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**NEW IMAGINARIES OF WAR:  
HOW HAMAS AND THE ISLAMIC STATE  
ADVANCE THEIR POLITICAL OBJECTIVES  
ON A VIRTUAL BATTLEFIELD**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis argues that Hamas and the Islamic State, two non-state armed groups located in the Middle East, each carefully calibrate their own war-fighting activities with their communications approaches in order to achieve their respective political objectives. Drawing on scholarship focusing on non-state armed groups and political communication, as well as other secondary sources such as specialist journalism, the thesis critically analyses online communications material distributed by Hamas and the Islamic State through official and affiliated websites, digital publications, YouTube clips, tweets, and other social media platforms. While there is a striking degree of conformity between the sophisticated, comprehensive, and disciplined communications approaches used by these two groups, the thesis argues that key differences during especially intense periods of conflict — specifically, between June and October 2014 — reflect the divergent ways in which Hamas endorses, and the Islamic State disrupts, the prevailing world order as each pursues their own cause. It also notes that much of the recent scholarship highlighting the use of social media by non-state armed groups overestimates the impact of the virtual world on the actions of their followers in particular and attempts to influence the hearts and minds of a global audience more broadly.

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## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

EU	European Union
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and Levant
MEMRI	Middle East Media Research Institute
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NSAGs	Non-state armed groups
PA	Palestinian Authority
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNWRA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East
US	United States of America

## GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

<i>Ahlul-halli-wa'l-'aqd</i>	people of authority
<i>Al-dawla al Islamiyya fi Iraq</i>	Islamic State in Iraq
<i>Aqidah</i>	creed
<i>Baqiya wa tatamadad</i>	remaining and expanding
<i>Bay'ah</i>	transaction or traditional contract
<i>Dawla</i>	state or dynasty
<i>Dhimmi</i>	protected person
<i>Din wa dawla</i>	an all-embracing governance system
<i>Fahish'ah</i>	fornication or adultery
<i>Fard 'Ayn</i>	individual duty
<i>Hajj</i>	pilgrimage
<i>Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya</i>	The Islamic Resistance Movement
<i>Hijrah</i>	migration
<i>Hudud</i>	punishments mandated by Allah
<i>Intifada</i>	uprising against oppression
<i>Istishhadiyyin</i>	suicide bombers
<i>Jama'a</i>	congregation or congregational prayer
<i>Jama'at al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad</i>	The Group of God's Unity and <i>Jihad</i>
<i>Jihad</i>	holy war
<i>Jizya</i>	tax
<i>Khalif</i>	caliph
<i>Khilafah</i>	caliphate
<i>Kuffar</i>	unbeliever
<i>Kufr</i>	denial of truth



<i>Majlis ash-Shoura</i>	Shura Council
<i>Manhaj</i>	path
<i>Muhajadeen</i>	one engaged in <i>jihad</i>
<i>Muqawama</i>	resistance through constant combat
<i>Nasheed</i>	vocal music
<i>Qu'ud</i>	abandonment of <i>jihad</i>
<i>Rafidah</i>	rejectionists/refusers
<i>Safawi</i>	pejorative term for Shi'ah Muslims
<i>Sahwa</i>	awakening
<i>Salafi</i>	adherents to 'true' Sunni Islam
<i>Salah</i>	prayer
<i>Sawm</i>	fasting
<i>Shahada</i>	bearing witness to Allah
<i>Shahid</i>	martyrdom
<i>Shari'ah</i>	legal system of Islam
<i>Shirk</i>	idolatry
<i>Shura</i>	consultation
<i>Taghut</i>	cross the limits/idolatry
<i>Takfir</i>	excommunication
<i>Tamkin</i>	consolidation
<i>Tawhid</i>	oneness of God
<i>Ummah</i>	community of true believers
<i>Usrat</i>	small organisational cells
<i>Waqf</i>	inalienable charitable endowment
<i>Wilayat</i>	province
<i>Zakat/Zakah</i>	alms-giving as a religious obligation

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have become more prominent in world affairs since the end of World War II. One reason for their rise is the sharp increase in the frequency, intensity, and duration of civil conflicts (Harbom & Wallensteen, 2007) conducted by an increasingly “assertive and brutal” range of actors described by the United Nations (UN) as a “new generation of belligerents” (Javan & Wieland-Karimi, 2014, p. 7), rather than by national armies. These groups also engage in organised violence that is transnational in nature, as globalisation facilitates flows of money and weapons across borders, and enables support drawn from diaspora sharing common religious values and political aspirations (Kaldor, 2012; Mulaj, 2010). This violence makes these groups central to questions of security in contemporary world politics, bringing them to the attention of the world’s Great Powers (Mulaj, 2010).

NSAGs are worthy topics of scholarly inquiry because they can control significant territory and populations, have powerful war-fighting capabilities, and use violence that is “deliberately spectacular and terror-provoking” (Archetti, 2013, p. 7) in a manner that affects, and therefore resonates with, a global audience. Some of these groups seek power within the existing Westphalian world order where sovereign states are preeminent. These groups covet authority over territory inhabited by a fixed population that owes allegiance to a government capable of entering into relations with other states (Kilcullen, 2015). Other NSAGs seek a different form of statehood that is at once ancient and modern, such as those modelled on an Islamic *khilafah* (caliphate). They seek to disrupt the prevailing world order. While groups seeking either form of statehood are often depicted as “illegitimate deployers of coercion” (Mulaj, 2010, p. 15) by those wanting to maintain their own standing in the existing world order, they demonstrate legitimacy by becoming *de facto* governments in areas under their control, providing public and social services as well as economic development (Krause & Milliken, 2009; McQuinn & Oliva, 2014). In order to secure external recognition, NSAGs need substantial local and external support, often from a powerful state providing financial and political resources (Mulaj, 2010). They also need to have an attractive politicised cause persuasively

associated with at least some members of the international community (Mulaj, 2010).

Difficult to define because of their varying types and characteristics, NSAGs have been described as distinctive organisations that are:

willing to, and capable of, using violence for pursuing their objectives, not integrated into formalised state institutions such as regular armies, presidential guards, police or special forces and possessing a certain degree of autonomy with regard to politics, military operations, resources and infrastructure although they may be supported by state actors either secretly or openly (Hofman & Schneckener 2011, p. 2).

More simply, a non-state armed group can be defined as “any organised group with a basic structure of command operating outside state control that uses force to achieve its political objectives” (DCAF & Geneva Call, 2011, p. 7). Yet these useful definitions are often eschewed in favour of terms, such as “terrorists” (Stern & Berger, 2016, p.5) engaging in activities stemming from the Latin *terrere*, meaning “to frighten or scare” (Weimann & Kaplan, 2011, p. 4). Contemporary ‘terrorism scholars’ denounce these activities as “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 43) or as the “use or threat of violence to obtain a political or social goal through intimidation of a wider audience than their immediate victim” (Enders & Sandler, 2012, p. 4). Defining these groups solely through the prism of ‘terrorism’, scholars miss an opportunity to better understand and more fully explain NSAGs’ significance in contemporary world affairs.

While these groups’ use of violence is often deemed illegitimate (Sekulow, 2014), state use of violence is routinely considered legitimate (Franks, 2009), even when it is terrorist-like activity (Weimann & Kaplan, 2011, p. 113). There is an irony here for the origins of modern terrorism lie in the French Revolution and terror found its most destructive application in the hands of powerful leaders of totalitarian states, specifically Stalin and Mao (Gray, 2007). Moreover, NSAGs’ non-violent activities are often also denigrated as simply “manipulating grievances and mobilising populations” (Kilcullen, 2015, p. 6) while the same activity is accepted as a common way to win popular support when used by so-called legitimate political actors on the world stage. There is a double-standard at

work here. Although the violence committed by NSAGs is often described as irrational, such acts result from political and social grievances and economic deprivation within societies (Weimann & Kaplan, 2011, p. 20). Far from random acts, the violence employed by NSAGs is frequently conducted in the “pursuit of political change” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 43). Such violence is both a form of collective action and a social movement because it concerns the mobilisation of people who do not have immediate access to institutions and who are making novel but unauthorised claims challenging existing authorities and their orthodoxies (Tarrow, 1998). The political calculations of these groups are, therefore, a key driver of war-fighting activities undertaken (Weimann & Kaplan, 2011) in response to historical animosities and oppression, perceptions of injustice and the denial of rights, grievance, greed, religious beliefs, and spiritual factions (Mulaj, 2010). As we shall see, while religious rhetoric is used to explain the aims and conduct of particular NSAGs, this does not detract from the political purposes behind their violence (Mulaj, 2010).

These groups have a profound effect across the globe, particularly as the war-fighting activities of some are conducted on foreign soil, including ‘lone wolf’ attacks on civilians (Levs & Yan, 2014, p. 1) co-ordinated, or inspired, by these groups (BBC, 2015a; Higgins & De Freytas-Tamura, 2016). The ongoing recruitment of foreign fighters equally signals the global reach enjoyed by some of these groups. The war-fighting activities of certain NSAGs, such as Hamas and the Islamic State (IS), can, at times, reshape the map of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), exacerbate tensions between Islam and Judea-Christian minorities in the region, and deepen cleavages between Sunni and Shi’ah. This, in turn, further destabilises a region which is prone to internal armed conflict, has a history of authoritarian repression, and is experiencing large-scale refugee flows with attendant social and economic crises. The existing situation in the MENA region — following the Arab Spring’s partial success, fracturing of Iraq, spill over of violence from Syria, the ongoing Palestinian/Israeli dispute, and the rise of IS — is “dangerously destabilising” and creating a “geopolitical hangover” for the rest of the world (Kilcullen, 2015, p. 2). The conflict in this region is destroying the lives of millions of people, undermining the world economy, massively disrupting global energy flows, shipping routes, transportation and telecommunications systems, creating unprecedented refugee flows, potentially redrawing the borders of half a dozen nation-states, and dragging regional and

world powers into an escalating and seemingly intractable conflict (Kilcullen, 2015).

