.¹²

Narrowing these approaches down to two strategies for analyzing documents, the choice is between quantitative or qualitative content analysis. Again, there are

¹² Crotty, Michael J. *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. (New York: Sage Publications, 1998) 12

several distinctive methodologies within these two strategies. Here I want to point out that the choice between undertaking qualitative and quantitative research occurs at the level of methods. It does not occur at the level of epistemology or theoretical perspective, so it is, for example, possible to start from a constructionist epistemology and choose a quantitative method.¹³ Therefore, even though I reject positivism as an ideal in social science, this does not mean that I reject all quantitative methods. In this particular work, however, my choice of method was guided by my general interest in how violence in Iraq was discursively constructed in the United States. Therefore, I have chosen qualitative content analysis as the best process for reviewing this chapter's material.

Qualitative content analysis can be understood as an expanding process between an overall understanding of the empirical material and specific textual analysis. I started with research "buzzwords" and selected potentially relevant documents for analysis. In the course of analysis, some concepts stood out as more relevant than others and throughout the project there was a need to evaluate the relevance of different perceptions and understandings. In qualitative content analysis, an important point is that the texts are not viewed as standing on their own. The context always matters in analysis. The broader context in this thesis is that the concepts analyzed are constructions of an imagined space within the Middle East and its key violent actors within said space, and that they all relate to a constructed 'war on terrorism' as a response to violence in Iraq. The context of the individual texts will be discussed in the analysis.

1.3 Islam in American Popular Discourse

Negative sentiments about Islam in popular discourse have surged in the United States since September 11th, 2001. This antagonistic national attitude has been facilitated by the American media. The media have labeled Muslim culture in a stereotyped and negative way which has resulted in the creation of "folk devils."¹⁴

¹³ Crotty, 14

¹⁴ Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: Creation of Mods and Rockers* (New York: Rutledge, 2002)

These “devils” and their activities have been reported in such a way as to create moral panic. Panic occurs when a condition, episode, person, or group is defined as a threat to societal values and interests.¹⁵ The media’s role in structuring the current public awareness is vitally important: amplifying the problem, the media have created a social reaction against Muslims and Islam; they have galvanized awareness and alarm. The simplified and exaggerated facts have scared the public and fostered the stereotypes.

It is arguable that without moral panics, suicide bombings may never have become as prolific as they have in Iraq. Without wide media coverage, possible emerging terrorist groups, who have falsely claimed credit for suicide attacks to improve their prestige, may never have been tempted to make such claims in the first place. Therefore, any retaliatory attacks may never have taken place. The media consequently not only distort contemporary reality but they also condition future reality.¹⁶ Furthermore, the American media have also been responsible for the reinvigoration of what Tom Engelhardt calls “victory culture”¹⁷ in the United States. By framing the conflict in Iraq as “civilization against barbarism” and as “good against evil,” the media have given Americans the clarity and confidence of a country mobilized for an “us or them” struggle. In order to better understand how Americans perceive suicide bombers and Islam, it is important to briefly investigate American religiosity.

Religion is a ubiquitous component of the American experience. Ninety-five percent of Americans indicate that they believe in some sort of God or Higher Power whereas only 5% claim to be atheist or agnostic.¹⁸ Approximately 40% of

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Engelhardt, Tom. *The End of Victory Culture*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995)

¹⁸ Forbes, Bruce David. and Jeffery H. Mahan. Eds. *Religion and Popular Culture In America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 2005) 7

the United States population reports attending worship in any given week.¹⁹ Religion can be perceived at numerous levels but it is arguable that the most recognizable form is institutional religion. Therefore, religion can be defined in a very broad and inclusive way, or it can be used in a narrower approach to refer to human expressions which are closer to traditional religions. How Islam is understood in American popular discourse is also perceived on numerous levels. Somewhere in this imagined Islam, the suicide bomber has come to be equated with an “Islamic” form of expression. This figure is imagined by millions of Americans as a Muslim religious actor. Such a figure signals both a religious and political threat to many Judeo-Christians in America.

The icon of the suicide bomber demonstrates how American representations of Muslims reaffirm certain racist notions of the Middle Eastern “other.” It is undeniably important to analyze the icon of the suicide bomber within the phenomenon of Orientalism—as part of an orientalist network of representations. As a created body of theory and practice, Orientalism divides the world into “two unequal halves, Orient and Occident.”²⁰ Its “detailed logic is governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.”²¹ Consequently, rather than offering a clear and unbiased representation of Islam, this system of representation reveals the interests and concerns of the Occidental subjectivity from which it emerges.²²

The suicide bomber, depicted within this network of representations, includes within its scope a wide range of religious and political figures (Muslims Extremists, Nationalists, Jihadists, Secularists) from a variety of backgrounds (Iraqi, Iranian, Saudi Arabian, Arab, Persian). Even though such variety points to a diverse assemblage, they are homogenized within American popular discourse and consciousness. Orientalism serves to blur the individuality of particular figures. In

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. (New York: Vantage Books, 1979) 203

²¹ Said, 12

²² Ibid

fact, American recognition of any suicide bomber in Iraq is predicated on their fitting assigned roles and relationships paradigmatically recapitulated in the icon of the suicide bomber: his or her strict Islamic adherence and his or her loyalty to al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda's rhetoric, too, has claimed an ideological and religious rather than individual confrontation with the United States. This rhetoric has been disseminated through the American news media and is interpreted differently due to geographical, cultural, and religious differences. The news media have constructed, as a narrative device, a "militant Islam" as the single understood vehicle of the Islamic tradition and it has done so by combining Islamic belief and militant politics into a violent expression. Before 9/11, the United States media already interpreted the Middle East from a reductionist standpoint. As an example, for the hegemonic West, "what had been understood, albeit incorrectly, as 'the Arab world' in the 1960s and 1970s became, again, incorrectly, 'the Islamic world' in the 1980s."²³ Therefore, the American media have caused violence in Iraq to be framed as a war of the religious against the wider, "secular" world.

1.4 The Role of Media in Iraq

Mainstream news agencies rely on government and military officials for information on military conflicts such as the current Iraq War. Thus global news media have become channels for propaganda and the facilitators for elite sources to set the agenda for national and global audiences. These elite sources include government policymakers, security officials, and terrorist networks. Coverage of Iraq is consequently framed by international news agencies, especially Western media from the U.S. and Britain. News values, globalization, economic interdependence, news flows, and propaganda are all highly significant factors affecting coverage. Dominance of the global news agencies by American media has allowed various Western constructs to become the main content providers of Iraq's war coverage as well as in depicting Iraq's communities, culture, and religions.

²³ McAlister, Melani. *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 200

The method of “embedding”²⁴ journalists in the Occupational Force’s military units is one of the U.S. government’s main strategies to control information coming from Iraq. This strategy replaced the “pool system,” adopted since the Vietnam War and used in the Gulf War, where journalists had been grouped and headed by the military. In the past, media coverage was censored and no access was given to actual conflict. However, in accordance with the embedding strategy, journalists are working in concert with the troops and can report in a relatively unrestricted manner.²⁵ This new form of journalism has only become possible thanks to the new digital technology which allows real-time broadcasting of war reports. The military’s calculated intention here has been to enhance the reporters’ credibility by enabling them to be at the scene of hostilities. This allows the audience to accept America’s capability to deter conflict as well as creating an impression of the army’s invulnerability. Images taken by the embedded journalists have been rife with weapons.²⁶ The very presence of civilian journalists has testified to the American army’s invulnerability. To be among their ranks is to be in a safe place. A study of German and American print media coverage shows that the German media’s assessment of the strategy of embedded journalism has been more critical than that of its American counterparts.²⁷ It added that the closer a particular media outlet is to the left wing of the political spectrum, the more critical the presen-

²⁴ An embedded journalist is a news reporter who is attached to a military unit involved in an armed conflict. While the term could be applied to many historical interactions between journalists and military personnel, it first came to be used in the media coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

²⁵ Szukala, Andrea. “Media and public opinion in the Iraq war.” *Politics and Contemporary History*. 2003. Spring Issue. 25.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Donsbach Wolfgang. and Olaf Jandura, and Diana Müller. “War Correspondents or Compliant Propagandists? How German and American print media in the Iraq War Saw ‘Journalists embedded’” *Themenheft Media & Communication Studies*. Fall 2005. 298-313.

tation of embedding becomes. This reveals strong national and political bias in war coverage on the media's part.

Understanding Western media operations is paralleled by observing Arab satellite TV station al-Jazeera. Its far-reaching presence during the Iraq War has raised interest in general conditions of media production in the Arab world. The emergence of internationally influential and somewhat politically independent satellite television channels in the Middle East has led to a regional change where previous monopolists such as Reuters, the BBC, the AP and CNN are now being ignored by local audiences in favor of Arab media. Olivier Hahn reasons that in the Middle East there is a "trend towards extreme politicization, polarization, personalization and emotionalization" which can be observed, especially at al-Jazeera, along with a cultural, i.e. pro-Arab, bias.²⁸ In this respect, the Arab channels do not differ from their American counterparts CNN and FOX News. Their programs are instilled with a mixture of journalism and patriotism — merely from a pro-Arab standpoint.

As an analysis of their history and structure shows, the satellite channels of the Middle East are frontier runners between journalistic cultures.²⁹ On the one hand, they follow ideals of objectivity of the Western tradition of journalism. Al-Jazeera has even responded to Western criticism of its media coverage by creating a code of ethics.³⁰ However, in spite of their journalistic ideals, these stations are still largely dependent economically on their respective state governments. As far as conflict in Iraq goes, such Arab television stations might be expected to offer a wider variety of views from the Middle East as well as for sources of Iraqi conflict. Yet they only slightly enhance the analytical quality of global media coverage.³¹

²⁸ Hahn, Olivier. "Arab satellite television news: development history, structure and the consequences for conflict reporting from the Middle East, *Themenheft Media & Communication Studies*. Fall 2005. 241-260

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

This is because the effects of Arab media are predominantly understood in terms of their reception by the media in other parts of the world—primarily in industrialized countries. Therefore, Arab media in general and the Iraqi media specifically would only influence Americans if they had a hegemonic ability to disseminate their coverage. At this time these outlets are lacking such ability. It is for this reason that I argue that how the Iraqi media portrays Iraqi suicide bombers and Iraqi conflict is inconsequential for American audiences overall because Americans are rarely if ever exposed to those representations. Iraqi media do not have a great effect on American discourses on suicide bombers.

1.5 The Secularization Narrative

One of the ways that the iconic suicide bomber has made his debut in American discourse was through American media coverage including 24-hour television news, widespread print coverage, and internet based reporting. Diverse media sources served as platforms for the presentation and dissemination of what are now monolithic views in the public domain. An example of this print coverage is an article from the October 28, 2003 edition of *Newsweek* magazine which depicted the emergence of suicide bombers in Iraq as the work of religious Islamists fighting against the onset of secularization in Iraq.³² Within the framework of an “us against them” perception, secularization became depicted as the antithesis to the suicide bomber in this work by *Newsweek* and countless others. The article states that “foreign Islamists resorting to suicide tactics could pose an increasing threat against military and civilian targets alike.”³³ It asserts that fighters are coming from all over the Middle East to fight off Western occupation and secularization.

The term “secular” can be traced back to the Roman Empire when it was first used in relation to laws governing the Catholic Church. The Church needed some

³² Caryl, Christian. “Bad Days In Baghdad: In The Wake Of This New Wave Of Attacks, There Is A Palpable Sense Of Modest Progress Jolting To A Halt.” *Newsweek*, 28 Oct, 2003 (40)

³³ Ibid

way of distinguishing the sacred from the commonplace and the term secular was used to describe priests who worked outside the church.³⁴ The meaning of this term has grown beyond this early definition and is now employed as a social concept that describes the relation between business and politics in the institution of religion. Secularization is often seen as synonymous with modernization in its push toward industry and capitalism which, some have argued, has resulted in the worldwide decline of religion. Modern sociologists of religion have continued to address the issue of secularization and I am providing a brief overview of three popular theories. I am doing this to better understand how communities are, or are not, connected with institutions through secularly framed discourses and understandings. The three theories of secularization addressed are the Religious Economics Model, the Sociopolitical Conflict Model, and The Sociocultural Transformation Model.

The Religious Economics Model uses economic theory to explain the success of religion in certain environments and the decline of religion in other environments. The productivity of religion, according to this model, is dependent upon competition in the form of other traditions or religious groups.³⁵ When individuals have many options regarding religion (firms) they act like competitive shoppers out to find the best religious “product” that they can. If this is reversed and there is little competition then the religious culture becomes “lethargic” and there are low levels of “religious consumption.”³⁶ This model will be important later in this chapter because it is an approach that Americans use to imagine Iraqi religion.

The Religious Economic Model deemphasizes the role of politics in religion. This is significant because with the American focus on Islamism (political Islam), religion and politics are understood as being intertwined in Iraq. For someone

³⁴ Beckford, James A. *Social Theory and Religion*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 33

³⁵ Gorski, Philip S. “Historicizing the Secularization Debate: An Agenda for Research” *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Michele Dillon, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113

³⁶ Ibid

understanding the conflict in Iraq within this economic lens, the political aspects of the conflict would be ignored as seems to be the case by Americans in the early stages of the Occupation of Iraq. Such a mindset by the American-led occupational force allowed for the quick disintegration of Iraq's middle class, which this thesis will address in chapter 3.

The Sociopolitical Conflict Model uses sociopolitical conflict as a key factor in determining the success or decline of religion. According to this model, when a religious institution is very dependent upon the state and the ruling class then opposition to the regime will result in an anti-religious feeling as the religious institution "and the state will tend to become closely identified with one another."³⁷ As we will also see in chapter 3, it is through this model that the framework of Iraqi violence will be understood directly after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. It is my contention that the Ba'athist Party and Iraq's Sunni Muslims were explicitly linked together by the disenfranchised Shi'a majority.

The Sociocultural Transformation model of secularization works to address the root of sociopolitical conflict itself through the growth of secular ideologies. Gorski uses Durkheim's idea of division of labor to argue that up until recent times "intellectual labor in Western societies had been monopolized by the priestly class."³⁸ After the Renaissance, the intellectual world grew to include many different types of people from different professions, and inevitably the language used became increasingly secular as did "non religious sources of moral valuation."³⁹ This resulted in many people considering worldviews and philosophies that were essentially non-religious: Gorski cites nationalism and socialism as two such examples.

This model is helpful in that it allows us to better understand how America sees Islam in contention with the modern world since Islamism is bitterly opposed to nationalism. Because many Americans understand Islamism to be Islam proper, it is easy to understand how they would interpret al-Qaeda's rejection of national-

³⁷ Gorski, 116

³⁸ Gorski, 119

³⁹ Ibid

ism as Islam's rejection of secularization and therefore Islam's rejection of modernity.

As has been explained, Western perceptions of Islam and Arab culture have been influenced by Orientalism and are seen as laden with radical, revolutionary, and anti-American overtones, particularly when the media refer to fundamentalism, Islamic terror, and jihad. This bias manifests itself in news, literature, film, and other forms of popular culture. Michael Hunt argues that Anglo-Saxon racism and Social Darwinism have become fused in the American mind. In other words, Americans believe the civilized powers—the United States and Western Europe—are somehow in control of or responsible for, lesser races in a descending social ladder of underdeveloped and even primitive cultures.⁴⁰

1.6 Jihad vs. McWorld

Islam's imagined conflict with the rest of the world is often framed with the term *jihad* (holy war). The origin of the term jihad and how it has acquired the meaning used in this paper will be covered in depth in chapter 2. In this chapter, however, I will be focusing on the term's dissemination in American media and America's cultural understanding of the term in contemporary conflict. One of the best examples and one of the most influential works on America's vision of *jihad* is Benjamin Barber's book *Jihad vs. McWorld* (2001). Originally printed in 1995 and re-released after the September 11 attacks, Barber's book introduced countless Americans to militant Muslims partially in an attempt to answer the perennial question of "why do they hate us?" Barber portrays Islamic "fundamentalism" as a quintessential example of the defensive reaction against secularism, modernity, and cosmopolitanism that has surfaced in other regions and cultures.⁴¹ Barber constructs a vision of an epic struggle between the forces of Islam (jihad) and modern secular society (McWorld). The book offers a compelling, overarching paradigm for globalization and its discontents. It shows Islamist groups united in their opposition to the global spread of Western culture. These united groups are

⁴⁰ Little, 10

⁴¹ Barber, Benjamin. *Jihad vs. McWorld*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001)

most often characterized by American policymakers and members of the media as being represented by or as a part of the al-Qaeda network.