This volatile security situation in the MENA region provides fertile ground for the rising force of political Islam within this region and around the world (Hroub, 2010). However, the Islamic political movement is not homogenous. While some groups engage in armed conflict against their governments within the confines of national boundaries, others, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, conduct protests against the ruling elite in their countries by largely peaceful means and through parliamentary processes (Hroub, 2006, p. 100). There is also a generation of armed Islamist groups that are stateless (Hroub, 2000, p. 11) and who consider the very existence of many Muslim states as an abnormality to the one and unified single *khilafah* — that is, a state that adheres to *shari'ah* law (the legal system of Islam) — that they seek to create. These groups consider themselves to be the force behind a “global *jihad*” (holy war) where fighting is driven by the injustices suffered by Muslims and against those who inflict these injustices (Hroub, 2006, p. 100). The West, and the United States of America (US) in particular, are identified as the main enemy and their interests around the world provide key targets for these groups. Other adversaries are identified as coming from within the Muslim world itself, such as apostates who have renounced Islam (Al-Hayat, 2014g), *kuffar* (unbelievers) (Al-Hayat, 2014, July 5) or *rafidah* (rejectionists) (Al-Hayat, 2014, June 30) who follow a different form of Islam to that of the particular NSAG. While some of these Islamist movements share a goal of establishing a *khilafah* they differ in how to achieve this goal. Some strive for the creation of such a state through a grassroots process of Islamisation while others prefer violent revolution (Jensen, 2009). While a *khilafah* is decried by Western powers as an “evil” threat (Sekulow, 2014, p. 123), many Islamists see it as reaction to the West's political and economic domination as well as its cultural hegemony, if not a means of ending oppressive neo-colonial power structures (Burgat, 2003).

While NSAGs commit violence in pursuit of particular war aims, they also employ sophisticated communications approaches in a bid to achieve their political objectives (Khatib, Matar, & Alshaer, 2014). Former al-Qaeda and IS leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri acknowledged the importance of effective communication for NSAGs when he said that more than half of the US-led fight

against terrorism was taking place on the “battlefield of the media” and that “we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of Muslims” (Al-Zawahiri, 2005, p. 10). The communications approaches deployed by NSAGs are often defined negatively as the “propaganda” of “publicity whores” (Stern & Berger, 2015, p. 1) who use “abhorrent brutality” to promote their “violent Islamist fantasy” (Rafiq, 2015, p. 4). However, less emotive definitions can be found in Jowett & O’Donnell (2006, p. 7) as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist”. Or as Richard Alan Nelson puts it: a “systematic form of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence the emotions, attitudes, opinions, and actions of specified target audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes through the controlled transmission of one-sided messages (which may or may not be factual) via mass and direct media channels” (1996, p. 232-233). Propaganda in these latter terms is widely acknowledged as a common, accepted feature of politics practiced by many forces operating within the existing world system, including state and non-state actors alike. However, for the purposes of this thesis, a more useful definition of the communications approaches employed by NSAGs is ‘political communication’. Yet an authoritative definition for political communication remains elusive as both components of the term are open to a variety of interpretations (McNair, 2011). And while some scholars (Fairclough, 2015; Negrine & Stanyer, 2007) consider broader political discourse in their analysis — which includes communication by the political actors, to the political actors, and about the political actors — this thesis focuses on the primary aspect where political communication is considered to be “all forms of communication undertaken by... political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives (McNair, 2011, p. 4).

Political communication is utilised by NSAGs in order to achieve their substantive objectives. These goals range from intimidating opponents, increasing their popularity at home and strengthening their support base abroad (Osipova, 2011), to recruiting new members and donors, and winning the hearts and minds of a global audience in an attempt to increase their prominence, and therefore, influence in world affairs. The ultimate political objective for some groups is to secure the right to self-determination and recognition as a state by the international community. The violence committed by NSAGs can be

understood as a form of political communication which attempts to grab the attention of those in power as a means of promoting a cause (Crenlinstan, 1987). This violence can function as a form of “propaganda of the deed” (Winter, 2016a, p.1) in which NSAGs send messages to those in power as well as to a global audience. In this way, they recognise that actions speak louder than words when it comes to influencing world affairs. This argument can be taken a step further by asserting that the violence committed by NSAGs is, to some extent, a construction of the media itself given “the terrorist must have an audience who would be terrorised” (Weimann & Kaplan, 2011, p. 83). In other words, NSAGs rely on leveraging media representatives who are willing to use “shock and awe” to improve ratings and thereby increase advertising revenue (Osipova, 2011, p. 88). While there are two separate dimensions to contemporary conflict — the violent “tactical field of battle” and the “virtual informational realm” in which each side competes to create evermore compelling narratives (Betz, 2008, p. 510) — these dimensions are blurred when groups conduct war-fighting activities with the explicit purpose of creating information and images for use as communications material. The choreographing of violence to attract media and public attention has been occurring since the 1970s (Osipova, 2011) in situations where essentially “terrorism is communication” (Schmid & de Graaf, 1982, p. 14).<sup>1</sup>

While television, radio, and print media have been the traditional vectors of NSAGs’ communications approaches, the development and rapid expansion of the internet has opened a new communications frontier as the largest available platform of expression throughout the world (Adhami, 2007). For some, the internet is seen as an “emancipator” enabling “freedom, prosperity and enlightenment” (Lenert, 2010, p. 17) and represents a direct challenge to strict controls over public information and media reporting (Drache, 2008).<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent example can be found in a statement issued by the Palestinian group Black September in the wake of the killing of 11 Israeli athletes and a German police officer at the 1972 Munich Olympics, which attempted to draw attention to the imprisonment of hundreds of Palestinians in Israel. According to the group: “We recognised that sport is the modern religion of the Western World. We knew that people in England and America would switch their television sets from any programme about the plight of the Palestinian if there was a sporting event on another channel. So we decided to use their Olympics, the most sacred ceremony of this religion, to make the world pay attention to us. We offered up human sacrifices to your gods of sport and television. And they answered our prayers. From Munich onwards, nobody could ignore the Palestinians or their cause” (Weimann & Winn, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Globally, 3.4 billion people or 46% of the world’s population had internet access in 2016 compared to two decades earlier when it was just 1%. In the Middle East and North



internet enables these groups to utilise new technologies in order to generate and share a large volume of information at low cost, in real time, and across borders to an audience that is no longer passive, but actively responds to, and shares, that information, sometimes generating their own content in support (Farrell, Kolodny & Medvic, 2001). Digitalisation has affected the political sphere by transforming the speed and scope of communication (Castells, 2011). NSAGs are now able to provide easily accessible visual, audio, and written messages that are searchable and available on mobile devices, better enabling the public to take an active part in political debate (Flatcher & Young, 2012). This has increased their opportunity as peripheral actors to mobilise and co-ordinate their activities as well as to achieve greater visibility, both on and offline, in a direct challenge to traditional media which, before the advent of the internet, acted as a gatekeeper of public information (Farrell, Kolodny & Medvic, 2001; Stevens & Neumann 2009). The internet has expanded the theatre of operations for NSAGs, enabling them to take full control of their own communications by using the developed world's own infrastructure in cyberspace (Osipova, 2011) so that they can now better address populations directly without mass media mediation (Dobek-Ostrowska & Garlicki, 2013).

The internet also provides NSAGs with the ability to communicate with individuals who would have previously been far beyond their reach. Online access enables and encourages the formation of "virtual communities" (Rheingold, 2013, p. 20; Sageman, 2004) where the possibility of direct communication among political actors and a global audience is increased (Riaz, 2010). This occurs along the lines of the "imagined communities" defined by Benedict Anderson (2006, p. 6) as socially constructed communities imagined by people who perceive themselves to be part of a self-defined 'political' group. The proliferation of indirect relationships via the internet and the rise of these imagined communities are seen as two features that fundamentally characterise modernity (Calhoun, 1991) and, accepting this, a more apt description of such contemporary communities in the case of the two NSAGs at the core of this thesis might be a "virtual *ummah*" (community of true believers) (Archetti, 2013, p. 42). The internet thus enables marginalised actors and their arguments to gain

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Africa, there are limitations in some war zones such as Iraq and Syria where only 13% and 29% of the population respectively can access the internet while in the conflict-ridden zone of Palestine, where 62% of people use the internet, the virtual world is a key component of the communications approaches for local non-state actors (Internet World Stats, 2016)



visibility (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010), which is particularly important for NSAGs that may lack the legitimacy enjoyed by their rivals and have fewer opportunities to gain a voice through traditional media.

The internet has enabled NSAGs to open “new virtual theatre[s]” of war fought in distant locales, but where a global audience is put on a frontline through the online delivery of ‘spectacular’ images and messages to their personal laptops, tablets, and smartphones (Weimann & Winn, 1994, p. 27). The violence creating this spectacular content is less about causing widespread property damage or death and more as a form of political communication designed to convey a message to a particular constituency or to influence a much wider audience than the population from which the victims might be drawn. For NSAGs with limited war-fighting capabilities, such spectacles of violence involving a beheading or a raid on an opponent’s military outpost can be undertaken at relatively low cost compared to the publicity flowing from social media coverage. These spectacles of violence give rise to the new imaginaries of war; and by ‘new imaginaries of war’, I mean, simply, that the brutal and shocking images of spectacular acts of violence, which are now more widely and instantly available to a global audience in possession of smartphones and other technologies, effectively shifts war’s frontline from a physical battlefield to the imaginations of viewers throughout the world. While critics claim this violence is motivated by a desire to “assault the public mind through psychological warfare” (Weimann & Kaplan, 2011, p. 21) and to produce a “level of anxiety that is disproportionate to the actual damage” caused (Weimann & Winn, 1994, p. 27), it appears to be a useful means of galvanising support and persuading the media, the public and, ultimately, political leaders to become aware of these groups’ existence and their respective political objectives (McNair, 2011). Notwithstanding the internet’s near-global reach, widespread access, and potential for anonymity provides NSAGs with a powerful communication arena, it remains difficult to assess the precise effectiveness of their online communication material and, particularly, the contribution that their communications approaches makes toward achieving their desired political objectives (Osipova, 2011).

\* \* \* \* \*

This thesis seeks to address two cognate research questions: firstly, who are these two groups known as Hamas and IS, under which historical conditions did they originate, how are they organised, and what do they hope to achieve; and, secondly, how is communication used as part of both groups' overarching strategy and, specifically, what is the relationship between their war-fighting activities and communications approaches? While the first question has been the focus of many scholarly works, some cited in this thesis, answers to it provide a necessary foundation for the more novel answers to the subsequent research question. In order to answer these questions, the research for this thesis looked beyond the narrow and limiting terrorism lens, drawing instead on scholarship focusing on NSAGs and on political communication, as well as other secondary source material including specialist journalism produced by those reporting from within the MENA region. In answering its key questions, the thesis draws on, and perhaps even contributes to, a pool of scholarly literature described as critical terrorism studies. As Richard Jackson (2007) explains, this literature involves a critically-oriented approach to the study of political violence, which includes voices and perspectives missing in orthodox literature. The thesis also draws on an analysis of the online communications material distributed by Hamas and IS through official and affiliated websites, digital publications, YouTube clips, and tweets. The use of this kind of primary material contributes to an evidence-based approach to research, which should be at the core of terrorism research (Ranstorp, 2009).

The resulting thesis argues, specifically, that Hamas and IS carefully calibrate — and, at times, go as far as to choreograph — their war-fighting activities with their communications approaches in order to pursue their own political objectives. There is a striking degree of conformity between the sophisticated, comprehensive, and disciplined communications approaches used by these two groups. There are, however, important differences during especially intense periods of conflict — specifically, between June and October 2014 — which reflect the divergent ways in which Hamas endorses, and IS disrupts, the prevailing world order as each pursues their own cause. The thesis also notes that much of the recent scholarship highlighting the use of social media by NSAGs overestimates the impact of the virtual world on the actions of their

followers in particular and attempts to influence the hearts and minds of a global audience more broadly. This is largely because NSAGs' social media use remains reliant on traditional media distributing their messages to a global audience that would not normally be exposed to, or seek out, information about these groups and their activities.

Having introduced the topic of NSAGs and signalled these groups' importance as political actors in contemporary world affairs (given their use of violence and political communication), the next chapter situates this thesis among relevant scholarship. Chapter 3 describes the key design features of the underpinning research project, particularly the information-gathering processes and the analytic framework created specifically to make sense of the communications material. The remainder of the thesis is divided into four main chapters. Focusing on both Hamas and IS, Chapter 4 explains the historical contexts from which these groups emerged as well as their respective governance arrangements, political objectives, and war-fighting capabilities. It addresses the thesis' first research question. Building on the material in Chapter 4, the ensuing two chapters deal specifically with the communications approaches taken by Hamas and IS, respectively. Taken together, chapters 5 and 6 seek to address the thesis' second research question by exploring the narratives, framing, and messaging contained in the groups' online communications material. These chapters argue that while both groups search for statehood through *jihad*, Hamas uses violence while endorsing a state-based system of world affairs whereas IS uses violence to disrupt that system. This key difference shapes the ways in which both groups calibrate their war-fighting activities to their communications approaches. A brief penultimate chapter captures and conveys the analysis' key findings before the conclusion reflects on these findings in the context of mainstream media and its global reach. Rather than offering recommendations relating to counter-terrorism policy, which risks becoming an "uncritical mouthpiece for state interests" (Gunning, 2007, p. 240), this thesis seeks to better understand and more fully explain the relatively under-theorised phenomenon of NSAGs as political actors in contemporary world affairs. On this basis, it will be of interest to scholars seeking to theorise the role of NSAGs in international relations and those studying political communication. It will also be of relevance to self-reflective policymakers confronting the increasing influence of NSAGs in world affairs, and the public more generally.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW: CONCEPTUALISING NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS**

While a burgeoning pool of literature gives focus to the roles played by NSAGs in contemporary world affairs (Hofman & Schneckener, 2011; Javan & Wieland-Karimi, 2014; Krause & Milliken, 2009), these groups remain largely under-theorised (Mulaj, 2010). Given their violence's impact, especially the resulting human casualties and the significant media attention they attract, these groups deserve to be better understood and more fully explained (Hofmann & Schneckener, 2011). This brief literature review deals exclusively with the secondary source material that conceptualises NSAGs by dividing it into four categories — specifically, studies produced by 'terrorism' experts, studies arising from within the region, studies that take a holistic view of these groups, and critical terrorism studies — and positions the ensuing thesis in relation to this literature. While this thesis explores the historical contexts, governance arrangements, political objectives, and war-fighting capabilities of Hamas and IS, it does so in order to better explain how those factors influence their respective communications approaches. For reasons of space, this chapter does not provide a critical review of the scholarly writing devoted specifically to each group; nor does it provide an overview of the relevant scholarship on political communication, though both branches of scholarship inform the thesis' substantive chapters. This review also does not examine any of the scholarship written in languages other than English (due, simply, to my own monolingualism).

\* \* \* \* \*

Dominating this field of inquiry through its sheer volume, the work of so-called 'terrorism' experts tends to conceptualise NSAGs as brutal and evil forces driven by extreme religious ideologies that should be "expunged from the earth" before the "smoke and flames of terror fill the American skies once more" (Sekulow, 2014, p. 14). While many of these experts claim NSAGs' violence, including attacks on civilians in Paris, Brussels, and Turkey (Sydney Morning Herald, 2015), makes them a serious threat to the world, others argue that they do not existentially threaten the West (White, 2015). What they do threaten, however, is

the “assumption that the West can and should control what happens” in the Middle East (White, 2015, p. 112) in line with an intention to keep countries, including Iraq and Syria, as post-Ottoman constructs crafted by Western, rather than local, interests (McGeough, 2015, p. 126). In this respect, by misunderstanding the region, the nature of its conflicts, and the scale of resources needed to achieve enduring peace, the West unveils itself more as a problem than a solution: “In the Middle East, it is as though a history of foreign intervention is sufficient to justify more intervention as though it’s somehow okay to use other people’s lives and homelands as laboratories for what might be a smart new Western idea” (McGeough, 2015, p. 124).

Rather than conceptualise NSAGs in objective or neutral terms, too often these experts rely on loaded terms, such as “terrorists, extremists and insurgents” (Archetti, 2013, p. 14), describing their activities as “typically related to actions and value systems that lie beyond the moral and political centre of society” where violence is acceptable (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010, p. 8). There is often a failure to critically analyse the dominant forces in contemporary world affairs that determine this ‘moral and political centre’ or to acknowledge that many politicians and governments accept and, at times, advocate violence as a legitimate response. A boon in terrorism scholarship since the September 11 attacks in 2001 (see, for instance, Gunaratna, 2002; and Veitch, 2005) has made the term ‘terrorist’ one of the most powerful signifiers in contemporary discourse (Breen Smyth, Gunning, Jackson, Kassimeris & Robinson, 2008). This is despite clear evidence that acts of clandestine non-state violence are committed by a very small number of people and result in the deaths of only between several hundred and a few thousand people every year. While most of the world’s population will never experience such violence, millions, or even billions, of people become “virtual witnesses” to it through online sources (Cassidy, 2015, p. 1), including social media, as well as traditional media sources, such as television and newspapers, books, and movies (Breen Smyth et al., 2008). This familiarity with ‘terrorism’ provides easy fodder for journalists and scholars using the term as a pejorative label with negative connotations in a manner precluding its use as an objective or descriptive term for the study of political violence (Jackson, 2007). While this creates a kind of default position where everyone recognises terrorism when they see it (Finlay, 2009), scholars who rely on such a loaded term are at risk of becoming complicit with the agendas of powerful actors and predominant

institutions (Archetti, 2013, p. 68). Determined by socially negotiated agreement between state authorities, the judicial system, journalists, scholars, and other political actors, 'terrorism' exists as a rhetorical tool to "demonise and delegitimise" opponents (Jackson, 2011, p. 116) and functions as a symbol applied to any violence regarded as unjust, illegitimate, or excessive (Archetti, 2013).

Ignored here are the 200 or so definitions currently in use, which signal that 'terrorism' is a contested concept lacking a clearly definable general use (Jackson, 2008). One of the world's most cited 'terrorism' scholars, Bruce Hoffman (1998), acknowledges that the term can be used to describe virtually any especially abhorrent act of violence perceived or directed against society whether by a NSAG or a state. Others argue that while terrorism may be perceived as "sheer madness" and "an unreasonable use of extreme violence and senseless futile political action", we may, in fact, be condemning as mad only that which we do not understand or what we dislike (Weimann & Kaplan, 2011, p. 2). The use of the 'terrorism' label may well be motivated more by an emotional reaction to the particular brutality and unexpectedness of a violent act, its victims, and perceptions about the "radical" nature of its message, rather than by any clear difference from other politically motivated violence (Archetti, 2015, p. 1). As Jackson aptly puts it, "whereas some use terrorist others use freedom fighters or is terrorism just revolution by another name or is it national liberation?" (2011, p. 117).

Significantly, these experts are based mostly in the US, Europe, or Israel. They tend to conceptualise NSAGs negatively through the lens of Western values, focusing attention on the security threat they pose and providing Great Powers with counter-terrorism recommendations (Mendelshon & McCants, 2016; Stern & Berger, 2015; Winter, 2015). In this way, they fail to maintain the independent, non-operational role of a researcher (Ranstorp, 2009). Understanding these groups solely through the myopic prism of terrorism studies tends to highlight their recourse to spectacular violence at the expense of explaining the significance of their respective historical contexts, governance arrangements, political objectives, and the "information battle" they undertake (Adhami, 2007, p. 858). Research that is undertaken for the express purpose of providing counter-terrorism policy recommendations, generally speaking, dismisses the "perspective of the perpetrators only because it conflicts with 'ours' means

denying ourselves the opportunity to fully understand social action" (Zulaika & Douglass, 2008, p. 18). The work of 'terrorism' experts, therefore, represents a missed opportunity to critically analyse, better understand, and more fully explain the groups' origins, conduct, and impact. Contrastingly, the ensuing thesis seizes this very opportunity.