Barber characterizes McWorld as a secular place where “corporations are more central players in global affairs than nations.”⁴² McDonalds is the epitome of such corporations for Barber, hence the name he has given to McWorld. He goes on to construct McWorld’s citizens as “not citizens of any particular nation or members of a parochial clan” but instead belonging to “the universal tribe of consumers defined by needs and wants.”⁴³ These citizens exist in a globalized market culture which is based on the religious economics model reviewed earlier. Barber uses this model to conclude that McWorld “lacks anything resembling a civic envelope. As a result it cannot support the values and institutions associated with religion.”⁴⁴

Barber homogenizes all Middle Eastern violent actors, understood through Orientalism to be fundamentalist Muslims, as “people who detest modernity—the secular, scientific, rational, and commercial civilization created by the Enlightenment.”⁴⁵ He decides that “these enemies of the modern” seek “to recover the dead past by annihilating the living present.”⁴⁶ Here, Barber equates modernity with Western cultural dominance. It is important to understand that many Islamists do not reject modernism so much as they seek to reconstruct it on Islamic foundations. According to Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, new Islamic political discourse “has facilitated the shift of at least some Arab Islamists toward a constructive engagement with the emerging networks of global civil society.”⁴⁷ Barber’s work is therefore not helpful in depicting a nuanced and accurate picture of violent Middle Eastern actors but it is an excellent example of how such actors are homoge-

⁴² Ibid, 23

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid, xxviii

⁴⁵ Ibid, xiv

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Juergensmeyer, Mark. Ed. *Religion in Global Civil Society*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 150

nized in American discourse. As a regular writer for news periodicals such as *Harper's*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and many other publications, Barber is but one tor of the perception that militant Muslims are in a struggle with the rest of the “secular” world. This argument is not simply made by the media, however. It is arguable that the most powerful American generator of this world view is the American government.

The U.S. State Department has effectively combined all of the various militant groups in Iraq under an al-Qaeda umbrella in the minds of many American people. The State Department reports that al-Qaeda's current goal is

to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate throughout the world by working with allied Islamic extremist groups to overthrow regimes it deems ‘non-Islamic’ and expelling Westerners and non-Muslims [and their influence] from Muslim countries—particularly Iraq.⁴⁸

The current Bush administration had tried to draw a direct link between al-Qaeda and Iraq a full year before the 2003 invasion. On September 25, 2002, President Bush claimed that Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda worked “in concert,” and the following day, he claimed that Iraq had “long standing and continuing ties to terrorist organizations” mainly al-Qaeda.

American national security strategists and policymakers often frame this perceived global conflict in specifically Islamic religious and moral terms because they believe such context motivates “Muslim” militants and inspires suicide bombers. However, it is unclear if these government officials understand such terms. For instance, suicide bombings are described as irrational. This argument is being facilitated by the discourse of psychologists. Psychologist Clark McCauley describes such motivation as “a drive to feel a connection with God and the work of God,

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism - 2003*, Released 29 April 2004. Available from <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2003/31711.htm>

to feel the peace of submission of God's will."⁴⁹ McCauley gives a psychological assessment of those engaged in *jihad* as believing that "[f]ear is an act of worship due only to God."⁵⁰ McCauley's theory is supported by an argument posed by psychologist Roxanne Euben who argues against a "rational actor" theory of Muslim terrorism. Euben contends that for the Islamic militant "there is no separation between religion and politics in Islam." Therefore, she contends that these "fundamentalists" are operating under the belief that they are in fact engaged in a battle for "good versus evil" as described by McCauley. As a result, Euben says it is the fundamentalist belief that those that operate outside of the Islamic Law (the Qur'an) can only be cured of such ignorance through divine authority; or the employment of a holy war (jihad).⁵¹ In her work, Euben equates the Qur'an with the Shari'a in the constructing of Islamic law. She does not grasp the complex roles that each play in Islamic traditions. Such misunderstandings as to the sophistication of Islam allow her to reduce the religion to an ideologically violent version which al-Qaeda presents to the world.

Yet al-Qaeda does not speak for all Muslims nor does it speak for all of the supposed religiously motivated militants who are causing violence in Iraq. The media have begun to differentiate and nuance Iraqi violence, particularly in the light of sectarianism. It is arguable that sectarianism is one of the key constructions through which Americans perceive violence in Iraq today.

1.7 Constructing the Enemy through Threat Inflation

The Associated Press noted in April 2002 that FOX News first began using the term "homicide bombings" in its own reports immediately after Bush administra-

⁴⁹ McCauley, Clark. "Psychological Issues in Understanding Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism," *The Psychology of Terrorism* Vol. 3, ed. Chris Stout (Westport, CT: Pareger, 2002), 3-30

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Euben, Roxanne, "When Worldviews Collide: Conflicting Assumptions about Human Behavior Held by Rational Actor Theory and Islamic Fundamentalism," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 16. No. 1 (1995)

tion officials adopted the term -- such as then-White House press secretary Ari Fleischer.⁵² While other news organizations continued to use the term "suicide bomber," the AP reported, "Dennis Murray, executive producer of [FOX News'] daytime programming, said executives there had heard the phrase ["homicide bombing"] being used by administration officials in recent days and thought it was a good idea."⁵³ FOX has applied the "homicide" terminology not only in its own original reports, but also in the AP reports that it publishes on its website. Readers are led to believe that the AP itself uses the "homicide" terminology, when in fact it does not. According to a *Media Matters* search, the AP has used the terms "homicide bomber" or "homicide bombing" when referring to terrorist attacks in only one article, published on May 7, 2004. These terms have otherwise appeared in AP articles only in quotations via FOX News.

As has been explained, media sources reporting on violence in Iraq are diverse. As is evident by FOX News, platforms for politically based misunderstandings of Iraqi culture and actions are available to the American masses. These media outlets have effectively segmented recipients of news by political ideology. This allows individuals to discount news and information coming from outside their ideological scope. It should therefore come as no surprise that press reports from "liberal" outlets which have questioned the presentation of violent Iraqi actors have had little impact on public opinion. Conservative media have in fact insulated occupation supporters from these reports. One study has reported that viewers of FOX News would not only be more likely to hold factually incorrect beliefs about the Iraq War after the war's conclusion, but actually had become less informed the more they watched.⁵⁴

⁵² Haugland Jan. *Secular Blasphemy*.
<http://blogs.salon.com/0001561/2003/06/14.html#a2735> Last Visited
 January 23, 2008

⁵³ Media Matters. <http://mediamatters.org/items/200502230006> Last Visited
 December 11, 2007.

⁵⁴ Kull, Steven, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis. "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War." *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (Winter 2003-04): 569-598

By using the term homicide in the place of suicide, different cultures within the American media establishment can construct the “Muslim” suicide bomber as a vicious killer. Such presentations can reinforce the resolve that many Americans hold that America needs to continue its occupation of Iraq. This determination revolves around the Orientalist worldview already inspected in this thesis which labels Middle Easterners as savages in need of control by Western powers. It should be noted that the American media are in many ways just reflecting the terminology used by the current executive administration.

Language such as “homicide bomber” and “suicide bomber” in American discourse on the iconic symbol of the suicide bomber is important because as Talal Asad asks, is there a crucial difference between someone who kills in order to die and someone who dies in order to kill?⁵⁵ Asad suggests that the open-endedness of motive in suicide bombings inevitably leaves considerable scope for interpretation.⁵⁶ He therefore posits that suicide attacks are above all histories.⁵⁷ In recounting plausible histories, Asad reminds us that people employ fiction in their discourse. This helps us as scholars to understand why misrepresentations of religion arise in cases of conflict such as the suicide bombings. A mythology of suicide or homicide as pathology encourages fantasies which allow for accessibility to understanding actions like suicide bombings.⁵⁸ Such mythology also allows for politically influenced rhetoric to be disseminated. For example, the rhetoric of bringing democracy to the Middle East is thinly masking an argument for Western managing of the Middle East.

Rhetoric emphasizing the need for Western policing of Iraq and its Middle Eastern neighbors is in line with American foreign policy today. One of the most critical aspects of American foreign policy for the 21st century is the emphasis on a

⁵⁵ Asad, Talal. *On Suicide Bombing*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) 40

⁵⁶ Ibid, 41

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

shift to internationalism. This is because within policymaking bureaucracies there is a “fading distinction between foreign and domestic policy bureaucracies.”⁵⁹ With the emphasis on internationalism, the United States has evolved with distinct new fundamentals. These include the goal to retain the country’s position as the number 1 superpower, the militarization of U.S. foreign policy, the promotion of liberal democracies as a means of peace, the support of democratic allies, and a policy of pre-emptive self defense.⁶⁰ Along with these new policies has come a shift in attitude among the policymakers. These policymakers see it as America’s “duty to make the world better for its inhabitants and to shape the ‘new world order’ so that the gains from the Cold War can be preserved.”⁶¹ In other words, American foreign policymakers have embraced a “constructivist and activist U.S. role in world politics.”⁶²

1.8 American Misunderstandings

The fact that there has been an increase in American knowledge and understanding with regard to Islam and actions within the Middle East during the last few years is undeniable. The expanding public awareness of Islam in both negative and positive senses more than ever signifies the importance of the media’s impact on the way people construct images of communities that are strange to them. Media exposure is not the only way Americans are exposed to Islam; however, it is arguably the most severe way. The media are a powerful agent for change. Many individuals and groups vie for their control. Therefore, the media are not insulated from politics. Is it then possible that the media have covered issues pertaining to Iraq, Islam, and violence in an objective manner? The fact that America is the

⁵⁹ Rosati, Jerel A. *The Politics Of United States Foreign Policy*, 3rd Edition, (Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth & Thompson Learning, 2004) 103

⁶⁰ Gilchrist, James C. “Future of U.S. FPMP.” Class lecture. Political Science 366. University of Tennessee, Knoxville. 28 November 2005.

⁶¹ Hook, Steven W. and John Spanier, *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*, 7th Edition, (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2004), 248

⁶² Ibid

dominant state in today's international system has meant that American perceptions of Islam, often informed by Orientalist assumptions, are influential throughout the world. Furthermore, it has meant that divergent views on Islam have been ignored.

President George W. Bush has said “[b]y sacrificing life to serve their radical visions... (Islamists) follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism.”⁶³ Anchorage Daily News columnist and radio show host Dan Fagan has echoed the President by frequently using the term Islamo-fascism and he may have been one of the first to do so.⁶⁴ He uses it casually in reference to the entire religion of Islam. The mixing of fascism and Islamism is problematic because, as will be explained in the next chapter, Islamist groups like al-Qaeda scorn the idea of nation-states. This part of their ideology contradicts fascism, which by definition is ultranationalist. Therefore the term Islamo-fascists propagates misinformation. Correcting media misinformation and bias should not be seen simply in terms of correcting facts. What allows the news about Islam to be conveyed and consumed in a particular way has to do with the predominance of Orientalist thinking in American culture.

Due to the short nature of news reports, it is understandable how Americans draw connections between Islam and suicide bombers, fascism, and a host of other alarming things. A balanced portrayal of modern Islam is difficult to find in mainstream Western media sources. If it were presented, it is likely that audiences would reject what they were exposed to because of their preconceived notions of foreign Islamic cultures. Edward Said argues that Middle Eastern spaces and actors such as those depicted in Iraq are co-created by the Western media and its audience's prejudices as much as these spaces and actors are created by their reality.⁶⁵ Said makes the argument that because Westerners have little contact with Islam,

⁶³ Little, 42

⁶⁴ Fagan, Dan. *The Dan Fagan Radio Show* <http://www.kfqd.com/user/27> , Last Visited January 11 2007.

⁶⁵ Said, Edward. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997)

they tend to orientalize and create simplified and flawed understandings of its traditions which are more stylized or stereotyped than they ought to be.⁶⁶ For our purpose, this means the contexts for events in Iraq have to be recognized by the media's audience. In telling a story, Said argues, the media must relate events in a way that allows American audiences to understand them in terms of their own society.

While the media, en masse, are not solely responsible for the inaccurate image of suicide bombers and Islam, changes need to be made. Print media have led the way. They have shown an ability to adapt to burgeoning media such as blogging, which is responding to public demand for global awareness and accuracy. However, TV media have not adapted. The primary purpose of TV media is not their providing of information but their selling of corporate advertisements. Television media are therefore a corporate tool. Accuracy is not their objective. Consequently, there is opportunity for inaccurate depictions of Iraqi suicide bombers to increase on television. Inaccurate depictions as to the role of religion in suicide bombings are by no means limited to the government and media. Academia has also put forth inaccurate depictions of suicide bombers. The majority of writing and punditry about suicide bombers have been by political scientists and public policy experts. There has been a gap in religious studies scholarship. This is problematic because scholars of religion more than any other discipline can dispel the inaccuracies of religion's role in suicide bombings depicted in American discourse.

The scholar of religion Ivan Strenski has attempted to fill the gap that exists in religious studies scholarship on suicide bombers. Strenski argues that Muslim discourse on suicide bombers is multivalent.⁶⁷ He adds that Western scholars have dwelled on the discourse of jihad to explain and understand suicide bombings. He says that the language of "gift" and "sacrifice" is also present and has explanatory

⁶⁶ Ibid, 37

⁶⁷ Strenski, Ivan. "Sacrifice, Gift and the Social Logic of Muslim 'Human Bombers,'" *Terrorism and Political Violence*; Autumn 2003, Vol. 15 Issue 3, p1-34.

power in social sciences.⁶⁸ For Strenski, religion is too important and too compelling in significance to be the sole interpretive property of academics.⁶⁹ He is correct. Religion being presented as the only cause of suicide bombings distorts the motivations of suicide actors. If analysts, policymakers, and academics are going to better understand the motivations of suicide bombers, they must have accurate information as to who becomes a suicide bomber.