A second category of literature conceptualising NSAGs relates to political scientists, sociologists, social anthropologists, and journalists often working, or having worked, in the MENA region, reporting on their observations, experiences, and interactions with these groups. Their writing is often informed by hearing local narratives through interviews with members of the groups, time spent embedded with group's armed wings, and witnessing first-hand the impact of their activities on the political environment and civilian life (Atwan, 2015; Chulov, 2015; Dunning, 2015; Gerges, 2016; Sluka, 2008). These authors often enjoy access to various sides of a conflict and are, therefore, able to more knowledgably and, perhaps critically, compare and contrast the competing claims put forth by the interested parties. In the past two years, there has been a noticeable surge in journalist-authored publications relating to the rise of IS in particular (Chulov, 2016; Cockburn, 2015; Weiss & Hassan, 2015). This surge appears, in some cases, to have been prompted by IS battlefield victories, which led to the seizure and occupation of important cities and large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, caused the deaths of many thousands of civilians, and the displacement of millions. Of most interest to many journalists (Cockburn, 2015; Weiss and Hassan, 2015) are the high-profile incidents involving fellow reporters or Western aid workers who have been captured, held hostage, and then beheaded by IS fighters, with vivid descriptions of these atrocities featuring in the opening pages of their respective works. This literature was particularly useful in the preparatory stages of this thesis for developing research questions, comprehending the experience of those directly involved in, or impacted by, the violence on the ground in their own words, and understanding what drives media reporting of this violence.

A third category of literature relates to scholarship that adopts a more holistic approach to conceptualising NSAGs, taking into account the evolution of their ideologies, the role that differences in their beliefs play in sectarian violence, their engagement with, and contribution to, their communities, organisational



governance arrangements, war-fighting capabilities, and political objectives (Gunning, 2009; Hroub, 2006; Jensen, 2009; Rogers, 2016). The work of scholars, such as Krause, provides an antidote to the crowded anti-terrorism field where he establishes a two-level framework for transforming the current “deceptive debate” (2013, p. 1) around NSAGs by acknowledging that, against the backdrop of violence, they are also pursuing particular political objectives that benefit their larger social movement as well as organisational goals beneficial to their own group, such as increasing funding and membership. Tuastad’s neo-orientalist and new barbarism approach (2003) makes an important contribution here, with its critique of Western vilification of subaltern critics and opponents. Meanwhile Strindberg & Warn (2005) provide a useful counterbalance with their argument that treating these groups as ‘terrorist’ enemies is an example of neo-colonial power politics where native struggles against established power structures are deemed to be beyond both reason and dialogue. Rogers’ recent work emphasises the importance of economic and ecological contexts to these “revolts from the margins” (2016, p. 4). This literature proved most useful for this thesis in exploring the historical contexts leading to the rise of both Hamas and IS and shaping their respective governance structures and political objectives.

Lastly, there is a growing pool of scholarly writing that falls into the category of critical studies on terrorism, a category in which this thesis might be best located. This group of scholars argues that orthodox terrorism research is dominated by an a-historic, depoliticised, state-centric, problem-solving approach that relies on secondary sources and replicates knowledge that accepts the states’ definition of the terrorism problem and reinforces the status quo (Jackson, 2011; Loadenthal, 2014; Poynting & Whyte, 2012; Sluka, 2008; Stump, 2013; Zulaika & Douglass, 2008). Instead, they advocate for a more critical approach in line with Cox’s notion that rather than taking institutions and power relations for granted, they should be called into question (Cox, 1981). In particular, Sluka critiques the reluctance in existing scholarship to understand and explain ‘terrorism’ from the point of view of the ‘terrorists’ and the communities in which their support is located. He argues that the “propaganda war” has resulted in a “terrorism scam” where terrorists are dehumanised, demonised, and denied legitimacy and political context (2008, p. 157). Instead,



such violence should be considered in a cultural context rather than one coloured by vested interests (Zulaika & Douglass, 2008).

There are, however, significant differences among the approaches of critical studies scholars. While so-called 'reformists' argue for the retention of the 'terrorist' terminology as long as a consensus on its definition is reached and it is applied consistently to all actors, 'rejectionists' argue it should be abandoned in academic research because it is too ideologically tainted to serve as the basis for rigorous, objective research (Stump, 2013) and is, in fact, unnecessary. They are supported by others who argue that 'terrorism' is a socially constructed label, when it is the linguistic representational practices of the term that should be the proper focus of research. Loadenthal's recent research is particularly useful given his perspective as someone who "discusses terrorists without learning about them through a rifle scope" (2014, p. 358). His work challenges more orthodox, traditionalist, and state-centric discourses and — although often described by critics as a "terrorist apologist" — Loadenthal prefers the moniker a "terrorist understander" as opposed to a "terrorist stopper" of the kind that conducts research with the aim of promoting counter-terrorism policies (2014, p. 359). Loadenthal's advice — namely, that a critical study of terrorism requires the use of an intentional methodology that prioritises transparency, repeatability, and the analysis of primary source data, especially when documenting violence from a non-state perspective — proved most salient for this thesis. Representing a radical departure from traditional counterterrorism approaches found in mainstream disciplinary International Relations, Loadenthal's approach (2014) involves understanding violence as positional, subjective, and a political formation of power while accepting that it can also present as structural inequality, such as the denial of citizenship or autonomy for a people as well as the destruction of property or harming of people.

For the purposes of this thesis, a critical approach is taken where the phenomenon of 'terrorism' is not investigated. Instead, the term is eschewed in favour of the less emotive descriptor of 'non-state armed groups' that, I argue, use war-fighting activities in careful calibration with their communications approaches in order to achieve their political objectives. In light of this critical approach, my thesis synthesises existing secondary literature and interrogates primary data through a unique analytic framework that enables a new

interpretation of these groups' behaviours and creates another way of understanding them as political actors in the context of contemporary world affairs. But before this thesis explores those two groups in greater depth, the next chapter explains the key design features of the research project that underpins the thesis.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTIC APPROACH**

This brief chapter outlines the salient features of the research project underpinning this thesis. In particular, it describes the research methodology used to collect and collate both primary and secondary source material. It also describes the analytical framework which was designed specifically to help make sense of the political communications of Hamas and IS. Put simply, the chapter explains how, in practical and conceptual terms, research, analysis, and assessment was undertaken in order to answer the two cognate questions sitting at the heart of this thesis.

\* \* \* \* \*

Given that safety concerns and logistical obstacles precluded fieldwork, in-situ interviews, participant observations, and other proximal techniques, the research methods used here were primarily distal. Firstly, material relating to the historical contexts, governance arrangements, political objectives, and war-fighting capabilities of Hamas and IS was collected from a mixture of primary and secondary sources through extensive digital and library-shelf searches. Primary source material — relating particularly to the historical contexts in which the groups were formed, their high-level operating principles, and their political objectives — was sourced from the groups' official websites in the form of online communiqués, speeches, press releases, and explanatory backgrounders as well as communications released via social media. Secondary sources included academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other research published by scholars geographically located both within and beyond the MENA region. Additional secondary material was found in the work of specialist journalists operating in the region and other international media organisations as well as postings on websites, blogs, and various social media sites by political, military, and 'terrorism' commentators. The net was cast reasonably wide.

Secondly, in relation to the two groups' communications material, an extensive internet-based desktop review was undertaken in order to gather hundreds of individual pieces of primary source material created by the

respective media arms of Hamas and IS. This includes, specifically, digital magazines; official and affiliated websites; YouTube clips; tweets on Twitter (the online news and social networking service where users post and interact with each other with messages under 140 characters); and official communiques issued by these groups. While the groups also use Whatsapp (the cross-platform instant messaging service that allows the exchange of text, images, video, and audio) and Telegram (another instant messaging application), these were not examined because end-to-end encryption rendered them inaccessible. The collection effort was targeted around a particularly intense period of conflict between June and October 2014, which presented a rare opportunity to compare a coincidental surge in violence and political communication undertaken by both Hamas and IS. A significant portion of IS' communications were removed from the internet by the initial hosting sites during this period, but some was found in cached documents hosted by academics and researchers working in the field of international armed conflict.

The collection of this material took approximately six months of extensive online research, scouring numerous websites in an attempt to identify the NSAGs' communications and then establish their authenticity. Dozens of tweets, approximately 300 website postings, 14 hours of video, 12 online magazines comprising 600 pages, hundreds of still images and other materials were gathered. Where possible, the accuracy and veracity of the data and other information gathered was tested through a process of triangulation, which involves collecting information from multiple sources in order to corroborate facts (O'Leary, 2005). Inspired by the approach taken by critical terrorism scholars, this thesis utilised the primary source data with the aim of "interrogating, triangulating and evaluating" these voices, as well as those of academics and state officials, in order to "avoid investigating terrorism by simply recycling and remixing secondary analysis offered by analysts, government and the popular press" (Loadenthal, 2014, p. 359). This helped to some extent mitigate the potential impact of my own partiality and 'Orientalist' bias in seeking to comprehend this global security challenge located largely on a distant battleground. It was difficult, at times, to find primary material that was buried deep within websites (as in the case of IS where most of its Twitter engagement was inaccessible) and to avoid translations of material by groups motivated to present it in a particularly slanted way. The Middle East Media Research

Institute (MEMRI), for example, describes itself as a non-profit press-monitoring and analysis organisation providing free English translation of Arabic communications, but is, in fact, founded and funded by Israel (Whitaker, 2002). Due to my own monolingualism, I only collected communications material written in English although, at times, I relied on the groups' translation into English of their own products, such as subtitles on videos with Arabic interviews.

Making sense of all the collected information was difficult. Despite the urgent need for a critical investigation of this topic in order to foster a better understanding of the dynamics that underpin the use of violence in world affairs (Krause & Milliken, 2009), the theoretical literature of disciplinary International Relations has yet to provide the explanatory frameworks necessary to adequately understand the roles and functions played by NSAGs (Alley, 2004). Hence, the broad terms of analysis used here were derived from a basic understanding of strategy as the matching of means (that is, organisational capabilities, especially governance and war-fighting capabilities) to a particular ends (that is, political objectives). An understanding of the underlying historical contexts seemed important too as the rise and evolution of both Hamas and IS appeared inextricably linked to the political realities of Middle Eastern politics. Once the material concerning these two groups was collected and analysed, key commonalities and differences were identified and assessed. This formed the basis for the argument of Chapter 4. In so doing, that chapter seeks to answer the first of the thesis' core research questions, thereby providing a sound basis for the more novel explanations offered in Chapters 5 and 6.