1.9 Beyond An Orientalist Discourse

Who becomes a suicide bomber? The answer to this question is elusive. Some suggest there are definite trends, others dispute that conclusion, and still others maintain that a profile cannot be developed as it is “unlikely that the search would be successful in creating a set of common denominators that could span several continents, time periods, cultures, and political configurations.”⁷⁰ Although the data are limited, suicide bombers have one characteristic which typifies all—they are young. The average age varies from 21.5 (Turkey) to 23 (Lebanon), a small differential. According to US military spokesman Rear Admiral Gregory Smith, the average suicide bomber in Iraq is a single male aged 22 years-old.⁷¹ Other characteristics do not hold. Some are widowers or widows and others have never been married; some are unemployed and others are professionals; some are poor and others are middle class. Most analysts can easily compare the female suicide bombers known as the Black Widows in Russia with Palestinian suicide bombers of

⁶⁸ Ibid, 19

⁶⁹ Ibid, 28

⁷⁰ Combs, Cindy C. and Martin Slann, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2002) 215

⁷¹ From correspondents in Baghdad. *Agence France-Presse*. March 17, 2008
<http://www.news.com.au/perthnow/story/0,21598,23387620-5005361,00.html>

any gender, since both appear to be serving “struggles of national identity”⁷² with a possible religious, social, or nationalist element. As far as gender goes, researchers believe there are “few differences between a man and a woman carrying out such a mission. It may be a surprise, but motivations are the same: they do believe, they are committed, they are patriotic, and this is combined with a cultural duty.”⁷³ Furthermore, they are young. Analysts note “positive attitudes toward political violence—already well entrenched in persons under 17 years of age (14.5 percent)—actually increase in the population up to the age of 24 (14.9 percent) and decreases thereafter (6 percent at 64 years of age).”⁷⁴

Some fundamentalist clerics have expressed theological dilemmas in sanctioning suicide bombing, as Islam explicitly forbids suicide (*intihar*). The Qur’an states: “And do not kill yourselves, Allah is indeed merciful to you.” (Qur’an 4: 29)⁷⁵ Others note that the Prophet Mohammed explicitly forbade suicide and decreed, “He who drinks poison and kills himself will carry his poison in his hand and drink it in Hell for ever and ever.”⁷⁶ However, while God punishes someone who commits suicide, he rewards the martyr. How the ulema construct ideology

⁷² “This Litany of Carnage Explodes the Myth That Terrorism Can Be Easily Defeated,” *Independent (London)*, May 19, 2003, sec. Comment, p. 14, database on-line; available from Lexis Nexis; last accessed January 10, 2008

⁷³ Zoroya, Gregg. “Her Decision to be a Suicide Bomber,” *USA Today*, April 22, 2003, sec. A, p. 1, database on-line; available from Lexis-Nexis; accessed February 5, 2008.

⁷⁴ Neuburger, Luisella. and Tiziana Valentini, *Women and Terrorism*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996) p. 24.

⁷⁵ Fakhry, Majid. *The Qu’ran: A Modern English Translation*. (Lebanon: Garnet Publishing, 1997) 54

⁷⁶ Kay, Jonathan. “Defaming Islam—One Bomb at a Time,” *National Post* (Canada), July 16, 2003, sec. A, p. 14, database on-line; available from Lexis-Nexis; accessed September 5, 2007

and understanding does play a role in portions of suicide bombings. A more comprehensive look at suicide bombers will be dealt with in chapter 4.

Chapter 2

Rethinking the Past: How Militant Ulema

Constructed Islamist Ideology

Once again, this paper asserts suicide bombing is not a solely religious phenomenon. Religion is an element in the propagation of the phenomenon; however, religion is neither essential nor sufficient for explanation of such actions. This being the case, it is important to explain the role that Islam can play in Iraqi suicide attacks. Religion's role through Islam as an element in such attacks has captured the public's imagination and therefore requires clarification.

2.1 Key Terms

To begin this chapter, it is important to define key terms—namely ulema and Islamism. The term ulema is a plural form used to refer to Muslim scholars who are officially recognized as qualified to engage in Islamic studies.⁷⁷ The distinction that ulema enjoy is that they are scholars in learned Islam through special training in religious schools and universities which is separate from the notion of popular Islam where people participate in cultural or folk practices.⁷⁸ The ulema are notorious for attempting to control the public debate over the central values of society. In the past, ulema “became tantamount to state officials, helping governments by issuing *fatwas* (religious rulings) and publicly endorsing state policies.”⁷⁹ However, the authority of the modern ulema has been weakened “by having to share their role as arbiters with secular intellectuals.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Kepel, Gilles. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002) 47

⁷⁸ Ibid, 49

⁷⁹ Ibid, 52

⁸⁰ Ibid, 52

Islamism is Islam narrowed down to an ideology but it is undeniably a form of Islam and therefore an authentic religious tradition. Islamists see power as indivisible. In the Middle East, Islamists imitate their enemies, the existing regimes. They make no distinction between long term and short term goals. Such non-distinction may be accountable because of the internal conflicts that arise once they receive power. Security services that watch the day-to-day activities of these Islamist groups have sophisticated training but are not trained in the study of religion. The outlook of a scholar of religion is needed to understand what Islamism is really about. The role of the ulema is what visibly separates Islam and the various forms of Islamism. In a fundamentalist state, the government takes measures so as not to be criticized by the ulema whereas in the Muslim world such criticism is common place. Mainstream Muslims and Islamists have little or no difference of opinion over basic Islamic belief and its content or over the proper forms of worship and devotion. Islamism, as it has been manifested by the architects we are about to investigate, is new if only because it is concerned with the modern state. In the Middle East, it cannot be assumed that social change can be brought about without the application of force or violence. Many Islamist activists believe that the West has forced the Muslim community to abandon the Shari' a and that the West now fears the Islamist movements. Islamists and conservative Muslims alike are convinced that the West is afraid of what will happen to the world when the Shari'a is again implemented. Indeed, Shari'a law has vast implications for what it could mean to human rights, economics, and travel to name a few. More practically, Shari' a law is important because knowledge of it can give militants the confidence that the use of violence is just. It can also give them the terminology needed to appeal to particular cherished communities. This chapter will consider such Islamic militants who have had important influence on the development of Islamism. Doing so will provide a historical analysis for the construction of many of the Muslim concepts in American discourse reviewed last chapter. Such an investigation will allow this thesis to historicize, contextualize, and problematize rhetoric surrounding suicide attacks.

2.2 Ibn Taymiyya

Some consider the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1268-1328) as the original architect of Islamism. Ibn Taymiyya was an influential Islamic thinker who, though he died in the early fourteenth century, laid intellectual foundations that are used in Islamism today.⁸¹ Ibn Taymiyya was a pragmatic thinker who approached the political world in a realpolitik fashion.⁸² A brief examination of his life helps to understand the development of his ideas.

At the age of five years-old, Ibn Taymiyya became a refugee. His family fled their native Iraq for Syria in order to escape the Mongols. It is within a political and cultural climate sensitive to the Mongol threat that Ibn Taymiyya grew to adulthood. This is a central factor for understanding his later religious and political ideology. It was in 1300 that the Mongols finally invaded Syria.⁸³ The reigning Mongol Ilkhan, Ghazan, converted to Islam in 1295 and as such could frame himself as a legitimate Muslim ruler. Doing so allowed Ghazan to exploit the prohibition in Islam against internecine Muslim fighting. Ibn Taymiyya did not accept the Mongol invasion as legitimate, however, and he set to work in developing and proliferating anti-Mongol propaganda. Taymiyya argued that Ghazan was Muslim only in appearance and that his policies proved that he remained loyal to Mongol beliefs and traditions. By failing to enforce Islamic law in his realm, Ghazan revealed that his Islamic conversion was fake. It was on this argument that Ibn Taymiyya pronounced Ghazan an apostate. Ibn Taymiyya built a case based on apostasy (abandoning the true faith) that Muslims could legitimately ignore Ghazan's laws and enact total war on the un-Islamic Mongols.

⁸¹ On the influence of Taymiyya on modern Islamism, see Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology And Modern Politics*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and Johannes Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁸² Cook, Michael. *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 151-156

⁸³ Jansen, *Dual Nature*, 33-39

It was through his work on the Mongols that Ibn Taymiyya established a boundary between true Islamic society and its non-Muslim enemies.⁸⁴ To Taymiyya, these enemies posed a threat not just to Syrian Muslims but to the religion of Islam itself. The scope of the threat meant that war against the Mongols was the foremost priority of the community. This argument would be largely forgotten until the Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb applied it to the modern world. This will be dealt with later in this paper.

Ibn Taymiyya called for a literalist interpretation of the sacred sources (the Qur'an and Sunnah) for what he saw as a crucially needed Islamic renewal and reform of his society.⁸⁵ These sources were his benchmark for orthodoxy. Like his ideological successors, he regarded the original community at Medina as the model for an Islamic state. Ibn Taymiyya sought the purification of Islam.⁸⁶ This purification would entail a return to the purity of the period when Muhammad and the first four Caliphs ruled, because Ibn Taymiyya believed that doing so was required for the Islamic community to gain its past glory and power. He also distinguished sharply between Islam and non-Islam (dar al-Islam and dar al-harb) the lands of belief and non-belief.⁸⁷ Dar al-harb can also be interpreted literally as war. Ibn Taymiyya is also important because he made a harsh distinction between religion and culture. Although a Sufi, he denounced as superstition the popular practices of his day such as veneration of shrines and tombs as well as saint worship. The act of denouncing popular practices within Islam would become a model for future Islamists to control populations and groups. The authority to say what is and what is not proper Islamic belief and practice can give Islamic extremists agency over community behaviors. Such a tactic would be developed further by Hasan al-Banna and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 40-65

⁸⁵ Esposito, John L. *Holy War: Terror In The Name Of Islam*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 46

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

2.3 The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood called for an Islamic form of the modern nation state and it may have been the first organization to do so. When the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt during the 1920s, the Muslim world was in turmoil. The Ottoman office of the Caliphate had been eliminated and replaced with a secular Turkish national republic. The Caliphate had long stood as a symbol for Muslim unity. At the same time that the Ummah was crumbling, the land of Islam was being divided up by Christian powers. Hasan al-Banna created the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in order to reclaim Islam's political dimension which he believed had been lost with the Caliphate. For al-Banna and his Brotherhood, Islam was as complete an ideological system as was possible on earth. They saw no need for European values to be included as a basis for social order. The Qur'an was the only moral authority. Its values were universal. This belief is the foundation of the whole Islamist movement and was al-Banna's greatest contribution to this construction. Whatever their other beliefs, all Islamists believe that the answer to fixing the Muslim world relies on the setting up of an Islamic state that will apply the law of Islam, the Shari' a, as the rule of law just as the earliest Caliphs had achieved in the past. Intellectual as well as physical battle lines were drawn between the Brothers and the Egyptian government. The government cracked down on the Islamists who wished to overthrow it. Therefore, the process of Islamization of the modern nation-state appears to have been started by Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood. A number of revolutionary groups that have subsided into primitive rebellion have been seen as a continuation of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Al-Banna called for a return to an original Islam and chronologically but not ideologically followed Islamic reformers like Muhammad Abduh. According to al-Banna, contemporary Islam had lost its social dominance, because most Muslims had been corrupted by Western influences.⁸⁸ The Brotherhood has been an illegal organization, tolerated to varying degrees, since 1954 when it was convicted of

⁸⁸ Küntzel, Matthias. *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11*. (New York, Telos Press Publishing, 2007) 17-19

attempting to assassinate Gamal Abdel Nasser, head of the Egyptian government. The Brotherhood denied involvement in an assassination conspiracy and accused the Egyptian government of fraud as a basis to persecute the group and its members. From 1954 until Nasser's death in 1971, thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members were systemically persecuted under Nasser's regime. Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, promised the Brotherhood that Shari'a would be implemented as the Egyptian law and released all of the Brotherhood prisoners. However, as a result of Sadat signing a peace agreement with Israel in 1979, an Islamist group other than the Brotherhood assassinated Sadat in September, 1981 based on a fatwa approved by Omar Abdel-Rahman.

The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest mass and now worldwide Islamist movement. Because of its long history, it has had a substantial impact on almost all other Islamist organizations in a variety of ways. Many have been inspired by it. Some, like Saudi Wahhabism, have collaborated with it and been profoundly influenced by that association. Others have grown out of it, led by defectors who ultimately rejected its approach and set a new and frequently violent course of their own. This includes al-Qaeda, the Brotherhood being one of bin Laden's first intellectual influences.

2.4 Inspiration From Abdul Ala Mawdudi and Ruhollah Khomeini

As Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood were persecuted in Egypt, Abul Ala Mawdudi was in Pakistan opposing the Muslim nationalism that had given birth to the state of Pakistan in 1947. Mawdudi wanted a state where power would be exercised in the name of Allah and the sharia and Qur'an would be the sole authority. The nationalists wanted a Muslim state on the Indian subcontinent; however, Mawdudi wanted all of India to become Muslim to which the Pakistan nationalists were opposed.⁸⁹ To Mawdudi, nationalism was immoral because its

⁸⁹ It is important to make clear the differences in these two designations. A Muslim State is a state that is governed for and by those who identify as Muslim. An Islamic State is a state that is governed by sharia law where everyone in the state is subject to a strict interpretation of Islam and must abide by that interpretation's social norms and values.

notion of a state was European-inspired. He said that politics were “an integral, inseparable part of the Islamic faith, and that the Islamic state that Muslim political action seeks to build is a panacea for all their problems.”⁹⁰ It was therefore through Mawdudi that Islam was turned from a religious tradition into an ideology for political struggle. However, it is interesting to note that Mawdudi fought his holy war by using the political system of Pakistan to his advantage rather than taking a radical stance of opposition to the political system itself. He formed the Jamaat-i-Islami as a political party which has existed legally for the majority of its history. The party’s social base has mostly been the Middle Class and the party has yet to appeal to the poor in Pakistan. The party has even been called an “ideological fraternity.”⁹¹ This is in part because the poorer classes in Pakistan do not read or speak Urdu which is the language used by Jamaat-i-Islami.

An excellent example of Mawdudi’s radical ideas can be found in his work, entitled *Four Technical Terms of the Qur’an*. Mawdudi writes that the gradual linguistic drift in the Arabic language had caused Muslims to move away from the true teachings of the Qur’an and the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-saleh*).⁹² This idea was picked up by other Islamists right through to Osama bin Laden and therefore various members of his Al Qaeda network including Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Ruhollah Khomeini brought about a Shiite intellectual revolution in Iran. Khomeini was the first leading Shiite cleric to endorse Islamist ideas. Up until Khomeini, Islamism was a Sunni construction. But Khomeini joined the Sunnis in preaching for the destruction of the institutional order. Being a cleric, Khomeini was able to galvanize supporters more effectively than the intellectual elites like al-Banna and Mawdudi who had gone before him. This is a key reason why the Shiite Islamic Revolution has had no equal in the Sunni world. An important con-

⁹⁰ Mawdudi, Sayyid Abdul A’la. *Fundamentals of Islam*. 1st Eng. Ed. (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1975) 249-250

⁹¹ Gwynne, Rosalind. Paper Review. Religious Studies 500. University of Tennessee Knoxville. 7 April 2008.

⁹² Mawdudi, Sayyid Abul A’la. *Four Technical Terms of the Qur’an*. 6th edition (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications Inc., 1989)

tribution of Khomeini to the Islamist construction was his ability to unite the classes and make Islamism appealing to everyone. However, Khomeini accepted the existence of the modern nation-state as legal despite his anti-Western rhetoric. His use of the word republic when referring to Iran betrays this fact.

2.5 Sayyid Qutb

Sayyid Qutb borrowed from these various other architects and, as has been mentioned earlier, added his own definitions and interpretations to this construction of Islamism⁹³. Qutb espoused both al-Banna and Mawdudi's notion of an Islamic state but broke with his notion of slowly transforming the state through political action. Instead, Qutb sought to create a revolution as a means to seize power much like Khomeini. For Qutb, it was the Islamist's duty to break immediately with a nationalist state and to seek its destruction.⁹⁴ In this way, Qutb saw Islam as an instrument for what he considered to be social justice. This is where Qutb reinvigorated a concept known as *Jahiliyyah* which he got from Mawdudi. Qutb called for a new Qur'anic generation to build a contemporary Islamic community on the ruins of Arab nationalism just as the Prophet and his generation had built the Muslim community on the ruins of Arab paganism. For Qutb, nationalism was *Jahiliyyah* just as much as being a non-Muslim. In some cases he combined the two by stating that nationalists were themselves takfir, or impure Muslims.⁹⁵ Literally, takfir means "calling someone a nonbeliever."⁹⁶

In the late 1940s, Qutb visited the United States. This came to be a turning point in his life. His trip transformed Qutb from being an admirer of the West into being one of its most severe critics. His experiences in America created a culture shock which made him more religious and convinced him of the moral decadence of the West. He was appalled by America's materialism, promiscuity, and

⁹³ On Sayyid Qutb, see Sivan, *Radical Islam*; and Jansen, *Dual Nature*

⁹⁴ Esposito, 43

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Gwynne, Rosalind. Paper Review. Religious Studies 500. University of Tennessee Knoxville. 7 April 2008.

alcohol consumption. Perhaps most importantly, Qutb was sickened by America's racism which he directly experienced because of his dark skin. His views on America are summed up in his influential book *Milestones* where he writes:

Look at this capitalism with its monopolies, its usury... this individual freedom, devoid of human sympathy and responsibility for relatives except under force of law; this materialistic attitude which deadens the spirit; this behavior, like animals, which you call "emancipation of women"... this evil and fanatic discrimination.⁹⁷

Qutb regarded the West as the historic enemy of Islam demonstrated by the crusades, European colonialism, and the Cold War.⁹⁸ The Western threat was religious, cultural, and political. Equally dreadful were Muslim state actors who governed according to Western values such as secularism which Qutb saw as threatening Islamic faith.⁹⁹ Qutb denounced all governments and Western secular-oriented elites.