If making sense of NSAGs as political actors in contemporary world affairs was difficult, then making sense of their communications approaches during particularly intense periods of conflict was far more complex. Scholars have been somewhat slow in rising to this challenge, though there have been some important efforts. Where political communications of NSAGs are investigated, the focus tends to be on the "killing of civilians in mass, for a coercively political purpose, that is fear-generating and carried out to be psychologically persuasive, transmitting a threat-based form of communication to secondary or non-combatant audiences" (Loadenthal, 2014, p. 357-358). Matusitz (2013) asserts that this violence is, in fact, a message of its own and that communication is vital for these groups not only to draw attention to their cause, but also to ensure their

very survival. Other scholars — such as Weimann & Winn, who are prolific writers on terrorism, media, and the internet — provide insight into the use of communications by NSAGs as an inexpensive and effective form of psychological warfare in a context where the ‘practitioners of terror’ (1994, p. 4) can be either the defenders of a regime or a regime’s antagonists. Archetti points to a particular gap in the existing literature concerning social media when she writes: “Effectively without an understanding of communication in the digital age, the way research is being conducted in these domains can be compared to exploring the frontiers of space with Galileo’s telescope” (2013, p. 2). Despite offering a complex framework for contextualising and explaining the communications of NSAGs, Archetti’s work relies on ‘terrorism’ framing, which, for reasons already explained in Chapter 2, limits its usefulness for this thesis. Winter (2015) also prefers a terrorism framing for his analysis. His framework, influenced by his ‘counter-extremism’ approach designed to help the groups’ opponents develop counter-narratives, creates a particular slant and falls short of fully explaining the phenomenon of NSAGs and the congruence of their war-fighting activities and communications approaches.

The paucity of theory dealing, in particular, with the political communications of NSAGs posed a significant challenge when designing an appropriate analytic framework for this thesis. Hence, I created a bespoke analytic framework based on ideas gathered from scholars in the field as well as my two decades of professional experience as a journalist, communications specialist, and political adviser. The development of this framework was informed by recent studies, which provided important examples of how primary source material could be analysed. Klausen (2015) provides a forensic examination of 59 Twitter accounts used by IS supporters over a three-month period. This study is significant because it traces the account holders, identifying them by name, location, affiliation and even, in some cases, gender. She is also able to determine the existence of a high-level of sophistication and control exerted by a small number of users over the messages published and the ways in which these messages are distributed. Seo (2014) similarly provides analysis of visual images used by Hamas during the 2012 conflict with Israel. While these studies provide a useful snapshot, they are limited in terms of the period of time and content they cover compared to a more extensive IS Twitter Census provided by Berger & Morgan (2015), which captures between 20,000 and 46,000 Twitter

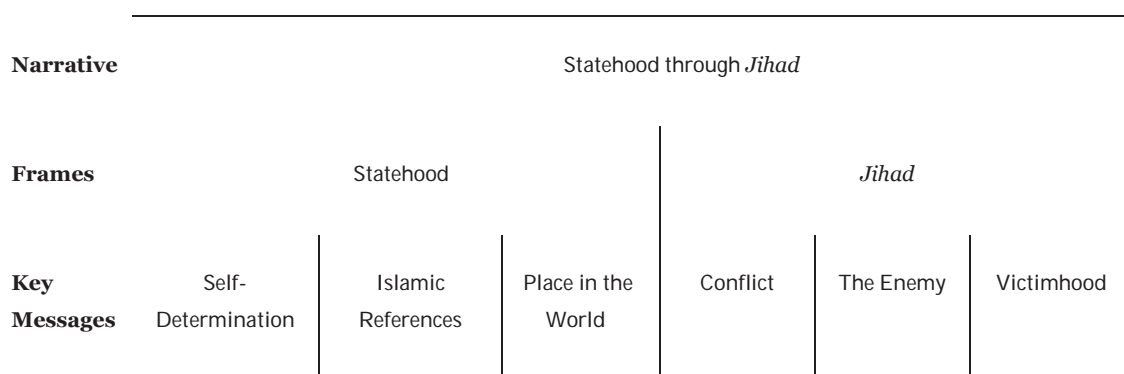
accounts. That study reaches the same conclusion as the smaller surveys in relation to control over the communications by certain super users, but it goes a step further by making recommendations to social media companies and the US Government to either suspend the Twitter accounts or exploit them as a valuable source of intelligence.

Given the deficiencies in these models, I examined Hamas' and IS' communications material on their own terms. As a disinterested observer, I wanted to know what they said they wanted to achieve and how they said they wanted to achieve it. Having examined hundreds of individual communications — ranging from tweets and online posts to press releases, speeches, magazines and 'news' reports, as well as watching more than a dozen hours of videos produced and distributed by the various media arms of these two NSAGs — I discovered that both groups articulated a strategic narrative. These narratives are central to the construction of identity (Lawler, 2002) for social and political actors, inform the practice of political communication via the internet or traditional media sources (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle, 2015), and help us make sense of the social and political impact of communications in the 21st century (Archetti, 2015). I also found that these strategic narratives had two aspects —namely, statehood and *jihad* — which were used as framing devices. Framing is the process of selecting and promoting certain aspects of issues and making connections among them in order to promote a particular interpretation (Entman, 2004). It is through framing that political actions shape the messages that influence the way people think (Nagel, 1975). The particular narrative and frames used by Hamas and IS were self-evident from my examination of the material. Both of these narratives were also articulated, consistently and repeatedly, through various streams of key messages.

Unlike Winter (2015), who identifies five major narratives utilised by the IS — namely, brutality; mercy; war; belonging; and victimhood — my preliminary examination of the material suggested that Hamas and IS each have a single, coherent, and consistent narrative comprising six streams of key messaging. These messages help convey narratives by presenting a story in a simple way that will resonate with a desired audience, offering a specific interpretation of reality and framed in a deliberate way to promote a particular political agenda and to create a relationship between the NSAG and its potential supporters (Tarrow,

1998). In practical terms, this meant that I read all of the communications material that I collected in order to discern what I judged to be the key messaging streams, though it is likely that other communications experts might identify other messaging streams. During this process, the terms of my analysis evolved when, for example, I found that what I had believed to be two separate streams — ‘unity’ and ‘place in the world’ — were actually different articulations of the same messaging stream. Furthermore, in the case of IS a category of ‘apocalyptic’ messaging was subsumed into the ‘Islamic references’ stream. These modifications merely signal that the analysis of NSAG’s communications approaches is more a craft than a hard science. Forming the categories into which the communications material was collated and analysed was challenging given, for example, the notion of statehood is essentially a Westphalian one that seeks to transform a group of individuals into a nation, whereas the *dawla* in pre-colonial Arab Islamic usage (which may be a more appropriate term in relation to IS) is derived more from serving the whole *ummah*.

Thus, for the purposes of this thesis I settled on six messaging streams, which led me to design the following bespoke framework for analysing the political communications of Hamas and IS.



I then categorised and collated all of the communications material in terms of these key messages. Much of this material fell within more than one messaging stream and was categorised accordingly. The analysis phase was, therefore, inductive, exploring open-ended questions instead of testing hypothesis through deduction (Marsh & Stoker, 2010). Rather than being locked into a rigid design, my analysis took a somewhat flexible and nuanced approach, allowing for



discovery by surprise and demonstrating empathetic neutrality when understanding a complex social world without deliberative judgement (Flyvberg, 2006). Hermeneutics, which is concerned with the interpretation of texts and actions, also provides a useful contribution to my analysis, assisting with identifying narratives and their meanings for NSAGs and, on the basis of this 'thick description' may offer further insight into the social dynamics informing the NSAGs themselves (Furlong & Marsh, 2010). The analytical methodology is also informed by a philosophical orientation widely known as anti-foundationalism, which takes, as a given, the assumption that human beings are unable to access a single reality or truth without the mediation of their senses, perceptions, and cognition. Rather than existing as something to be discovered, reality or truth is constructed by humans who are unable to suspend their values, tastes, and judgments (Furlong & Marsh, 2010). While this approach tends to focus on the meaning of behaviour and understanding, it does not exclude the potential for explaining or establishing causal links, for, as Stoker (2010) points out, there is a craft element to doing research, which implies a journey of discovery rather than the rigid application of rules.

Hence, the analysis informing this thesis follows an interpretive and hermeneutic epistemological approach that acknowledges no single objective reality or truth exists, the world is socially constructed, and social phenomenon cannot be understood independent of our interpretation of them (Furlong & Marsh, 2010). There is also an acceptance that objectivity is impossible, but an attempt is nonetheless made to achieve empathetic neutrality (Marsh & Stoker, 2010). The analysis takes a holistic perspective by seeking to understand the phenomenon of NSAGs more broadly, instead of reducing the investigation to an examination of its political communication's formal properties. Chapters 5 and 6 exploit this analysis in order to answer the second of the thesis' core research questions.

Drawing on the results of that analysis, I then assessed the extent to which each group's communications approaches support their overall strategy, paying particular attention to the key differences between these approaches. I also considered both communications approaches in the broader contemporary context of the traditional media's global reach. While limiting my assessment to two cases can be unrepresentative, revealing findings specific only to these

particular NSAGs, comparison can help assess the validity of our interpretation of political phenomenon and may allow for a more sophisticated understanding of the issue under examination (Hopkin, 2010). Putting the cases in historical perspective, as has been done in this thesis, may also enable a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the groups.

Finally, since this thesis relies on text, images, and other information already in the public domain and does not reproduce any of those images, it is highly unlikely that any person would be harmed by the analysis of this primary material. Consequently, this thesis does not present a discernible ethical risk. It is worth noting, however, the thesis' heavy reliance on digital research does raise important ethical questions around the examination and inclusion of text and images posted on social networking sites (Wiles, 2013) because, while this material may have been placed freely in the public domain, it would prove technically and logistically impossible to verify all of the material posted on these sites, which are often posted by people using pseudonyms or anonymous usernames. Given these individuals are not easily identifiable, and that I have not sought to identify them through activities such as tracing IP addresses, this ethical concern is largely moot. There is, however, a risk that a number of the images analysed here have been published without the consent of the person(s) depicted.

## **4. HAMAS AND THE ISLAMIC STATE: SEARCHING FOR STATEHOOD**

This first substantive chapter describes the historical contexts from which both Hamas and IS emerged before explaining each group's governance arrangements, political objectives, and war-fighting capabilities. It notes, firstly, that both groups emerge from, and operate within, the Middle East region and that religious history saturates their organisational mandates too. Significantly, both groups have arisen as a reaction to the belligerent foreign policies of other states; Israel in the case of Hamas and the US in the case of IS. The chapter then argues that both groups, frequently labelled by their opponents as terrorist organisations, are highly organised providers of an extensive array of social services and humanitarian assistance. Both groups maintain powerful war-fighting capabilities too, signalling that both are, at heart, armed resistance movements fighting a more powerful belligerent. While they both search for statehood through *jihad*, their methods of achieving this differ in that Hamas' war-fighting is focused locally through sporadic small-scale armed violence whereas IS operates more akin to an army conquering territory across borders. IS also encourages violence by supporters against military targets and civilians internationally. This chapter, which sets out who these groups are, how they are organised, and what they hope to achieve, provides the necessary context for the subsequent and more novel analysis informing Chapter 5 and 6, which together explain how communication is used as part of both groups' overarching strategy and, more specifically, what relationship exists between their war-fighting activities and communications approaches.

### **(a) Historical Context**

The Islamic Resistance Movement or *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (Hamas) is a powerful NSAG operating in the territory of Palestine under a self-proclaimed mandate of facilitating "national liberation" from the occupying force of Israel (Ashour, 2009, p. 157). While Palestine is considered a sacred religious place and is intimately linked with Islam historically (Jefferis, 2016), it also occupies a geo-strategic position linking the African and Asian parts of the Middle

East, offering a long coast and passage on the Mediterranean between the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, and Greater Syria (Hroub, 2010). Meaning 'strength and bravery', Hamas was formed through "rallying people together" and encouraging them to follow the "ways of Allah and martyrdom" in a bid to liberate a "historically mandated Islamic *waqf* (inalienable charitable endowment) entrusted as a religious endowment to all generations of Moslems" (Hamas, 1988, p. 1). The organisation formally declared its existence in a public communique on 14 December 1987, five days after the eruption of the first Palestinian *intifada* (uprising against oppression) (Hroub, 2010). While its founding Charter outlines its mission as well as its objectives, the announcement of the group's formation was also a prime opportunity to attract the attention and sympathy of world opinion to the social, economic, and political plight of the Palestinians during a particularly intense period of conflict (Jefferis, 2016). Hamas' emergence came at a time when the harsh living conditions in the region had reached unprecedented levels with half of the population aged under 14 and only 20% of school leavers and university graduates able to find jobs while many of those 'lucky' enough to find work suffered from low wages and under-employment (Gunning, 2007). These socio-economic conditions created fertile ground for the kind of potent mix of politics and violence advocated by Hamas as "poverty combined with feelings of oppression and humiliation charged the Palestinian atmosphere with the ripe conditions for revolt" against the Israeli occupation (Hroub, 2010, p. 6).

The group's roots can be traced back to the 1930s when Palestinian activist Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam and fellow members of the Muslim Brotherhood used violence against the British Mandate governing the region after World War I (Hamas, 1988). Founded in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood is a religious and political movement that aims to ensure society lives out Islam in all aspects of life (Bhasin & Hallward, 2013, p. 75) and to liberate the Muslim world from colonial rule (Gunning, 2007). Considered the "mother of all movements that comprise political Islam" in the Middle East with the exception of Iran (Hroub, 2010, p. 6), the Muslim Brotherhood was the organisation from which Hamas emerged as a Palestinian off-shoot. Significant differences between the groups have subsequently emerged. Whereas the Brotherhood's traditional stance has been that Muslims must be educated about Islam and committed to their religion before rising up, Hamas encourages grassroots activists to take up arms in a bid

to seize control of territory so that people can then live and be educated in the ways of Islam. Whereas the Muslim Brotherhood was motivated to establish Islamic states in each of the countries they operate within with a utopian vision of ultimately uniting those territories into a single *umma* (Hroub, 2010, p. 6), Hamas offers a contemporary case of an Islamist movement engaged in a national liberation struggle (Hroub, 2010) for and within Palestine, with the objective of establishing a state with an Islamic framework, but operating within the prevailing Westphalian world order. In this way, Hamas is a unique organisation born of a “religious mandate in a political conflict, seeking to govern in a territory that is not technically a state and trying to fight a war without the authority to form a military” (Jefferis, 2016, p. 1).

While Hamas’ focus is the creation of a Palestinian state, rather than any attempt to expand its authority beyond its borders, the group describes itself as a ‘universal’ movement (Hamas, 1988) with its core ideology based on a “circle of struggle” where its people are Palestinian first, Arab second, and, thirdly, Islamic (Baracskay, 2015, p. 525). Hamas emphasises the global nature of its effort to liberate Palestine (Rizqa, 2014) as an individual religious duty required of all Muslims wherever they live (Hamas, 1988). In return, the joint defence of the Arab and Muslim world and protection of its rights and interests is seen as the duty of Hamas’ members. In its formative period, the religious foundations of Hamas were particularly prominent with Qu’ranic references littered throughout its founding documents and other communications, including its mission statement: “Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Qu’ran its constitution: *Jihad* is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes” (Hamas, 1998, p. 1). Given Hamas’ characterisation of itself as “completely embracing” Islamic concepts of all aspects of life from culture to economics to politics (Hamas, 1988, p. 1) — specifically the five pillars of Islam: *shahada* (bearing witness to God); *salah* (prayer); *sawm* (fasting); *zakat* (alms-giving); and *hajj* (pilgrimage) (Rizqa, 2014) — any attempt to understand Hamas’ motivations and actions must take into account the deeply influential nature of those religious underpinnings (Dunning, 2015). In particular, its founding principle of armed struggle against an occupying force derives its origins from *shahada* in keeping with the view of Sunni Muslims who believe that fighting to defend your religion is the pinnacle of Islam.

Today, however, Hamas' religious rhetoric has been significantly toned down, particularly in its English language communications, with its leaders more likely to frame the group as a "Palestinian national liberation movement" first, followed by an Islamic "frame of reference" (Rizqa, 2014, p. 2). In the words of Khalid Meshaal, the leader of its Political Bureau: "[Hamas] is... a comprehensive liberation movement operating in various fields and arenas and has its own goals and political vision. It is a popular movement living the concerns of its people at home and abroad defending their interests and seeking to serve them" (Rizqa, 2014, p. 2).

Like Hamas, IS is located in the Middle East and its mandate is saturated with Islam. It emerged in response to ongoing intervention in the region by foreign powers, such as the US, seeking to impose 'Western-friendly' democracies. IS was supported by members of the local population strongly opposed to this intervention, as well as to the consequential rise of Shi'ah politicians and military leaders installed by the US, and desiring a safe place in which to freely live and practice their particular variant of Sunni Islam. In contrast to Hamas' ambition to liberate a particular defined territory, IS seeks to establish a transnational *khilafah* that is *baqiya wa tatamadad* (remaining and expanding) (McCants, 2015). It also differs in its imposition of the *khilafah* on the population through coercive force whereas Hamas believes statehood should be willed by the people. As a *Jihadi-Salafist* group (adherents to the 'true' Sunni form of Islam), IS offers followers the opportunity to live in strict adherence to the religious principles set down by the Prophet Muhammad in a territory purged of heretics and apostates. Its religious ideology is a form of Sunni Islam that rigorously conforms to the text of the Qur'an, is deeply rooted in pre-modern theological tradition, and extensively elaborated by a particular group of recognised religious authorities (Bunzel, 2015). Its stream of Islamic thought is primarily occupied with purifying the faith, eliminating *shirk* (idolatry), and affirming Allah's *tawhid* (oneness) as the only true Muslim movement. Its doctrine is to only associate with fellow true Muslims, that any failure to rule in accordance with Allah's law constitutes unbelief, and fighting IS is tantamount to apostasy (Bunzel, 2015). Considered a revolutionary actor whose *modus operandi* is to "project a goal of radical political and social change" (Lister, 2015, p. 34), IS therefore considers opponents — such as the West, Shi'ah-dominated

Iran, and other religious groups such as the Yazidis — as being in a *de facto* alliance against the true Sunni faith (Kilcullen, 2015).

While IS traces its ideological lineage from the inception of Islam to 14<sup>th</sup> century Syrian philosopher Ibn Tayniyyah through to Saudi Arabian-linked Wahhabism (Alexander & Alexander, 2015), the group only formally emerged in 2004 when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi merged his insurgent organisation *Jama'at al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad* (The Group of God's Unity and *Jihad*) with al-Qaeda's operation, forming al-Qaeda in Iraq (BBC, 2015b). Under al-Zarqawi, the group essentially evolved from conducting guerrilla warfare against the US intervention in Iraq to include, among its activities, the fomenting of a civil war between Shi'ah and Sunni (Kilcullen, 2015). It was during this time that the shift towards a *khilafah* was first signalled when al-Zarqawi described the creation of the Mujahidin Shura Council in April 2006 as the "starting point for the establishment of an Islamic State" (Bunzel, 2015). After al-Zarqawi's assassination two months later, new leader Abu Umar al-Baghdadi — otherwise known as Hamid Dawud Khalil al-Zawi — announced, via the group's *Al-Furqan* news agency, the establishment of *al-Dawla al Islamiyya fi Iraq* (Islamic State in Iraq), signalling the transition from a military to a political actor responsible for governing the territory under its control (Lister, 2015). In a treatise titled 'Informing Mankind of the Birth of the Islamic State', al-Baghdadi's rise to power was legitimated through his election by an elite group of elders known as the *ahlul-halli-wa'l-'aqd* (people of authority) — in this case the Mujahidin Shura Council (Bunzel, 2015). At the time, the group's formation and ambition for a *khilafah* was welcomed by those looking for a revived faith-based movement they could support and fight for, but decried by critics as a fanciful utopia existing only in the minds of its leader and a small band of followers.