Qutb translated the logic of Ibn Taymiyya's rulings on apostasy into a comprehensive perspective on the troubles of Islam in the modern world.¹⁰⁰ Qutb called on Muslims to make war on the ruling elites of both the Middle East and the greater planet. As Qutb saw it, a global evil threatened to annihilate Islam. Without an Islamic revolution, Islam would perish. "Mankind today," Qutb writes as the opening words of his book *Milestones*, "is on the brink of a precipice."¹⁰¹ Such thinking allowed Qutb and his ideological successors to divide the world into absolute categories of good and evil. Within these constructed catego-

⁹⁷ Qutb, Sayyid. *Milestones*. (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1990) 119

⁹⁸ Esposito, 61

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Esposito, 45

¹⁰¹ Qutb, 5

ries, groups can and do use violence as a way of cultural, political, and religious cleansing.

Al-Qaeda has been an ideological successor of Qutb. According to al-Qaeda, violence will avert Qutb's foreseen disaster and usher in a new Islamic world of prosperity.¹⁰² This is important in respect to the proliferation of suicide bombers in Iraq. Al-Qaeda is framing the United States as neo-Mongols whose authority is empowering an apostate government in Iraq. According to Al-Qaeda, under false rulers, Muslims suffer harm, oppression, and torture.¹⁰³ Therefore, suicide bombings can be presented as legitimate martyrdom operations and as acts of self defense. A 2004 survey of Iraqi citizens established that, outside of the Kurdish North, 81% of Iraqis considered coalition troops to be occupiers and not liberators.¹⁰⁴

2.6 The Godfather of Jihad

An important figure to look at in the spreading of Islamism is Abdallah Azzam (1941-1989). Azzam was a central figure in the global development of the militant Islamist movement.¹⁰⁵ Azzam was a teacher of Osama bin Laden's so it is of no great surprise that Al Qaeda in Iraq would use his concepts in their terrorism rhetoric.¹⁰⁶ Azzam was "the leading contemporary mouthpiece of the jihad, popularizing the concept of armed struggle that would be developed further in the 1990s

¹⁰² *Al-Qaeda Training Manual*, 8. The manual was discovered in the house of an Al Qaeda operative in May 2000. It was introduced as evidence at the trial of an accused bombers of the East African Embassy. A copy of the manual can be found at <http://www.justice.gov/ag/trainingmanual.html>

¹⁰³ Ibid, 7

¹⁰⁴ Soriano, Cesar G., and Steven Komarow. "Poll: Iraqis out of Patience," *USA Today*, 28 April 2004.

¹⁰⁵ Kepel, 144

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 145

by much more radical activists.”¹⁰⁷ In his work, entitled *Defense of the Muslim Lands: the First Obligation after Iman*, Azzam writes:

One of the most important lost obligations is the forgotten obligation of fighting. Because it is absent from the present condition of the Muslims, they have become as rubbish of the flood waters. Just as the Prophet (saw) said: "It is expected that the nations will call each other from all horizons, as diners calling each other to feast from a platter of food in front of them." A person asked the Prophet (saw) would that be because of our small number that day. The Prophet (saw) said, "No, but you will be rubbish like the rubbish of flood water. Allah will put Wahn into your hearts and remove the fear from the hearts of your enemies because of your love for the world and your hate of death". In another narration it was said: "and what is the Wahn, O messenger of Allah?" He (saw) said: "love of the world and the hate for fighting." Narrated by Ahmad with a good chain. Narrated by Abu Daud with the words "hate for death", and it is a sahih hadith.¹⁰⁸

In this text, Azzam is equating Muslims who do not fight “infidels” with those who have a “selfish” attachment to materialism. He makes this judgment by proclaiming that the reasoning behind not taking arms must be a love of “this worldly” matters as opposed to “other worldly” matters such as Allah. Therefore, the Mus-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 142

¹⁰⁸ Azzam, Abdullah. *Defence of the Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after Iman*.

http://www.religioscope.com/info/doc/jihad/azzam_defence_3_chap1.htm

Last visited December 4, 2006.

lims in question are comparing their staying alive to God and are thus committing the worst crime possible, which is shirk, associating something as being equal to God.

After the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Azzam's priority "was to demonstrate that the jihad in Afghanistan was an obligation for all good Muslims."¹⁰⁹ Azzam rose up against any man who called jihad "a collective obligation" (*fard kifaya*) to be left to the politicians.¹¹⁰ Instead, he insisted that jihad was an individual obligation (*fard ayn*) that every Muslim should participate in. Azzam labeled the Soviets as *kafir* or *kuffar* meaning ungodly and impious.¹¹¹ Azzam wrote:

Defensive Jihad—this is expelling the Kuffar from our land, and it is Fard Ayn, a compulsory duty upon all. It is the most important of all the compulsory duties and arises in the following conditions: 1) If the Kuffar enter a land of the Muslims. 2) If the rows meet in battle and they begin to approach each other. 3) If the Imam calls a person or a people to march forward then they must march. 4) If the Kuffar capture and imprison a group of Muslims.¹¹²

Here, Azzam demonstrates his interpretation of jihad. He presents an armed jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan as an Islamic cause that concerned all Muslims around the world. By saying that an Imam has the final say over fighting instead of politicians, Azzam struck a blow to understandings of government authority.

¹⁰⁹ Kepel, 146

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Ibid, 432

¹¹² Azzam,
http://www.religioscope.com/info/doc/jihad/azzam_defence_3_chap1.htm
 Last visited December 4, 2006

Azzam is a prime example of an Islamist reinterpreting Ibn Taymiyyah to suit his cause. He writes:

Sheikh Ibn Taymia says on this topic: "About the defensive jihad, which is repelling an aggressor, is the most tasking type of jihad. As agreed upon by everyone, it is obligatory to protect the religion and what is sacred. The first obligation after Iman is the repulsion of the enemy aggressor who assaults the religion and the worldly affairs."¹¹³

As has already been stated, the appropriation of Ibn Taymiyya has sought to legitimize various Islamist world views. In tracing the appropriation of Ibn Taymiyya, it is arguable that Azzam is one of the most important figures after Sayyid Qutb. Azzam has also used Ibn Taymiyya to affect the acceptance of Muslim casualties during war. He has done this by writing:

Ibn Taymia said in Majmua al Fatawa 28/537: "If with the Kuffar there are pious people from the best of mankind and it is not possible to fight these Kuffar except by killing them, then they are to be killed as well."¹¹⁴

By writing this, Azzam created a line of thought that other militants have built upon that justifies Muslim casualties during suicide bombing attacks within today's U.S. occupied Iraq. This statement also illustrates the extent to which Muslims rely heavily on the past for meaning and guidance in the present. It is very common for medieval and pre-modern theologians and movements to directly impact the world of Islam today. Azzam's has further complicated the current situation within Iraq by writing:

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Azzam,
http://www.religioscope.com/info/doc/jihad/azzam_defence_3_chap1.htm
 Last visited December 4, 2006

If the Jihad becomes Fard Ayn it nullifies the peace treaty such as when the enemy enters the Muslim lands or intends harm upon them. Fath Aliy of Malik 1/289 on the subject of peace treaties in Mayir in the chapter Jihad: “The Caliph signs a peace treaty with Christians but the Muslims feel the only solution is Jihad, then his peace treaty is annulled and his deed rejected.”¹¹⁵

By writing this, Azzam has constructed an argument that militants and suicide bombers use today in Iraq to justify the rejection of the coalition force working with Iraq’s government. These actors say that violent jihad is a noble course of action and those who carry out suicide attacks are often proclaimed to be martyrs.

The term ‘martyrdom’ has had an extraordinary transformation within Islam. The original use of the word in the Qur’an was “to bear witness.” Today’s more popular understanding of the term is to die a holy death. Martyrdom is Arabic *shahada*. This is from the term *shaheed* or witness. Whenever dying for Allah is mentioned in the Qur’an, one encounters phrases such as “slain in the cause of God” (II: 154)¹¹⁶. ‘The cause of God’ (Sabil Allah) has become the major expression understood to designate martyrdom. The combination of these two understandings of “to bear witness” and “martyrdom” in *shahada* serves to construct violent militants as both an icon of a holy death as well as a witness to the authenticity of Islam. In the Shi’ite tradition, Ali is quoted as saying “He who dies in the path of God does not die, but rather is immortalized.”¹¹⁷ However, David Cook points out that the Prophet’s life, which is taken as a template for all other Muslims to live by, did not end in martyrdom. Consequently, in contrast to Christianity for instance, martyrdom lies at the periphery of the Islamic tradition

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Cook, David. *Martyrdom in Islam: Themes in Islamic History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

¹¹⁷ Shahri, Muhammad Ray. *Martyrdom in the Nahj Albalagheh*. (Qum: Yaser Publications, n.d.) 9, 41

and not at its centre.¹¹⁸ In other words, martyrdom is not a traditional act of veneration associated with the Prophet Mohammad and is thus arguably not a chief component of practicing the tradition. This is substantiation for my argument that only extreme Islamist groups promote suicide bombings and Islam is not the foremost element in all suicide attacks.

¹¹⁸ Cook, 62

Chapter 3

Religious Persecution: An Iraq Survey

The population of Iraq is diverse. Its total population is about 25 million people who are divided ethnically between Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, and Turkomen with smaller groups like the Shabak making up the rest.¹¹⁹ Islam is the religion of the majority and Arabic is universally spoken outside of Iraq's northern Kurdistan area. The Shi'a comprise 60% of the total population. The Kurds count for 20% and the Sunnis make up about 18%.¹²⁰ Baghdad, which accounts for a quarter of the country's population, is a majority Shi'a city. Yet it has a large population of the country's Sunni. The upper areas of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers are mostly Sunni enclaves. Northern Iraq is a mixture of peoples and religions. The city of Mosul has a majority Sunni population but it includes important Kurdish and Christian populations. In Iraqi Kurdistan, the majority of the population is Sunni Muslim. Southern Iraq is overwhelmingly populated by the Shi'a. However, the city of Basra has an important Sunni minority. As has just been demonstrated, Iraq is a diverse and dynamic country. This chapter will disaggregate the conflict in Iraq to better fracture the monolithic moniker that it has been characterized with in American media and discourse. This thesis cannot adequately address an accurate portrait of Iraq's suicide bombers without first accurately addressing the contexts in which such actors are performing in.

3.1 The State of Modern Iraq

The modern country of Iraq emerged out of World War I. Iraq's boundaries were drawn by Great Britain with little to no input from its residents.¹²¹ Iraq had been

¹¹⁹ Allawi, Ali A. *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing The Peace*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 12

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ There are a number of contemporary works on Iraq after World War I. See, Dodge, Toby. *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-building and a History*

carved out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire. Originally, it included two Ottoman provinces of Baghdad and Basra. Mosul was added in 1926.¹²² These three provinces form the expanse of the modern state of Iraq. Iraq acquiesced to British rule from 1920 to 1947. This was followed by a shorter period of de facto British power until the nationalist revolt of 1958. This experience of European imperialism is relevant to the discourses and rhetoric being produced in Iraq today. For instance, many Iraqis see the U.S. mission of spreading democracy as a manifestation of neo-imperialism. This is because, even with the restoration of ostensible Iraqi sovereignty on June 28th 2004, the coalition force with its British allies is still very much in control of the country. Iraq's prior history under British rule has all but guaranteed that current U.S./British rule would be deeply resented.

Bitter personal memories of British dominance have been preserved by the older generations of Iraqis. Therefore, many Iraqi citizens have been predisposed to defend their national sovereignty by opposing occupation by Western powers, especially an occupation conducted with the inclusion of the British. Also, past U.S. policies in the region have helped to fuel Iraqi anger and resentment. The most notable policy has been the United States' close collaboration with Saddam Hussein against Iran in the 1980s. It was during this time period that some of his notorious human rights abuses were committed.¹²³ Adding to this bitterness are new grievances that Iraqis have with the coalition force. Military actions which have been aggressive to fight insurgents have produced a high toll of civilian death, wounding, and suffering. The number of Iraqi civilian casualties is con-

Denied. (London: Hurst and Co., 2003); Allawi, Ali A. *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing The Peace*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007)

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ International Center for Transitional Justice, "Iraqi Vices: Attitudes Toward Transitional Justice and Social Reconstruction," Human Rights Center (Berkeley: University of California, 2004)

tested.¹²⁴ The most scientifically conducted survey suggests that the total number of Iraqi death is higher than reported.¹²⁵

3.2 Human Rights Abuses

Saddam Hussein was able to consolidate his power as leader of the Iraqi state due to his extensive control of the country's internal security organization. He was able to effectively eliminate most opposition before it could take shape. He was quoted as saying:

I know there are scores of people plotting to kill me. I know they are conspiring to kill me long before they actually start planning to do so. This enables me to get them before they have the faintest chance of striking me.¹²⁶

This is a quote that Hussein lived by for the entirety of his dictatorship. He was able to transform the Ba'ath party into an extension of himself. He packed the party with people who were personally related to and loyal to him. Everything that the government did under Saddam Hussein was with the intention of ensuring the retention of power by the leadership.

The institutionalization of the Ba'athist party into Iraqi society was one of Hussein's paramount goals. The party was concentrated on penetrating society at every level. The politics of Iraq were controlled in the following ways: by creating an extensive internal party organization and fostering its growth; by maintaining a paramilitary organization that was loyal to the party; by attempting to bring other political groups into the system where they could be controlled; and by creating a

¹²⁴ "Many organizations keep track of Iraqi casualties—but no one knows the correct number for sure," International Herald Tribune, 16 January 2007.

¹²⁵ Brown, David. "Study Claims Iraq's 'Excess' Death Toll Has Reached 655,000," *Washington Post*, 11 October 2006.

¹²⁶ Karsh, 2.

National Assembly which gave promise to the public of a more representative leadership.¹²⁷

As has been mentioned, it is the recent events following the US occupation of Iraq which occupy a central place in this investigation. It has been during this period that suicide bombers have appeared in Iraq and it is within this context that Iraqis have been fighting a modern military in hopes of preventing what some of them see as colonial-like powers from taking control of Iraq. As Iraqi hard power and international prestige has diminished, sectarian sentiments¹²⁸ have become a pervasive aspect within the Iraqi political and social spheres. As has been common in other Middle Eastern countries experiencing Islamic sectarian differences, religious institutions became involved in the propagation of sectarian rhetoric. As a consequence, many citizens began to reinterpret the importance and function of their religious tradition so as to remain in step with growing sectarian sentiments.