The US invasion of Iraq, and the power and security vacuum created by the fall of the Baa'thist regime that provided insurgents with a new "haven" from which to undertake their *jihad* (Adhami, 2007, p. 858), was key to IS' rise. In fact, IS' ongoing evolution has been largely shaped by the US military strategy in the Middle East. The group's power was, for example, severely limited as a result of the US military surge and the creation of US-backed *Sahwa* (Awakening) Councils, which rejected IS' absolutist ideology and particularly brutal activities (Lister, 2015). After Abu Umar al-Baghdadi's death in 2010, Ibrahim ibn Awwad



ibn Ibrahim ibn Ali ibn Muhammed al-Badri al-Samarri — known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi — assumed control of the group, significantly developing its military capability (BBC, 2015b). His credentials for the role of 'Commander of the Faithful' were rooted in his descent from Prophet Muhammed's Qurayshi tribe, his doctorate in Islamic jurisprudence, published writings on Qur'anic recitation, and experience as an Islamic Preacher. The new leader took advantage of the US' withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan and its unwillingness to intervene in civil conflict in Syria, as well as increasing Sunni disenfranchisement in Iraq and Syria, by merging his troops in the two countries and rebranding the group as Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) (Kilcullen, 2015). In 2011, al-Baghdadi dispatched a small band of experienced fighters, led by operations chief Abu Muhammed al-Jawlani to Syria, in order to establish a new front, Jabhat al-Nusra (the Salvation Front), which was publicly announced on 23 January 2012. The aim here was to preserve ISIL's capability, create more strategic depth by expanding across the territory, and to exploit emerging sectarian violence in Syria by positioning itself ahead of other rebel groups with its strongly-resourced and battle-hardened veterans (Kilcullen, 2015). However, the move did not go smoothly with a public disagreement developing between the two groups when ISIL took credit for al-Nusra as an extension of itself, which was subsequently denied by al-Jawlani (Bunzel, 2015).

Like Hamas, IS' rise to power has not been without its internal challenges as it sought to cast off the shackles of al-Qaeda, the movement from which it emerged but with which it was suffering from ongoing ideological fissures, and to establish itself as a force operating across multiple fronts. At the forefront of this challenge was the clash with rival Sunni groups with a public dispute between IS and al-Qaeda over whether it was just an off-shoot of an existing movement that was breaching the rules of membership by conducting extreme violence and *takfir* (excommunication) or, in fact, an independent group now eclipsing al-Qaeda as the region's preeminent NSAG (Bunzel, 2015). This debate was important within Islam because, as a state, IS could require unrestricted *bay'ah*, that is, a traditional contract in this case between a commander and the commanded, which would give IS the opportunity to expand and conquer more territory. The latter view was reinforced with a military surge into western Iraq and the announcement of a *khilafah* to be known as the Islamic State on 29 June 2014. Al-Baghdadi's demand that all *jihadi* groups worldwide must accept its



supreme authority and carry out *hijrah* (migration) to the *khilafah* nullified any internal challengers (Al-Furqan, 2014b). In demanding *bay'ah* and making *hijrah* compulsory, IS differs from Hamas, which views allegiance as something that is given rather than forced from its supporters through the threat of harsh punishments. Hamas has a less draconian view, consistent with its overt nationalism, of how Muslims should support its cause, including financial and political backing, as opposed to mandatory migration.

Here, then, both groups are steeped in religious history and, therefore, born of a religious mandate founded in a particular form of Islam sharing common principles or values such as *shahada*, *zakat*, *hajj* or *hijra*. Perhaps most importantly, however, Hamas and IS emerged from a volatile region, endured political and religious persecution, and formed as reactions against Israel's invasion and occupation of Palestine, and the US invasion and occupation of Iraq, respectively.

### **(b) Governance Arrangements**

Hamas is a highly sophisticated and complex organisation comprising an extensive network of social service institutions, an armed wing, and a political branch that essentially manages Gaza as a self-governing authority without the sovereign prerogatives of a state. It has evolved from a marginalised armed group to a deeply embedded and influential player in Palestinian politics with the capacity to govern simultaneously through top-down institutional politics and bottom-up social welfare networks (Berti, 2015). Hamas' membership is drawn mostly from poor and middle-class Palestinians with a particularly strong presence in refugee camps and other deprived areas, though more wealthy supporters can also be found in conservative cities (Hroub, 2010). While Hamas adopts Islam as *din wa dawla* (an all-embracing governance system) where the state and religion are considered inseparable, it also utilises models drawn from Western political theory and related democratic practices, such as the election of members to positions of authority (Hroub, 2010). The political system endorsed by Hamas is neither a "theocracy nor a democracy but a hybrid" in which people have the right to elect their political leaders while Allah provides the moral

authority and principles on which their rule and any legislation is based (Gunning, 2007, p. 68).

The right of people to choose their leaders through elections is considered by Hamas to be the most appropriate mechanism to achieve *bay'ah*. It has adopted the principle of majority rule and believes that political pluralism is necessary to achieve Islamic values, such as freedom and equality, particularly in providing a solution to the question of minorities so that the homeland belongs to all citizens (Rizqa, 2014). This demonstrates that Hamas identifies with two strongly linked sources for political authority: one divine, the other contractual. For example, it adopts the Western notion of a separation of powers because this fits with the Islamic tradition that rulers should be subject to the law (Gunning, 2007) and it interprets the Qur'anic requirement for consultation as the need for nation-wide democratic elections. Liberation is vital to Hamas' understanding of nationalism as a concept based on faith, principles, and a rejection of factionalism which is "part and parcel" of its religion and ideology (Rizqa, 2014, p. 9). The group does not believe nationalism is incompatible with pan-Islamism or Arab unity because, while the *ummah* draws on many countries and religious elements, Islam is the "religion of unity and equality, guaranteeing a bond among all as long as they collaborate for the greater good" (Rizqa, 2014, p. 10). Hamas' approach to governing is "neither anti-modern nor anti-democratic nor inherently anti-Western" (Gunning, 2007, p. 70), although it has shown centralising authoritarian tendencies and restricted the level of freedom for the average citizen of Gaza (Berti, 2015).

Hamas is deeply invested in institutional politics and strategically committed to preserving its power and authority (Berti, 2015), resulting in a pragmatic style of governance where it compromises some political goals for the sake of continuing popularity. Under Hamas' rule, citizenship is granted to all those who live in the territory regardless of religious affiliation. All have the right to vote, including non-Muslims and women, with individuals from both groups permitted to run for positions of power within the organisation and to occupy ministerial posts in any government it forms (Gunning, 2007). Hamas' membership is strongly disciplined with a culture of internal solidarity where moderate and radical voices are accommodated. This discipline is reinforced by the reliance of the population on social services provided by Hamas and also

because of its practice of executing those found to be “collaborating” with Israel, its enemy (Jefferis, 2016, p. 85).

At a lower level, the group’s internal structure consists of local *usrat* (small organisational cells) that each have their own members and leader. These *usrat* elect local representatives to regional councils who, in turn, elect members of the leading party body *Majlis ash-Shoura* (the Shura Council), which sets overall strategy and has final authority over formal policy decision-making. *Shura* is defined in the Qur’an as the right of a nation to express an opinion on public affairs as long as definitive texts or general principles that cannot be subject to consultation or reinterpretation are not violated (Rizqa, 2014). The powerful *Shura* Council is the equivalent of legislative power at the state level (Gunning, 2007) with the ability to monitor and collapse the Government in a vote of no confidence; however, its ability to exercise authority is somewhat diminished by the geographical spread of Hamas’ leadership, the relative political and financial autonomy of the external leadership, and the particular problems created by Hamas’ clandestine branch which engages in violence (Gunning, 2007).

This notion of *shura* sets the general principles for political life while democracy, which is considered a “Western version of the Islamic *Shura*”, provides the methodology and mechanism for decision-making (Rizqa, 2014, p. 19). The Shura Council elects the Political Bureau comprising up to 20 members and is responsible for implementing strategy through day-to-day operations on behalf of Hamas. There are also specialised committees that oversee Hamas’ various activities, including charitable and social work, education and health services, media and communications, religious functions, and military action (Hamas, 2017). A judicial system also exists independently of the political apparatus. While the source of its legislation is *shari’ah* law, Hamas also believes that law provides a set of principles, leaving room for other legal systems and scientific knowledge to complement it (Gunning, 2007). *Shari’ah* law manages relationships among individuals, protects their moral and material rights, and holds them accountable for their actions with Hamas’ rule based on the 2003 Basic Law, which is a body of modern constitutional rules and principles that address public and personal rights to ensure justice and equality for all without discrimination (Rizqa, 2014).

Political leadership is the ultimate authority within Hamas (Hroub, 2010) with all other wings and branches subject to the strategic and operational decisions that are dictated by the Shura Council and Political Bureau. The structure of Hamas' political leadership is divided into parallel parts with an internal group of leaders making decisions on the ground in Gaza while an external group conducts the majority of its political lobbying and fundraising from exile in other countries. While the group's violence is sanctioned by its political leaders, there is a deliberate vagueness about the connection between the two branches in order to avoid accountability or punishment for these actions and to protect against organisational disruption, as was the case when more than 400 of its senior members were deported from Palestine in 1992 (Hroub, 2010).

Since its formation, Hamas has successfully transitioned from being a marginal political organisation in Palestine to governing Gaza (Berti, 2015) when it rose to power in 2006 on the back of a dire economic situation with rising unemployment, extreme poverty, and an increase in the number of Israelis settlements in the Occupied Territories. At the time, its strongest opponent, Fatah — which dominated the governing Palestinian Authority in the West Bank — was weakened by corruption, nepotism, and an autocratic style of governing that lost it a lot of public goodwill (Hroub, 2010). Fatah was suffering particularly as a result of the failure of the Oslo peace process. Hamas opposed the process as "illegitimate" (Ashour, 2009, p. 173) when its promise of improved security and prosperity failed to materialise along with the proposed two-state solution (Gunning, 2007). Hamas' rise was also aided by its decision to abide by a ceasefire in 2005, which reassured the population that the group would end violence once an acceptable two-state solution had been reached, and by its securing of lower middle and middle class votes well beyond its core Islamist and anti-peace constituency by downplaying its long-term goal of liberating the entire Palestinian territory (Gunning, 2007).

Once it took power in January 2006, Hamas came under intense pressure when it had to cope with its internal organisational responsibilities as well as governmental ones (Ashour, 2009) on behalf of the 1.8 million residents in the 40km coastal strip of Gaza. Its economy has since suffered from the impact of continued conflict with Israel, particularly in its businesses and agricultural industry as well as the cost of constantly rebuilding damaged infrastructure and

public utilities (United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), 2015). The closure of border tunnels with Egypt had restricted the flow of goods, cutting revenue from taxes on fuel, cigarettes, and building materials although that has now eased somewhat (al-Mughrabi, 2017). Funding from Iran has also been cut as the result of an increasingly frosty diplomatic relationship. Hamas has been forced to reduce salaries for public servants and recently restricted the supply of electricity to four hours a day, sparking unprecedented public protests against the group. While it continues to govern Gaza, Hamas has yet to heal the political rift with Fatah (Rushdi, 2017).