For our investigation, we have to think about ways in which religion, politics, and culture interact. The University of Chicago religious historian Bruce Lincoln has investigated the Muslim bombers of 9/11 in an effort to analyze the textual

¹²⁷ Lafta, Burnham G. R. Doocy, and Roberts, L. 2006. "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey. *The Lancet*, 368 (9545)

¹²⁸ It is difficult to determine when some Iraqi citizens started to identify more as part of a religious sect than as part of a nation. With the fall of Saddam Hussein from power, various Shiite communities sought to punish Sunni individuals who had abused their power under Saddam. Communities formed local militias almost immediately after the US invasion to carry out revenge killings. Yet is it not certain what the role that such militias have played has been in the dismembering of Iraqi nationalism. Nevertheless, one can say with relative certainty that the process of sectarianism began in earnest following the US invasion in 2003. In the years following the initial invasion, most Iraqi citizens have recognized a fluid sectarian divide within their nation.

detritus that links religion to the motivations of the 9/11 bombers.¹²⁹ However, Lincoln is not a specialist in Islamic Studies, but rather a comparativist and theorist. As Lincoln has noted, religion is culturally bound, historically recent, and discursively loaded.¹³⁰ Religion is also historically specific. The extent to which religion penetrates and controls other aspects of culture becomes more evident in instances of cultural contact.¹³¹ The contact produced from the Western occupation of Iraq along with the cultural and political upheaval that the occupation has caused certainly constituted an atmosphere for religious change if we accept the premise that religion is culturally bound. Yet it is important to also remember that no definition of religious theory is universal and the same for all people in all places. Therefore, one can use Bruce Lincoln's assessment that religion is culturally bound, historically recent, and discursively loaded to help map out the ways in which religion, politics, and culture interact in Iraq but we must be careful not to emphasize this argument as the preeminent and sole reason for growing sectarian differences within the country.

3.3 Defining Religious Persecution

For the purposes of the empirical portion of this study, religious persecution is defined as constraints, destruction, injury, fear, and death placed on those of a particular religious tradition or organization, who are in a minority in an area, which are not placed on those in the majority. This definition implies prejudice and differential treatment. Also, this definition does not include restrictions which are economic in nature. An attempt to define persecution will be revisited throughout this chapter.

3.4 Thinking About National Identity

There are two ways of thinking about national identity. The first is that all people who are citizens within a country's borders are part of the nation regardless of

¹²⁹ Lincoln, Bruce. *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

¹³⁰ Ibid, 2

¹³¹ Ibid, 3

their racial, ethnic, or religious identity. This can be termed civic nationalism. The second is that nations are characterized by a shared heritage which can include a common culture, language, religious tradition, and ancestry. This can be termed ethnonationalism.¹³² It is through this second view that one can understand the complexities of religious persecution in Iraq. Ethnonationalism draws much of its power from the subjective belief in the reality of a common “we.” Communal boundaries therefore have significance. As Walker Connor has noted, “[i]t is not what is, but what people believe is that has behavior consequences.”¹³³ When the markers that distinguish the in-group of a nation deteriorate, the national cohesiveness also deteriorates and with it the possibility for conflict increases. In Iraq’s case, the conflict has most often been characterized by Western media as being sectarian in nature.

In regard to the suicide bomber, as with other non-state actors (NSA) participating in disruptive conduct and terrorism, the process of aligning him or herself with the understood growing trend of sectarianism has been exacerbated by the fact that American-led coalition troops made a concentrated effort to suppress Imams and other Islamic leaders engaged in anti-Western and anti-American rhetoric.¹³⁴ This religiously and politically backed rhetoric has been proclaimed by those hoping to further American strategic power as unauthentic Islam, and these individuals have sought to replace it with sanctioned pro-Western Islamic discourse. Coalition troops minimized access into and out of communities where groups who espoused anti-Western rhetoric wielded control.¹³⁵ There can be no doubt that such a crackdown must have fueled some Iraqis to feel it necessary to prove

¹³² Connor, Walker. *Ethnonationalism: The Quest For Understanding*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 218

¹³³ Ibid

¹³⁴ A. William Samii, “Shia Political Alternatives in Postwar Iraq,” in *Middle East Policy Council Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer 2003), available from http://www.mepc.org/public_asp/journal_vol10/0306_samii.asp

¹³⁵ Ibid

their Islamic and or Iraqi identity in juxtaposition to the largely Judeo-Christian forces who have sought to wield power over their community.

3.5 The Disintegration of Iraq

Our insights into the construction of Islamism and sectarianism help to explain the conflict that has erupted in Iraq since the US-led invasion in 2003. The various Sunni and Shiite Islamist groups who are often in opposition to one another are also openly in opposition to Iraqi nationalism. Once again, it is on the Islamist agenda to destroy nationalist ideology with the intention of substituting one vision of world community for another. Furthermore, it is safe to say that political disintegration and reformulation can lead to the demonization of people who were not demons before. This helps to explain the rapidity by which communities were degraded along sectarian lines. Five years after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, scholars and military experts alike still continue to debate the reasons why the United States so far has failed to quell the sectarian violence for postwar reconstruction in Iraq. The lack of adequate security has been identified as a central problem to postwar reconstruction. In its final report, the Iraq Study Group, headed by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton, called for significant troop reductions as a way of reconfiguring the Coalition presence and slowing Islamic resurgence.¹³⁶

The roaming of sectarian death squads in the Iraqi streets has led to the deteriorating of religious and ethnic divides. The demand for vengeance against former Ba'athist party members, who are seen as being responsible for the country's 24 year-long repression, has led to the killing of countless Sunnis in the past five years. These killings have been "more pronounced in areas in the South and Sadr City (which) suffered most from Ba'athist repression."¹³⁷ Such killings can be seen as a response by people seeking justice who have lost confidence in the U.S. and

¹³⁶ Baker, III, James A. and Lee H. Hamilton. *The Iraq Study Group Report*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) 61

¹³⁷ Allawi, Ali A. *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 145

its allies' ability to bring said justice. The decision to bring Ba'athist party members back into government no doubt served to reinforce this loss of confidence. It should safely be assumed that the fact that the U.S. has seemed concerned with only arresting the elite members of the former autocratic regime, known as the "pack of cards," while leaving the implementers of the regime free, has spurred on this conflict. Religious leaders appear to sanction such killings. Work by the death squads, which were originally against those who could be clearly identified by past victims or by reputations, quickly escalated.

The membership lists of the Ba'ath party and intelligence operatives began to be widely circulated, following the seizure of document caches after the fall of Baghdad. Death squads started to work on these lists and, by June 2003, the killings began to include academics, teachers, bureaucrats, artists, journalists, and professionals who were seen as part of the regime's control and repression apparatus.¹³⁸

Reaction to Shi'ite death squads resulted in the creation of Sunni death squads seeking retaliation. A new special police commando unit had been organized by a "Saddam-era" general named Adnan Thabit who was the uncle to Iraq's Minister of the Interior.¹³⁹ These Special Police Commandos, drawn from former Saddam-era special forces and the Republican Guard, were supposed to feature importantly in various "counter-insurgency operations in late 2004 and early 2005, notably in the Samarra area."¹⁴⁰ However, these units did not end sectarian killings. Instead, the Ministry of Interior's elite Special Police heralded the growth of a death squad culture under official sanction.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 145

¹³⁹ Ibid, 319

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 319

3.6 The Role of Privilege

According to Max Weber, the state is the most pivotal sight of authority in the modern nation.¹⁴¹ He says that states are found in all modern societies with a complex division of labor.¹⁴² Weber defines a state as “a collection of interlocking institutions that claim a monopoly over the means of domination in a given territory.”¹⁴³ The state partially justifies its domination because of its role as sole protector (agent) designated to protect its population from foreign aggressors. If there is not a real foreign threat to the nation, the state sometimes artificially manufactures threats to justify its dominance over the national population.¹⁴⁴ Internal law and order (courts, police, prisons) are also things that the state tries to monopolize.¹⁴⁵

The Sunni led Ba’athist regime of pre-occupied Iraq had considered Iran’s influence in Iraq to be the most prevalent danger to the Iraqi state. The regime worried about the Sunni minority’s future in a country with a clear Shi’a majority which may or may not have held secret sectarian loyalties to Iran. These fears led to the state domination of the Shi’a people and to their brutal repression at the will of Saddam Hussein. Arguing that Iran posed an imminent threat to Iraqi security, the Ba’athist regime was able to construct a framework in which it could claim justification for its brutal treatment of dissent within the country. It was through this repressive state security mechanism that millions of Shi’a were put to death. I argue that it is the communal memories of the Shi’a, remembering how the Iraqi state used its role as protector to brutally dominate the largest contingent of its national population, which helped “sectarian” violence erupt within the nation after the initial occupation by American led forces. Furthermore, I argue that

¹⁴¹ Gulick, John. “The Modern State.” Class Lecture. Sociology 344. University of Tennessee Knoxville. 10 February 2003.

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

violent Sunni actors operating in Iraq today still use this argument for the propagation of violence against Iraq's Shi'a population. Pamphlets and martyrdom videos by Sunni identified Iraqi militants, including suicide bombers, openly discuss their fear that Iran will dominate a post-occupied Iraq and seek to restore a type of regional control that the Persian Empire had in the sixteenth century.¹⁴⁶ It is this history of the state privileging of one social group over another that has inflamed tensions in Iraq and escalated the violence.

3.7 The Role of Power

The role of power in any societal divergence is important to investigate. Power has the ability to shape and frame choices in a way that limits the options of an individual or social group to a restricted few. This forces such individuals or groups into a decision that forwards the agenda of the controlling party(ies). That is why this thesis characterizes power as an expression of illegitimate domination. Power can be defined as:

“the ability of an individual or social group to pursue a course of action, make decisions, and implement decisions, shaping the over all agenda for individuals and groups. If necessary, such actions are done against other individuals or social groups or in opposition to other individuals or social groups.”¹⁴⁷

Interests of the nation state can overlap with interests of social groups who view the reliability of the societal status quo as fundamental to the continued existence of the nation.¹⁴⁸ In this way, it is explainable why many Iraqis construct the argument that the integrity of Islamic culture should be protected by the Muslim state.

¹⁴⁶ Grange, David L. 2007 “Forging An Iran Strategy,” *Journal of International Security Affairs*. (12) 73

¹⁴⁷ Gulick, John. “Exercise of Political Power.” Class Lecture. Sociology 344. University of Tennessee Knoxville. 15 January 2003.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

These people understand that the character of their nation is dependent upon particular cultural and religious norms and values. Choices that are perceived as falling outside of this character are seen as degenerate and are limited by the controlling parties. These values also have a way of reinforcing the power wielded by the state or NSAs trying to overthrow the state.

3.8 Al Gharib

The divide between Sunnis and Shiites can be seen as a fault line in Iraqi society. With tensions between the two religious groups already high, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a long time associate of Osama bin Laden, began actions for expelling the U.S. allied occupying force. Al-Zarqawi adopted a “two-pronged” strategy to alienate U.S. allies and destabilize the country.¹⁴⁹ He sought to isolate U.S. forces by driving out its allies. More importantly, al-Zarqawi had the goal of precipitating civil war. He launched a series of attacks on the Shiite leadership, holy Shiite sites, and Shiite civilians on the street.¹⁵⁰ Al-Zarqawi excelled in assassinations and destruction. In a letter to al-Zarqawi dated July 9, 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri of al-Qaeda questioned the wisdom of inflaming Sunni-Shiite hatred and al-Zarqawi became known within the Islamic resurgence movement as al Gharib (the foreigner) “because of his extreme views.”¹⁵¹ All of these actions were elements that led to the politics of religious persecution becoming a huge factor in Iraqi society.

The concept of persecution must be delineated in a way that accounts for the various individuals and groups that this paper examines. Some persecutors would appear to have at least partial state sanction for their violent acts. Other persecutors appear to have little more backing than their neighbors in segments of residential areas. Therefore persecution, in the most direct and significant sense, can be seen as an effort by an organization, group, or government to repress activities by a given religious group, ordinarily with the goal of eliminating that group in

¹⁴⁹ Riedel, Bruce. 2007 “Al Qaeda Strikes Back.” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*. 86 (3) 27

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 28

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 28

the long or short term. This paper has the difficult task of identifying nuances separating religious persecution from other forms of repression in Iraq based on ethnic, racial, and political factors. Since the Sunni connection to the Ba'athist regime most certainly was the catalyst to the sectarian divide, can one properly describe Sunni persecution in strictly religious terminology? Presumably not, especially since Sunnis were often identified in the early days of the conflict simply by their last name. In this case, we should probably speak of a multi-pronged conflict rather than a strictly religious one. However, since religious identification has come to embody this conflict as a primary category by which both Iraqi insiders and outsiders classify it, understanding this conflict through the lens of religious persecution is warranted.

3.9 Religious Legitimacy

A second reason for looking at this conflict through a religious lens is the fact that, as Michael Hudson said thirty years ago, “the central problem of government today in the Arab world is political legitimacy.”¹⁵² This is as true today as it was when it was first stated. Political legitimacy in Iraq has come to be equated with religious legitimacy by various individuals and groups. Protestors against the present Iraqi status-quo often object on Islamic and Islamist grounds. However, these people are using a religious lens to protest and understand a political culture.

First, if persecuted religious groups are to survive, they often do so by developing active and effective military traditions.¹⁵³ In a threatening environment, groups must often develop defenses. Second, groups that resist persecution often develop ideologies that explain their suffering and promise rewards for themselves and punishment for their persecutors.¹⁵⁴ In opportune terms for this paper, this

¹⁵² Hudson, Michael. *Arab Politics: The Search For Legitimacy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997)

¹⁵³ Seiple, Robert A. and Dennis R. Hoover. Eds. *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations*. (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004) 28

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 29

means that persecuted groups are prone to martyrdom. Third, persecution can change the internal dynamic of a tradition, to concentrate power and prestige in the hands of a clerical elite.¹⁵⁵ Such reality helped give rise to national Iraqi figures like Muqtada al-Sadr.

3.10 Death in Iraq

In October 2006, the British medical journal *Lancet* published a report on the killings in Iraq.¹⁵⁶ This followed an earlier work in the journal published in 2004. The 2006 report surmised that the total deaths in Iraq between the period of March 2003 and July 2006 may have exceeded 650,000 people. The *Lancet* study has been condemned by U.S. and British policymakers, yet experts find it credible. If it proves to be true, then there has been a killing of Iraqis at a much higher number than had been predicted or has been reported. Added to such bloodshed has been the displacement of Iraqis in an unparalleled campaign of sectarian and ethnic cleansing. This displacement has affected all of Iraqi society. The Brookings Institution-University of Berne Project on International Displacement has found that nearly 1.6 million people have been displaced internally since March 2003.¹⁵⁷ The Brookings-Berne report deals only with those displaced as a direct result of sectarian-induced violence. The report states that “by September 2006, nearly 250,000 people had fled their homes because of fear, intimidation, or threats.”¹⁵⁸ Most of the displaced people have come from mixed neighborhoods of major cities such as Baghdad or Mosul. The report emphasizes that most of those displaced since the Samarra bombings have been Sunnis fleeing from Shi’a areas. Such a report shows that community bonds that have previously kept Iraqi society resilient are disintegrating. Shiite power is showing signs of breaking down as well.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 31

¹⁵⁶ Lafta, 368

¹⁵⁷ Al-Khadali, Ashraf. and Victor Tanner. “Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq.” *The Brookings Institution-University of Berne Project on Internal Displacement*. October 2006.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

3.11 Iraqi Justice

This forces us to ask the question of what types of representations of justice does Iraqi society generate? What are the rhetorics of such justice? What are the Iraqi cultural positions on justice? Conflicts are very ideological. Groups and individuals such as suicide bombers use the ethos of justice to help drive their conflicts. Yet this idea must be nuanced and we must ask ourselves what effect the rhetoric of the extremists, be they political, cultural, or religious, has on NSAs such as suicide bombers.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi declared war on Iraq's Shi'a using the language of justified violence. In referring to the Shi'a as "the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom" he declared them kuffar.¹⁵⁹ Zarqawi did this claiming that it was in response to a U.S./Iraqi Army offensive along the northwestern border with Syria. He claimed that Sunni Muslims were being unfairly persecuted and that the Shi'a were to blame. With only a small contingent of Sunnis backing him, Zarqawi said he had "decided to launch a comprehensive war on the Shiites all over Iraq, wherever and whenever they are found. This is revenge...Take care because we are not going to have mercy on you."¹⁶⁰

3.12 Iraqi Freedom

Of special importance is the perceived religious persecution that Iraqi citizens understand themselves to be under as the victim of the U.S. led occupational force. For example, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is a government agency tasked with monitoring religious freedom around the world and it advises the U.S. executive and legislative branches. It was also tasked with incorporating strong protections for religious freedom in the new con-

¹⁵⁹ Stanley, Trevor. "Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi: The Osama bin Laden of Iraq." *Perspectives on World History and Current Events* (PWHCE) 8

¹⁶⁰ Knickmeyer, Ellen. and Naseer Nouri, "Insurgents Kill 160 in Baghdad," *Washington Post* (16 September 2005) 1

stitution of Iraq.¹⁶¹ As such, Iraqis have understood the campaign to secure religious freedom in Iraq as a Christian agenda to proselytize and convert Muslims to Christianity.¹⁶² Indeed, frustrated by the Islamic ban on conversions, would-be Christian missionaries have called for the removal of Islamic restrictions that obstruct their drive to convert Muslim Iraqis.¹⁶³ Furthermore, this understanding that the promotion of religious freedom in Iraq was linked to the spreading of Christianity was reinforced by Kansas Senator Sam Brownback. Senator Brownback insisted that the Interim Iraqi Constitution incorporate the right to religious freedom. Brownback is a leader of the Christian right and shortly after he made his assertion Kyle Fisk of the National Association of Evangelicals proclaimed that a free Iraq would become the base for proselytizing throughout the Middle East.¹⁶⁴

Surveys show that Iraqis perceive themselves to be persecuted by the U.S. led coalition force. A poll conducted in August 2007 found that 79% of Iraqis opposed the presence of coalition forces, 80% disapproved of the way coalition forces had performed, and 86% had little to no confidence in the forces as a whole. More importantly, accusations of mistreatment were widespread. 41% reported unnecessary violence against Iraqi citizens with an understood bias towards Islam and Arabs. 57% of Iraqis called attacks on coalition forces acceptable.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Galbraith, Peter W. *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006)

¹⁶² Al-Istrabadi, Feisal Amin. "Reviving Constitutionalism in Iraq: Key Provisions of the Transitional Administrative Law," *New York Law School Law Review* 50 (2005/2006): 225-226

¹⁶³ Ibid, 226

¹⁶⁴ Allawi, Ali. *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 226

¹⁶⁵ Langer, Gary. *Iraqis Own Assessment: Few See Security Gains: ABC News/BBC/NHK National Survey of Iraq Finds Worsening Public Attitudes*. ABC NEWS, 10 September 2007

Sunni clerics have used their podiums in mosques to encourage the public to support the insurgency and to call for holy war against the U.S. led coalition force.¹⁶⁶

3.13 Sacred Space in an Imagined Space

The use of mosques to hide militants and weapons is another cause for Iraqis to see themselves as being persecuted by the largely Christian coalition force. Christian soldiers, within the boundaries of sacred space, no doubt offend the religious sensibilities of many Iraqi Muslims. Yet soldiers routinely raid mosques and find explosives, guns, ammunition, mortars, and so on.¹⁶⁷ Counter-insurgency operations are understood to desecrate these religious spaces. Furthermore, assaults on these locations can and do result in damage to the religious sites that house these spaces. This damage can be physical but it can also be incorporeal. Sacred sites that have been defiled by infidels can be rendered profane. As such, coalition troops defiling a mosque by entering it can be seen as just as destructive as if they were to demolish the site completely. Various Muslim traditions take their own liberties in interpreting the restrictions on non-Muslims entering mosques. Saudi Arabia, for example, firmly disallows the entry of non-Muslims into a 15 mile zone around the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.¹⁶⁸ More damaging than the destruction of sacred sites is the destruction of neighborhood communities.

3.14 The Refugee Crises

The conflict in Iraq increasingly bears the mark of sectarian polarization and “cleansing” in neighborhoods formerly of mixed religious orientation. Some argue that displacement has become a tool of war and the means for feuding networks and groups to establish territorial control. Overall living standards have declined

¹⁶⁶ Wong, Edward. “In Shift, Rebel Iraqi Cleric Backs New Government He Had Once Mocked,” *New York Times*. 12 June 2004, A5

¹⁶⁷ Wong, Edward. “G.I.’s Report Killing 36 Insurgents Around Kufa Mosque That Held Arms.” *New York Times*, 24 May 2004, A11

¹⁶⁸ Robinson, Gordon. *Arab Gulf States: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates*. (Hawthorn: Lonely Planet Publications, 1996) 354

sharply. Direct personal threats, abductions, assassinations, and death are commonplace. Many middle-class and upper-class Iraqis with the means to leave have already done so. Religious belief, political or tribal affiliation, or association with occupational forces or Iraqi state authorities all can make someone a target for violence. Displacement can be the result of sectarian conflict and general armed violence, local criminal activity, military operations, and fighting among militias and insurgents, all of which have contributed to decreased security and an atmosphere of generalized fear for many ordinary Iraqis. The movement was predominantly in and between urban areas — with more than 70% fleeing Baghdad. In general throughout Iraq, patterns have shown that Shi'as have moved from the center to the south; Sunnis from the south to the upper center; Christians fled to Ninevah and Kurds ended up within Diyala or Kirkuk.¹⁶⁹

The violence and insecurity resulting from the ongoing sectarian strife, terrorism, and insurgency in Iraq have had a marked impact on civilian displacement in different parts of the country. Many of Iraq's neighbors fear that they are being overwhelmed by refugees fleeing over Iraq's borders. There are now heightened concerns about the absorptive capacity of neighboring countries, their ability to provide adequately for the populations moving across borders, and the impact of refugee flows on stability in general. It is possible that the Iraq situation could well begin to outpace other refugee crises worldwide. The refugee crises also attests to how complicated the current conflict is in Iraq. Contrary to Benjamin Barber's view, all Muslim groups are not cooperating with one another in opposition to the West. Groups and movements within Iraq are in violent opposition to one another. Yet coalition force spokesmen often frame Iraqi conflict as being the result of al-Qaeda interference. In order for a more accurate and nuanced view, conflict in Iraq must be seen as a variety of different concurrent movements as opposed to one monolithic phenomenon.

¹⁶⁹ International Organization for Migration (IOM) "Iraq Displacement 2006 Year in Review," January 2007 and "Iraq Displacement 2007 Mid-Year Review," July 2007

Chapter 4

Bombs over Baghdad:

How Militants Are Shaping Iraq Today

Because of the social and historical demographics of Iraq, I argue that it is necessary to understand Iraqi suicide bombings as a variety of different concurrent movements as opposed to one monolithic phenomenon. I demonstrate this multiple nature of the Iraqi insurgency by examining three different social groups and their movements. Given the understood sectarian affiliations within Iraq's population, religion is the single biggest signifier that is used by analysts to identify insurgent groups. Therefore, I focus on movements and groups within the typology of Sunni, Shi'a, and transnational. However, factional motivation must also be highlighted in order to further disaggregate the phenomena of suicide bombers. The Shi'ites, Sunnis, and transnationals are all characterized by differing social bases, motivations, and organizing strategies. Each of these three groups in turn holds numerous tendencies within. The breakdowns are aimed at not only giving a typological structure to the Iraqi insurgency, but at flushing out subdivisions within each category. In this respect, the categories of insurgents outlined in this thesis are intended to be functional, assigning specific attributes to each category and sub category of violent actors which will better assist U.S. policymakers in identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and divisions between insurgent groups.

4.1 Collective Identity Among Violent Actors

Violent actors who operate within or in the name of the groups covered in this chapter foster a sense of social and collective identity. Social identity is defined as:

that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value

and emotional significance attached to that membership.¹⁷⁰

This is a limited definition of identity but it is helpful because it is a definition that assumes that some aspects of an individual's view of him- or herself are contributed by an understood social membership. Identity is related to a particular group's common sense psychology which suggests a set of ideologies and rationalizations about causes in everyday life. These explanations serve the function of legitimating actions including violent ones. Narratives are therefore an important object of study in this chapter. Narratives can be defined as constituting a collection of stories, beliefs, aspirations, experiences, histories and current explanations that a group holds about itself and about its surroundings.¹⁷¹ They coherently interrelate historical and recent events and provide a larger meaning system into which social identities are incorporated.¹⁷² This includes how violent actors construct social reality and make inferences about causes in daily life. These explanations are to a large extent historical in that they are specific to particular periods and tend to change over time.¹⁷³ Therefore, this chapter will address Iraq's recent history as well as the most powerful groups who operate within it in order to investigate the country's current narratives of violent actors and suicide attacks.

Typically, actors engage in suicide bombings when (1) a national community is occupied by a foreign power; (2) the foreign power is of a different religion; and (3) the foreign power is a democracy.¹⁷⁴ Of nine occupations that have bred sui-

¹⁷⁰ Tajfel, Henri. *Human Groups and Social Categories*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 255

¹⁷¹ Salomon, Gavriel (2004) "A Narrative-Based View of Coexistence" *Education Journal of Social Issues* 60 (2), 275-76

¹⁷² Ibid, 277

¹⁷³ Moghaddam, F. M. *Social Psychology: Exploring Universals Across Cultures*. (New York: Freeman, 1998) 158-60

¹⁷⁴ Pape, Robert A. *Dying To Win: The Strategic Logic Of Suicide Terrorism*. (New York: Random House, 2005) 80

cide bombers, eight met all three conditions, and the last, the Turkish Kurds, met two.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, suicide terrorism is a brutal tactic for collective liberation. Suicide attacks occur on the whole as a part of an organized and coherent campaign where individual after individual voluntarily kills him or herself as a method to eliminate the maximum number of people in a target force, community, or society. This can be executed with the intention of forcing a state to end an occupational campaign.

A recurring problem in the study of Iraq's violent conflict is a lack of data that have the breadth, depth, and historical accuracy to provide insight as to why, at the individual level, people are participating in the disruption of the status quo through suicide attacks. The challenge is to construct a theoretical bridge to facilitate interaction between the state and organized NSAs who are in a competition for control. The individuals and groups who fuel both sides of this competition base decisions to participate in violent conflict on a framework founded in rational actor theory that has been modified by their perception of culture, community, and religion. Groups who wish to recruit individuals into their insurgency apply incentives and disincentives selectively to compel membership. These incentives can include coercion through economic, cultural, or religious appeal as well as outright force.

NSAs who engage in suicide bombings are competing with the state through political rebellion and destructive force in order to bring about change at the societal and political level. The suicide bomber's goal is the modification of authority within a state. A prolonged movement of suicide terrorism requires significant community support in order for the violent actors to be accepted as martyrs and to replace their membership. The networks of NSAs engaged in suicide terrorism hope that their martyr propaganda will influence social responses to suicide attacks. Positive social responses are paramount because a full scale insurgency requires control. Suicide bombings require monetary funds to support the construction of bombs and the payments to families of suicide bombers. Networks that fuel suicide bombings in Iraq therefore require control at local levels to ensure

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

profits from *other* illegal activities such as drug smuggling, kidnapping, and mercenary killings.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, these networks maximize their financial gains through localized control of neighborhoods and communities. To attain the ultimate goal of liberation from occupation, violent groups similarly require control at the local level.

When societal responses are not positive and do not adequately facilitate NSAs such as suicide bombers, these actors turn to the tactics of coercion and intimidation. Coercion has the ability to manipulate a community and the community's perceptions of society within which it exists. The individuals within a community share a common framework for assessing the values of benefits and costs in making rational decisions. This in turn affects the control that a network of violent actors has over an individual. The dynamic of control by an individual or group allows for the shaping of the expectations of the associated costs of action both within a community and within a nation-state. As individuals believe in the controls of violent NSAs, the power of violent NSAs grows.¹⁷⁷ The result is a self-perpetuating mechanism of control over both the individual and the community.

Individuals participate in violent acts such as suicide bombings because their perspective of society leads them to rebellion against occupation. The decision to participate in suicide attacks comes about because the individual determines that participation is the most effective means to achieve his or her desires. In other words, suicide terrorism works. Would-be suicide bombers make reasonable assessments of the relationship between the bomber's coercive efforts and the political gains that have been achieved in past conflicts. Violent NSAs, like all people, learn from experience. However, the analysis here seeks to determine why NSAs are increasingly attracted to the specific coercive strategy of suicide attacks. At the core of the decisions addressed in this thesis is the rational choice model of decision making. Individuals are rational beings. Individuals weigh the benefit of action and the expectation of receiving that benefit minus the cost of the decision

¹⁷⁶ Miller, 253

¹⁷⁷ Leites, Nathan. and Charles Wolfe. *Rebellion and Authority : An Analytical Essay of Insurgent Conflicts* (Chicago: The Rand Corporation, 1970) 28-46

and the expectation of receiving that decision. NSAs are any individual or group who desire to wield control over a fixed political space. Their motives may be religious or they may be economic; in any case the NSA desires to usurp the authority of the existing state to achieve its own agenda.

Iraqi NSAs are in a constant state of competition with the Iraqi government. They apply incentives selectively to individuals to compel submission or membership. A selective incentive is any input, benefit or cost, in a rational decision that provides a motive or deterrence for an individual to take a particular course of action, or counts as a reason for preferring one choice to any alternatives. The incentives are not universal to everyone, nor are they always applied. NSAs with control in a community apply incentives or disincentives to influence the rational decision making of specific individuals and groups. In Iraq, NSAs use threats of violence towards individuals to gain compliance. For example, Sunni suicide bombings are often but not always an example of the multi-faceted Sunni insurgency which has targeted Shi'a groups with the intention of insuring that the Shi'a continue to acquiesce to the Sunni Arabs' political authority. NSAs use personal harm as a disincentive for going against them.

Expectations are directly linked to selective incentives and the general perception of benefits and costs. Individuals associate an expectation of receiving a benefit or cost when they make rational decisions. Individuals also tie expectations to the selective incentives based on the credibility of the individual offering them. Therefore, it is easy to understand why Iraqi NSAs from both the Shi'a and Sunni sects established themselves as capable of violence early on in the occupation. The knowledge that a network or group is capable of inflicting harm, even at the expense of their own person, provides high expectations of costs. It is dangerous to clash with them.

The reasons individuals resort to becoming suicide bombers are troubling and difficult to understand. One of the first steps to understanding suicide bombers is to look at how they are able to develop the control necessary to get groups or communities to give a positive social response to allow for bomber replenishment and monetary support. To explain the reasons for participation, this thesis has de-

veloped a framework that explains why and how an individual or group makes decisions that lead them to become violent NSAs and suicide bombers.

This theory starts from the basis that individuals are rational actors. Using the rational actor as the foundation, this thesis can define how suicide bombers are able to recruit from the communities they affect. Within the supply based analysis of insurgencies developed by Lienes and Wolf,¹⁷⁸ it is explained that by using selective incentives, a network of violent actors are able to mobilize resources. Within this section we are looking at examples of mobilizing participation and the development of coercion. This thesis argues that when common frameworks are established and understood throughout a community, then the control that the suicide bomber has developed will be clear to see.

Through research, this thesis has identified specific cultural and environmental characteristics that contribute to suicide bombings. These characteristics are viewed as additional conditions. These characteristics are not directly tied to suicide bombings but further explain why individuals participate in such acts of violent expression. These additional conditions explain the phenomenon that gives actors specific values for cost, benefit, and expectations for rational decisions. This author also believes that these additional conditions also need to be understood to see a more nuanced picture of why people become suicide bombers.

Individuals decide to act as described by the rational actor model. An actor weighs the value of the benefit and the expectation of receiving that benefit, minus the value of cost and the expectation of that cost to determine whether to participate in a suicide attack. The equation is simple. The important aspect of the equation is that it is continuously being applied to all decisions. Any group or network that exerts control through coercion over a community can change the significance of the community's cultural norms and values. Therefore, it is possible to derive motivators for making single decisions and place them in the overall framework of a positive societal response. The outcome of this process is a determination of how shared norms and values provide information that actors use in making decisions when a violent network has control over community hegemony.

¹⁷⁸ Leites, 28-46

An actor will work towards its preferences but selective incentives will construct boundaries around an actor's actions. The ultimate qualifier for communities to support suicide bombings is a change in community control exerted by a group or state other than the recognized state or government. When looking at a suicide bomber's environment, all decisions are greatly influenced by the coercion and control exerted in a community. Suicide bomber networks are able to exist because they have established control over time. As violent actors establish their ability to control large communities, states see a reduction in their ability to wield authority.

Networks and organizations only implement suicide attacks if their community approves of its use.¹⁷⁹ "A careful study of all the organizations that have resorted to terrorism since 1983 suggested that the most meaningful distinction among them involves the degree to which suicide bombing is institutionalized."¹⁸⁰ Brian Jenkins, a terrorism expert, agrees. "I think we'd all agree that suicide bombing is abnormal. The fact that abnormal behavior is applauded in the community reflects abnormal conditions. If normal conditions are restored, then normal behavior should return—at least they would be less tolerant of abnormal behavior."¹⁸¹ Why would a community view suicide bombing as an accepted norm and value? The main reasons assuredly include military occupation and/or deplorable economic and social conditions.

4.2 Transnational Actors

The collapse of the Ba'athist regime created a tremendous power vacuum in Iraq which had used a repressive state security mechanism to keep control of the populace. The overnight disappearance of this form of authoritarian control allowed a multitude of independently motivated groups to pursue their own individual in-

¹⁷⁹ Sprinzak, Ehud. "Rational Fanatics," *Foreign Policy*, September-October 2000, p. 68

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

¹⁸¹ Natta, Van Jr. Don. "Big Bang Theory: The Terror Industry Fields Its Ultimate Weapon," *New York Times*, August 24, 2003, sec. 4, p. 1

terests. In this way, the transnational actors may be the most diverse typology of the Iraqi suicide attacks, incorporating a variety of different religious, social, national, ethnic, and economically motivated groups. Despite this, they all contain similarities, and for the purpose of this work I define transnational insurgents using two criteria: those insurgents who have a greater interest in their specific group, organization, or political agenda, than in the future of the state of Iraq; and insurgent groups with “sustained continuous interactions with opponents—national or non-national—by connected networks of challengers across national boundaries.”¹⁸² Iraq’s three largest transnational groups are the 1) Islamic militants, 2) Kurdish elements, and 3) economically motivated criminal groups. For the purpose of this thesis I will differentiate between religiously motivated indigenous Iraqis and Abdullah Azzam influenced jihadists. I will classify jihadists as transnational, ideologically motivated fighters who use religion as their justification for acts of violence “directed against people they believe are their enemies and the enemies of their way of life.”¹⁸³

4.3 Sunni Actors

Indigenous actors are also important to examine. Concentrated in central Iraq, the Sunni have been the ruling minority over Iraq’s Shi’a for centuries, reaping the social, political, and economic rewards of their position. The toppling of Saddam Hussein’s government brought an end to this system and largely disenfranchised many of Iraq’s traditional power structures. Many of these power structures had been revitalized by Saddam Hussein in the past few decades in an attempt by the former dictator to consolidate his power within Iraq. These traditional power

¹⁸² Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement: Collective Action, Social Movements and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 184

¹⁸³ Habeck, Mary R. “Jihadist Strategies in the War on Terrorism,” in *Policy Research and Analysis* (Washington D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 8 November 2004), <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/hl855.cfm>; Last visited January 5 2008.

structures take the shape of tribes in Iraq, and their significance, as well as their past relations with Saddam Hussein's regime, are possibly the most misunderstood aspects of history with regard to the coalition's current policy in Iraq. For the purpose of this thesis, a tribe is defined as a collection of "affiliated clans (who) claim to have a common lineage or descent."¹⁸⁴ The clans that make up a tribe are further divided into sub-clans, which are eventually made up of extended family groupings, and finally single families.

The legacy of this reversal for the Sunnis has been the rise of a multi-faceted Sunni insurgency, which can be generally divided into Sunni tribal insurgent groups, Sunni former régime loyalists (FRL), Sunni nationalists, and Sunni Islamists. While Sunni tribal groups are largely concerned with their regional power and prestige *vis-à-vis* neighboring tribes, FRL are mainly motivated by a general desire to nationally reestablish the "Old Guard" in power, or at a minimum, prevent this power from falling into the hands of the Shi'a. With the capture of many high-ranking Ba'athists, the FRL have become operationally inactive, functioning largely as financiers of other groups. Iraqi nationalists gained many of their numbers from FRL groups, and are motivated primarily by their desire to expel foreign forces to insure that Sunni Arabs retain the political authority in Iraq. Indigenous Iraqi, Sunni Arab Islamists are another sub-category, acting as a cohesive force between some insurgent groups, and allowing for cooperation between Sunni groups and transnational jihadists. For the purposes of this thesis, the "Sunni" categorization of the insurgency is used for Iraq's Sunni Arab population. While the majority of Iraq's Kurds are also Sunni, they are identified with their own distinction.

As has been mentioned, Sunni Muslims only make up approximately 18% of Iraq's population. In general, they are concentrated in a roughly drawn triangle between Tikrit in the North, Ramadi in the West, and Baghdad in the East, creating a region known as the "Sunni Triangle." This region provides Sunni identified

¹⁸⁴ Faleh A. Jabar, "Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes under Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1968-1998," in *Totalitarianism and Tribalism: The Ba'ath Regime and Tribes*, eds. Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawod (London: Saqi, 2003), 75

violent actors with the ability to move freely and openly in terrain that they are not only familiar with, but which also affords them the ability to maintain extensive support networks. The Sunnis have been a ruling minority over Iraq's Shi'ites for centuries. Even prior to the Ba'athists, Ottoman Sunnis had run Iraq for centuries, eventually replaced by British installed Sunni Arabs, who filled the country's top political seats.¹⁸⁵ The rise of the Ba'athists in Iraq not only continued, but took this legacy of a Sunni minority rule to a new level, empowering this population with the wealth of Iraq's natural resources. In the spring of 2003, however, the toppling of Saddam Hussein's government brought an end to this system. This section examines Iraq's Sunni population, interpreting its preferential treatment under the Ba'athists as background to the roots of Iraq's Sunni insurgency. Despite their historical minority rule, Arab Sunnis benefited further by the rise of the Ba'athists to power.

Sunni domination was not always the case within the Ba'ath party, and in many respects, Iraq's Shi'ites were useful in bringing the Ba'ath party to power. Once in place however, the party's Shi'ites were successively driven out of powerful positions. Before 1968, the Shi'ites had substantially more power within the Iraqi Ba'ath party. From 1952 until 1963, Iraq's Shi'ites maintained 53.8% of the party's 53 top command seats, in comparison to the Sunnis' 38.5%.¹⁸⁶ With the rise of the Ba'ath party to power in 1968, this fairly representative demographic changed greatly. Between 1963 and 1970, Arab Sunnis came to hold 84.9% of the party's top commands, with Arab Shi'ites in only 5.7% of the top positions.¹⁸⁷ By 1977, the disparity had grown and Sunni Arabs thoroughly dominated the Ba'ath party, holding 93.3% of the organization's top command posts.¹⁸⁸ The locations from which the party's members came were also heavily concentrated in central

¹⁸⁵ Dodge, 14

¹⁸⁶ Batatu, Hanna. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978)1078

¹⁸⁷ Ibid

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 1090

Iraq, with an increasing number of upper echelon party officials and decision makers hailing from Saddam Hussein's home town of Tikrit.

In 1979, Saddam Hussein took power. In the years that followed, due to the country's oil wealth, the GNP multiplied. "[B]y the early 1980s, the state bureaucracy was about 25 percent of the total workforce, and a new class of entrepreneurs, contractors and managers reaped much of the benefits of Iraq's wealth."¹⁸⁹ This new middle class of government bureaucrats and contract employees was heavily Arab Sunni, bringing the country's new oil money and investment into central Iraq. Other major government programs devoted to housing, literacy, health, and education catered to the Arab Sunnis as well, focusing largely on urban areas in central Iraq and depriving the Iraqi north and Shi'ite southern areas of an equitable distribution of money and resources.¹⁹⁰ Opposition movements and uprisings by the Kurds and Shi'ites fueled Hussein's neglect of these areas. While Iraq's economy suffered greatly in the 1990s, socio-economic disparity between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'ite populations continued to grow, and by the fall of Saddam Hussein, southern Iraq had been devastated by poverty and years of neglect. The implementation of United Nations-imposed sanctions failed to dislodge the regime. Instead, the result was Hussein's manipulation of the allocation of basic social services, aid, and foodstuff distribution in order to keep the Kurds and Shi'ites under control.¹⁹¹

Prior to the mid-1980s the Ba'ath Party had a relatively adversarial relationship with Iraq's tribes. Upon taking power in 1968, the Ba'athists issued their first public communiqué, opposing traditional linkages by stating that the Ba'athists "are against religious sectarianism, racism, and tribalism."¹⁹² There were a variety

¹⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, "Iraq Background: What Lies Beneath," in *Middle East Report*, No. 6 (1 October 2002), 6

¹⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, "Iraq Background: What Lies Beneath," 6

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Baram, Amatzia. *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96* 1

of philosophical and practical reasons why the Ba'athists initially sought to weaken and marginalize Iraq's tribal networks. Ba'athism is an activist, revolutionary and modernizing political ideology, focused on "effecting a structural transformation in the spirit and thinking of the Arab people which would revolutionize their society."¹⁹³ It is based on the "trinity" of unity, freedom, and socialism which became manifested in modern, secular socialism and pan-Arabism.¹⁹⁴ This clearly runs counter to traditional tribal-based notions of governance. Iraq's new Ba'athists saw tribalism as an antiquated system, which eroded their principles of pan-Arabism and Iraqi nationalism. Whereas Ba'athism is centered on the predominance of the state, traditional tribalism produces a sub-national network of loyalties. These loyalties hold familial bonds the strongest and allegiances weaken as one moves farther from the family, through the tribal chain and into general society. Because of this, Ba'athists came to view tribalism as an alternate social support structure and form of legitimacy that challenged the primacy of the Iraqi state. Further, Iraq's rural-based tribal sheikhs also represented a competing social class, as the Ba'athist ranks were largely made up of lower-middle class youths from urban areas.¹⁹⁵

4.4 Shi'a Actors

Violent actors from the Shi'a represent a social group which had been previously disenfranchised within the country. Whereas many of the Sunni actors are violent because they have lost power, the Shi'ite actors arose largely to insure that they get power in a system that has historically excluded and repressed them. While Sunni elites have ruled the territory that we now know as the state of Iraq for the better part of the last millennium, Iraq's Shi'a comprise the numerical majority of its population. Due to the minority Sunni rule in this region, no current accurate

¹⁹³ Nabil M. Kaylani, "The Rise of the Syrian Ba'ath, 1940-1958: Political Success, Party Failure," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 5

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

¹⁹⁵ Baram, 2

census results are available on the exact number of Shi'a in Iraq. British census data from 1919 estimated the number of Shi'a in Iraq as 53% of its population, and this number was adjusted in 1932 to reflect that Shi'a accounted for 56% of the populace.¹⁹⁶ Recent estimates on the number of Shi'ites in Iraq are even higher, indicating that they account for between 60 and 65 % of Iraq's 24 million citizens.¹⁹⁷

Using his familial ties, clerical relationships, and Iraqi national identity, Muqtada al-Sadr became a centerpiece for the rise of the Shi'a Mahdi Army. Through the successful exploitation of common Iraqi desires for jobs, security, and a coalition withdrawal, al-Sadr was able to build a following from the poor Shi'ite communities of Iraq. This paper must examine Muqtada al-Sadr's personal and familial characteristics, which enabled him to rapidly gain a short-lived burst of popularity and create a Shi'ite insurgency in Iraq.

The popularity of Muqtada al-Sadr among Iraqi Shi'ites and his ability to rally such a large number of supporters in a short period of time can be attributed to several factors. His familial ties and tribal connections are probably his greatest credits, as al-Sadr was a household name that had been associated with Shi'ite activism in Iraq well before Muqtada had begun his clerical studies. Muqtada al-Sadr is the son of former Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, and nephew of former Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. Considered to be "the most prominent intellectual figure among the Shi'a radical ulama of post-monarchic Iraq", Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr was one of the founders of the Shi'ite Da'wa Party, and directly responsible for bringing the fundamentalist notion of Islamic government into Iraq.¹⁹⁸ The murder of Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr at the hands of Iraqi security forces in April of 1980 only helped to increase the al-Sadr family's

¹⁹⁶ Yitzhak Nakash, "The Shi'is of Iraq," (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003) 13

¹⁹⁷ A. William Samii, "Shia Political Alternatives in Postwar Iraq," in *Middle East Policy Council Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer 2003), available from http://www.mepec.org/public_asp/journal_vol10/0306_samii.asp

¹⁹⁸ Nakash, 137

standing as martyrs for the Iraqi Shi'ite cause. In a culture where familial ties and tribal affiliations are extremely important, Muqtada al-Sadr's family also holds sayyid status, which maintains that he is a direct descendent of the Prophet Mohammed.¹⁹⁹ Beyond his tribal affiliations, the fact that the al-Sadr family is of Iraqi origin in a society where the majority of ranking Shi'ite clerics have been of Iranian origin, is also extremely significant. Muqtada has been able to use this to his advantage, giving the fundamentalist Mahdi Army an Iraqi nationalist flavor, which has greatly increased the appeal of the al-Sadr movement among Iraqi Shi'ites. The Sadrist is a populist movement in a nation dominated by outside forces—in this case the US and Iran—and they are a movement of the dispossessed, i.e., not the ruling class. In other words, al-Sadr gives his Shi'a followers a means to defy the Coalition Occupational Force as well as Iran. An example is al-Sadr giving his followers permission to ignore an order given by the Coalition Force and Iraqi government which would have had the Mahdi Army disarm.²⁰⁰ Al-Sadr said his Mahdi Army would turn in its weapons only to a government that “can get the occupier out of Iraq.”²⁰¹

It is notable to mention al-Sadr's relationship with hard-liner Iranian Grand Ayatollah Kazem al-Ha'eri, supporter of the precedence of Islamic law in government, and close friends with al-Sadr's father, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. Upon his death, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr had left instructions that his followers take direction from Grand Ayatollah Kazem al-Ha'eri, and since May of

¹⁹⁹ Faleh Jabar, “Rethinking Iraq: Tribal Identities,” in *Middle East Journal* (Washington DC: Middle East Institute Publications, 25 April 2004), available from <http://www.mideasti.org/articles/doc234.html>

²⁰⁰ Al-Jurani, Nabil. “Al-Sadr defies Iraqi gov't; 16 killed in airstrikes.” *USA Today*. (31 March 2008) available from http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2008-03-29-iraq-saturday_N.htm

²⁰¹ Ibid

2003, frequent visits between al-Sadr and clerics in Tehran have caused security officials to pay even more attention to this connection.²⁰²

The violent Shi'a actors under the al-Sadr Movement in Iraq have three specific stated goals: the preservation of Muqtada al-Sadr from imprisonment; the expulsion of foreign forces from Iraq; and the establishment of a Shi'ite Islamic government in Iraq based on Khomeini's model in Iran.²⁰³ When looking at Iraq's other actor groupings, the only commonality that the Shi'a actors have with the Sunni and transnational actors is the expulsion of coalition forces from Iraq. Of course al-Sadr does not represent all of the violent Shi'a actors in Iraq. At the onset of hostilities between the Mahdi Army and coalition forces in May of 2004, Muqtada al-Sadr was at the height of his popularity, boasting a 68% popularity rating among Iraq's estimated 15 million Shi'ites.²⁰⁴ However, only 2% of Iraq's Shi'a approved of al-Sadr as a presidential candidate at that time.²⁰⁵

4.5 Uncertain Future

The discourse within Iraq has been directed in varied and numerous directions. These include nationalism, liberalism, socialism, capitalism, Islamic extremism, and Islamic moderation. The Shi'a acceptance and attitude toward their state loyalty, religion, sect, and ethnicity has been one of the main driving points of friction in the country. How do members of Iraqi's Shi'a community feel they were and are treated? Do they believe that they will have a better say in government policymaking in the future? What kind of state will the new Iraq be? Will

²⁰² Murphy, Dan. "Sadr the Agitator: Like Father, Like Son," in *Christian Science Monitor* (24 April 2004), available from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0427/p01s03-woiq.htm>

²⁰³ Rahnama, Ali. *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1994) 194

²⁰⁴ Baldauf, Scott. "Sadr Plays to Power of Martyrdom," in *Christian Science Monitor* (12 August 2004), available from <http://csmonitor.com/2004/0812/p01s02-woiq.htm>

²⁰⁵ Ibid

the population be run by majority rule? Do abused state citizens still have a national loyalty to the state they were abused under? The Sunni acceptance and attitude towards these same issues is in many ways ad hoc. The leadership class of the former Ba'athist regime, as well as those Sunnis who prospered under the regime, have formed a base of violent resistance. Their main targets have been coalition forces and the Shi'a, who they believe have been executing Sunnis as revenge against the Ba'athist regime.²⁰⁶

Since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, the central provinces in Iraq have been the most violent, with the greatest number of insurgent incidents and the strongest anti-coalition resistance. It is in an accommodating environment that Iraq's violent Sunni actors have increased their hostility, carrying out their planning, recruitment, training, and operations in the shadow of coalition forces. Suicide bombings, as well as armed attacks, and intimidation campaigns are part of daily life in central Iraq. Since the spring of 2003, over 35 Sunni Arab insurgent groups have claimed responsibility for acts of violence throughout Iraq.²⁰⁷ Reappearance errors are possible, as certain groups on the Arab street may use multiple names or may have changed their name. It is also likely that smaller local groups exist which coalition sources have not yet identified. Beyond the sheer number of Sunni insurgent groups, "an overwhelming majority of those captured or killed have been Iraqi Sunnis, as well as around 90-95% of those detained."²⁰⁸

The ambiguity of players in Iraq's violence, as well as their possible motives, are complicated even more by the fact that bombs are easy to make. "Improvised explosives, such as military and commercial explosives, are typically mixtures of an

²⁰⁶ Allawi, 136

²⁰⁷ Cordesman, Anthony H. "The Developing Iraqi Insurgency: Status at End-2004" (Working Draft), (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies Publishers, 22 December 2006), 12

²⁰⁸ Ibid

oxidizer and fuel.”²⁰⁹ Anyone with a basic chemistry background can produce gunpowder. This is done by simply combining charcoal (Carbon) with Sulfur, and Salt Peter (Potassium Nitrate). Such a combination is favored by militants in the Middle East.²¹⁰

4.6 The Making of an Iraqi Suicide Bomber

This section will demonstrate why individuals, especially young males, become suicide bombers. By using the methodology proposed earlier in this chapter, it is possible to derive the motivations for becoming a suicide bomber and then place them in the perspective of the overall decision making process of a rational actor. The outcome of this process is a determination of how an actor understands values for costs and benefit that he or she as an individual uses in making decisions.

Within an Iraqi community, children get their first exposure to suicide bombers through aspects of the society around them. An individual develops his or her cognition from observing the news and print media, movies, fashion, companions, and family. Groups within a community may exert influence such as peer pressure; however, a youth is interpreting all of the inputs that he or she sees and experience. Some aspects romanticize suicide bombers, and some do not. All aspects leave an impression. The youth who participate in suicide attacks do so out of a desire to belong to a movement and for the gain of prestige, funds for their family, and communal power.²¹¹ These youth feel a need to prove themselves to their desired cherished community. Some youth will participate in a suicide attack for the power gained through a violent religious expression. These youth become

²⁰⁹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Domestic Preparedness, “Explosive Devices,” Awareness Level WMD Training (n.d.), 82, http://cdp.dhs.gov/pdfs/agert/Explosive_Devices.pdf

²¹⁰ Abdel-Aziz, *The Mujahideen Explosive Handbook*. (For the preparation of the Mujahideen, 1996) 6, http://www.exet.nu.html/download/ovright/mujahideen_explosive_bok.pdf

²¹¹ Stern, Jessica. *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004) 32

martyred and gain a reputation as religious warriors. The networks that produce suicide bombers can provide peers for socialization. These networks can provide identity, discipline, recognition, belonging, and money.²¹² Youth on the Arab street see that these networks have the prospect of providing these things and are intrigued by the lifestyle.

Talal Asad suggests that the motives behind suicide bombings are rarely lucid, are always invested with emotion, and their description can be contested.²¹³ He says that motives may not be clear even to the actor.²¹⁴ Most importantly, Asad explains that motives depend on typologies of action that are conventionally recognized and to which individuation is central.²¹⁵ For Asad, the uniqueness of the suicide bomber resides not in its essence but in its contingent circumstances. Such circumstances in Iraq are often ones of insecurity.

Iraqi communities by and large lack security control except for community militias and the occasional patrol of Iraqi national police and occupation forces. Supervision can be limited due to the violent nature of the neighborhoods. There are few financial prospects for youth to desire.²¹⁶ Overall, these communities have a lack of formal or informal national social structures that are perceived in a positive light. Such reality can also infrequently cause an older Iraqi to commit a suicide attack. This is because the lack of financial and communal opportunities leave an ideological vacuum which Iraqis fill with other cultural aspects or institutions from their society.

²¹² Ibid

²¹³ Asad, 64

²¹⁴ Ibid

²¹⁵ Ibid

²¹⁶ Bowman, Tom. "Teens, Children Aiding Iraqi Insurgents." *Morning Edition, National Public Radio*. February 26, 2007
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7599096> (Last Visited April 13, 2008)

Cultural aspects or institutions can be transformative. In the case of an Iraqi suicide bomber, they can be liberating. Culture, society, and religion are abstractions which have a historically and geographically specific character.²¹⁷ Therefore, these aspects or institutions are attractive to Iraqi actors because they resonate with a particular system of beliefs that they have an affinity for. Here, culture can help Iraqi actors navigate the divide between Western and Iraqi civilization, Sunni and Shi'a communities, and Islamic and Islamist ideologies. Cultural narratives can be intensifiers of thought, belief, and action. Western media reduce Iraq's culture to religion. However, religion is neither essential nor sufficient to understanding the diverse cultures within Iraq. Then again, religion can be a powerful element in suicidal attacks. Analysis of religion can be used to explain suicidal attacks as acts of liberation.

Liberation is the term given to a desire to overcome, circumvent, or ameliorate an unacceptable condition of being whether that condition is individual or communal.²¹⁸ Since Iraqi NSAs who participate in suicidal attacks come from all walks of life and regions within the Middle East, it is difficult to favor any particular state of affairs which an actor is trying to overcome. Any number of issues pertaining to Western occupation, sectarianism, secularism, and political turmoil can be seen as causal. In the case of religion, the nature of Islamic traditions to provide for their adherents an ontology of who or what they are, either in the form of cosmology or an anthropology, as a mode of actualization is particularly powerful.²¹⁹ Religion can give a suicide bomber the rationale that performing an attack can be a form of religious action. Suicide bombers seek to transform their unacceptable reality by blowing themselves up in the name of liberating themselves or their communities from such a condition.

Suicide bombers strive to shift their formal identity through their destructive actions. This shift is not a wholesale change of character. It is a transformation

²¹⁷ Surin, Kenneth. "Liberation." In Taylor, Mark C., ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 173

²¹⁸ Ibid, 177

²¹⁹ Ibid, 178

where the actor is challenging the ideology of Iraqi domestic policy. The actor is attempting to transform him or herself from a nondescript citizen into an agent for change. The actor is transforming his or her state of being with the intention of transforming the status-quo of the state. In this way, the social behavior of suicide bombers can be explained through rational intentionality. Here it is important not to use Western rationality as a judgmental yardstick.²²⁰ However, it is safe to say that these actors believe in their fight for liberation and see their actions as justified. They are no longer common citizens of the Iraqi nation but instead martyrs functioning to influence and change the Iraqi state. For the suicide bomber, the benefit of changing an unacceptable condition in Iraq outweighs the cost of killing oneself and others.

A fuller evaluation as to the rationality of suicide bombers in Iraq is difficult to make because we as scholars lack total knowledge about suicide attacks and the attackers themselves. What we can say is exactly what this thesis argues—that is suicide bombers in Iraq are not solely driven by religion but by motivations drawn from a number of sources including a strategic objective to gain state and community influence and status. Such objective has been brought on by state conditions which actors and communities perceive as unacceptable. These state conditions are predicated on Western occupation. Empirical evidence backs up this assertion. Prior to Iraq's occupation in 2003, Iraq had never experienced a suicide attack in its history.²²¹ Since the occupation, suicide attacks have rapidly escalated. Iraq had 20 suicide attacks in 2003, 49 attacks in 2004, and 125 attacks in 2005.²²²

The biographies of suicide bombers in Iraq are unclear. The best information available is that suicide bombers are primarily Sunni Iraqis and Transnational actors.²²³ The Transnationals come primarily from Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Ku-

²²⁰ Ibid, 247

²²¹ Pape, 256

²²² Ibid

²²³ Ibid, 259

wait.²²⁴ If this holds to be true, this could mean that suicide bombers in Iraq are either Iraqi themselves or from countries immediately adjacent to Iraq whose societies are most vulnerable to the volatility and Western threat of Iraq's occupation. These suicide bombers are not from the Middle East's largest Islamist populations (Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Sudan) and therefore cannot be understood as Islamist actors. This backs up the argument of this thesis that religion generally and Islamic extremism specifically is not the primary foundation for suicide terrorism. Members of suicide bombers in Iraq are no more and no less religious than other individuals. Religion is simply one element in motivation for and explanation of such behavior.

²²⁴ Ibid

Chapter 5

Conclusion:

Where Do We Go from Here?

Religious difference has long been a focus of conflict. However, in our post Cold War reality, religion has replaced political ideology as a favored explanatory contributor of conflict by American policymakers, the American national security establishment, and the media. Societal grievances are widely expressed in the language of religious extremism. Yet a more accurate and nuanced ground to explain such grievances can only be found in the dynamic of inclusion. Americans must include a number of causes for such grievances instead of simply reducing them to being based exclusively on religion. Americans must therefore practice more dialogical openness in regards to other cultures and religions. If they do not, they will continue to perpetuate misinformation.

5.1 Toward Better Western Understandings of Islam

By mixing Islamist militants like al-Qaeda together with secular rogue states like Iraq, the doctrine of President George W. Bush over simplified U.S. understandings of Muslims and the Middle East. He claimed that there were strong ties between al-Qaeda and Iraq. He said that he believed that Iraq was involved in 9/11 but that he did not have “the evidence” to link bin Laden with Hussein.²²⁵ Even though this belief proved to be factually incorrect, many Americans still see such a partnership as probable since Muslims are depicted through Orientalism as a homogenous community with few divergent representations.

The image of an alien and barbaric Islam has been ingrained in U.S. popular discourse for the past 200 years. Such an image is evident from nineteenth-

²²⁵ Little, 323

century ballads to Disney's movie *Aladdin*.²²⁶ In order to move beyond such a simplistic and inaccurate image, Americans need to avoid the impulse to couch Islamic misunderstanding in the framework of civilizational warfare. In order to better understand the complexities of Islam, American discourse needs to employ an expansive definition of the Middle East to encompass not merely Israel, the Arab states, and Iraq but also the diverse communities and cultures which make up these regions. It is with this intention that this thesis was designed to provide a general reader with a broad understanding of how Americans have equated Islamic religious traditions with suicide attacks inside Iraq. This thesis has sought to dispel such misunderstandings to give a more accurate representation of Islam.

5.2 Constructing Iraqi Identity

Having been the main architects of the long process of constructing an Iraqi identity and forging an Iraqi state, the Arab Sunni minority was assuredly dissatisfied with their loss of power after the demise of the Ba'athist regime in April 2003. Though they are not made up of a monolithic community and many disagree on basic issues, it can be safely assumed that most Iraqi Sunnis, and possibly others in Iraq, agree on some principles for the future of their country. They would like a safe and peaceful Iraq in its current boundaries, contrary to separatist tendencies espoused in Kurdish discourse of today. Internally, the ideal Sunni Iraq would preferably be run along centralist lines, contrary to the prevailing rhetoric of federalism expounded by the Shi'a and Kurds. The country would be understood by its citizens as predominantly Arab, with strong links to the surrounding Arab world. Arabness and Iraqi identity could serve as a bridge between Shi'a and Sunni sectarianism.

Whether the Sunnis get their way or not, they may hold the key to the preservation of a united Iraq. They were the dominant force in the shaping of Iraqi national identity, albeit in a poor way. Of the three main population groups, they are the most enthusiastic in using it as a rallying force. Like other Iraqis, they are looking toward the future: Very few Sunnis wish for a return to the Ba'athist past.

²²⁶ Ibid, 314

Therefore, they should be an essential part of a national dialogue toward a redefinition of Iraqi identity.

5.3 The Iraq Refugee Crisis

There have been no reliable census data on Iraq's ethnic and sectarian makeup for decades. As has been explained, Iraq's population represents a number of ethnic groups and religious traditions. In recent studies, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that Iraqi refugees fleeing violence tend to be from mixed neighborhoods and are displaced to homogenous ones.²²⁷ Furthermore, daily behavior by those who are displaced or living in fear for their lives may also vary to avoid establishing any predictable pattern. Micro and nighttime displacement is used to describe a person living in his or her home, but sleeping elsewhere. Daylight displacement involves shifting routines, routes, and activities. And false displacements are those who pretend to be displaced and build homes on government land or the land of locals.²²⁸ Such realities do not bode well for the future of Iraq. The potential for persecution, religious and otherwise, is heightened by the chaotic nature that Iraqi communities are operating in. How these communities will adapt to and understand the fallout to displacement has yet to be seen.

5.4 Future Security Issues

It has proven extremely difficult for occupational forces and Iraqi police to provide security against suicidal attacks. While this paper seeks a better understanding of those who kill themselves and others, such an assessment is of little help to the innocent people who have already lost their lives. History shows that foreign combat forces in prized territory are a principle recruiting tool to mobilize suicide bombers. This helps to explain why suicide bomber campaigns begin but also why

²²⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM) "Iraq Displacement 2006 Year in Review," January 2007 and "Iraq Displacement 2007 Mid-Year Review," July 2007

²²⁸ Al-Khalidi, Ashraf. and Victor Tanner, "Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq," October 2006

they end. If suicide bombers were a product of religion alone, then suicide terrorism in countries like Lebanon should not have ended when America withdrew its combat forces.

The future of Iraq is precarious. Americans can better navigate its topology by better understanding the country through a cultural sense and not by simply reducing it to a religious or ethnic state. This thesis suggests a simple, effective strategy to understanding suicide terrorism: Religion is an element in the propagation of the phenomenon of suicide bombings; however, religion is neither essential nor is it sufficient for explanation of such actions.

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