In its early years, IS had virtually no land to govern but, by 2014, the group controlled a territory larger than the United Kingdom (UK) with a population estimated at ten million (Curwen, 2014). IS conducts its activities as a *dawla*, which in Arabic can mean a form of the modern nation-state or, alternatively, the evolution of Islam's greatest medieval empire, Dawla Abbasiyya, which covered territory in Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, and North Africa (McCants, 2015). Underneath al-Baghdadi's leadership sits a Cabinet of advisers and a Shura Council. Two deputies have specific responsibility for Syria and Iraq with twelve governors under each of them administering provinces in those territories. A number of councils also operate along the lines of ministries with responsibility for fiscal issues, military and legal affairs, public relations, and fighters' welfare as well as security and intelligence services (Thompson & Shubert, 2015). IS bases its electoral system on *bay'ah* which, as a cornerstone of Islamic *shura*, gives people the right to appoint and impeach rulers (Rizqa, 2014). Unlike Hamas, which views Islam as a humanistic movement that respects human rights, IS does not tolerate other faiths under its rule. On the one hand, IS requires non-believers to pay a specific *dhimmi* (protected person) tax for the privilege of living under its rule while, on the other, it seeks to eradicate all "deviants" who do not follow its exclusionary version of Islam (Al-Hayat, 2014f). While both groups see religion and politics as inseparable, IS denounces Hamas and other Islamic movements who embrace democracy and nationalism as part of their governance system (Akram, 2015). Hamas perceives nationalism as prescribed by Islam, contrasting its definition — which focuses on freeing the land from "usurpers", instilling principles of freedom and greatness in its people, and building unity — against the "divisive" nationalism associated with "colonialism, the rise of materialism, and national and geographic division in

Europe" (Rizqa, 2014, p. 8). However, IS believes that approach simply panders and hands power to the Western colonial system which has oppressed Muslims for centuries.

IS has comprehensive and complex governance arrangements, including the appointment of civic officials responsible for public utilities such as water, electricity, and gas. These arrangements enable it to operate hospitals providing free healthcare, including vaccinations, and create food production systems, such as factories and bakeries with price controls on basic items like bread and milk. Other public services include a free bus network, postal system, soup kitchens, and other humanitarian assistance, as well as Islamic schools (Lister, 2015). Despite these arrangements, IS faces significant internal challenges to its economy, particularly agriculture, and has trouble maintaining basic services, including water and power supplies. This is largely because of the damage caused by thousands of coalition airstrikes to vital infrastructure and its consequential inability to extract and export natural resources such as oil. Its revenue is also drained by the need to financially support its fighting force (Al-Tamimi, 2016). To some extent, IS relies on the resilience of a local population accustomed to poor living standards (Al-Tamimi, 2016). Balancing governance needs with war-fighting priorities has led to allegations of inequitable treatment. This is because IS provides funding, food, and fuel to people who cooperate, including local leaders and tribes who maintain their own security, while punishing those who dissent from its religious-political programme (Atran, 2015). Sometimes these punishments include the kidnapping of children and the murder of residents whose bodies are dumped in mass graves (Associated Press, 2016). This carrot-and-stick approach is designed to both entice and intimidate the local population (McCants, 2015).

Intelligence and police units enforce law and order in the territory and a judicial system has been established based on a particular form of *shari'ah* law, which imposes the concept of *hudud* (punishments mandated by Allah) (Kilcullen, 2015). IS' approach departs significantly from Hamas' model, which embraces *shari'ah* as guiding principles, rather than as rules to be harshly enforced. Whereas Hamas believes it is unfair to punish those who breach rules due to the economic and social hardship, IS requires attendance for five daily prayers while drugs, tobacco, alcohol, gambling, non-Islamic music, and gender

mixing are banned (Lister, 2015). Under IS, non-Muslims face severe restrictions, including an inability to establish their own places of worship or to demonstrate any outward sign of their faith, as well as a ban on carrying weapons and consuming pork and alcohol (Al-Tamimi, 2013). Harsh punishments are meted out to those who breach these rules; for example, theft results in hand amputation, sexual intercourse outside of marriage attracts one hundred lashes or stoning to death while blasphemers, homosexuals, murderers, and those who commit treason are publicly executed (McCants, 2015).

As IS expanded, particularly in Libya, Yemen, Nigeria, and Somalia, it drew on the human and financial resources of these new provinces (McCants, 2015). IS' revenue now comes from multiple sources, including oil exportation, selling antiquities on the international black market, and funding from international supporters (Kilcullen, 2015). It also imposes a *jizya* (tax) on *dhimmi* and has established numerous other taxes, including a custom's charge for trucks travelling between Syria and Jordan (Lister, 2015). At its height, its assets were estimated at US\$2 billion, with an income of US\$2 million a day largely from oil exportation (Lister, 2015), though those figures have varied depending on the territory the group holds at any particular point in time. The bulk of the group's revenue goes towards maintaining its war-fighting capability, especially fighters' salaries and benefits and the maintenance of military bases. Documents obtained from the group show fighters receive a basic wage of US\$50 per month, plus US\$50 for each wife, US\$35 per child, US\$50 per sex slave, US\$35 for child of a sex slave, US\$50 for dependent parent and also allowances for food, heating costs, and special duties (Al-Tamimi, 2016). However, the recent decrease in territory under its control, as well as reduced access to the border with Turkey, the Iraq government's decision to stop paying salaries of government workers in IS-held territory, and coalition airstrikes on key infrastructure, including oil facilities, has severely impacted its revenue (Lister, 2015). Consequently, fighters' salaries and the maintenance of public utilities, especially power, have been cut while fees, such as repentance charges for former army and police in Mosul, have increased (Al-Tamimi 2016).

Both Hamas and IS are driven by strong leadership that draws inspiration from Islam. Whereas Hamas emphasises Islam's moderate and tolerant elements, IS draws on a far more literal and fundamentalist interpretation of



Islam. This difference helps to explain, at least in part, important nuances within their respective political objectives. And, as Chapters 5 and 6 will demonstrate, the divergent ways in which these groups pursue their respective causes results in differing communications approaches.

### **(c) Political Objectives**

While Hamas' origins and its leaders' beliefs are founded on Palestinian nationalism and Islam, the group employs a rational and calculated form of pragmatic politics. It takes advantage of contemporary events and secures the group's long-term political survival as opposed to everlasting spiritual rewards (Jefferis, 2016). Religion provides a framework for Hamas' political programme, however "its flexible position has broken a traditional Islamist attitude that others continue to cling to" (Rizqa, 2014, p. 13). The bulk of its political manifesto reads like any secular political party's manifesto and, in its internal practices, the group appears to value secular political and administrative expertise more than religious (Gunning, 2007). While the tension between the 'religious' and 'political' elements are constantly encountered (Hroub, 2010), the decision to shift from religious to political expediency is tactical and pragmatic, rather than a reflection of a changed consensus within the movement (Long, 2010).

While Hamas' political activity was initially limited to activism in universities and workplaces and providing social services (Jensen, 2009), grassroots work proved a significant ingredient in its strategic transition from the primary voice of the political opposition to governors of Gaza. In its first two decades, Hamas' focus was largely limited to its charitable work, violence against Israel, and opposition to other Palestinian groups pursuing peace through international diplomacy. However, the burying of the Oslo Accords by the Al-Aqsa *intifada* in 2000 along with the welcomed coincidence of a leadership void among its opponents created by the death of Yassir Arafat and Israel's withdrawal from Gaza provided a significant opportunity for Hamas to pursue self-governance through taking part in, and succeeding, at local and national elections (Hroub, 2010).

While Hamas is a key player in the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as the arena of political Islam, the extent of its political success is questionable (Jefferis,



2016). Since it took power in Gaza, living conditions have deteriorated as the result of three catastrophic conflicts with Israel in 2008-09, 2012, and 2014, the resulting humanitarian disaster, and an inability to rebuild in the aftermath due to less international financial support (UNGA, 2015). Hamas stands accused of violating human rights through extrajudicial killing, torture, and jailing, and beyond the forum of the UNGA, which recognises its existence, the prospects of a Palestinian state remain bleak (Jefferis, 2016). Hamas faces a number of future challenges, including its tendency to blur the distinction between state and non-state actor, as well as struggling between its founding ideology and attempts to maximise and preserve power (Berti, 2015). Due to a combination of immense external pressures as well as Hamas' own mistakes, Gaza has been effectively sealed off from the outside world with 80-90% of its people dependent on external aid for survival. While critics argue that as long as Hamas retains its international designation as a terrorist entity and "its increasing internal notoriety as a washed-up religious sell-out, it will spiral towards a future of obscurity" (Jefferis, 2016, p. 105), others assert the group will continue to enjoy popularity as long as Palestinians suffer from the Israeli occupation and the Knesset (Israeli legislature) refuses to acknowledge Palestinian rights (Long, 2010).

Through these trials and tribulations Hamas established its political objectives and, despite changes to its rhetoric that accommodated political realities, these remain largely unchanged since its founding mission to make Palestine a state that allowed citizens to fulfil their purpose as servants of God (Jefferis, 2016). Put succinctly, the group's main political objectives are: (a) self-determination through liberating the land in order to establish a sovereign Palestinian state; (b) resistance against the Israeli occupation through *jihad*; and (c) creating unity through the right of return for refugees and establishing a place for Palestine in the existing world order (Hamas, 2017).

Whereas Hamas demonstrates political pragmatism in the form of a willingness to downplay its religiosity and to be flexible in how it pursues its political objectives, IS is uncompromising in the doctrine governing its political actions. As al-Baghdadi puts it: "it will persist upon its *aqidah* (creed) and its *manhaj* (path) and it has not, nor will it ever, substitute or abandon this" (Bunzel, 2015). For IS, there can be no separation between the religious and political arms

of its movement for they are both located within their single leader, the *Khalif* (Caliph), who has ultimate decision-making authority, albeit based on advice from his Cabinet and the guidance of the Shura Council. As *Salafi* exclusivists, IS' path to power differs from the more mature group, Hamas, which grew out of Muslim Brotherhood activism and a willingness to participate in existing secular electoral systems. IS asserted its dominance through sheer force in a shattered geopolitical landscape (Ramadan, 2016) as well as by offering its supporters a movement promising to restore Islam's glory through conquering, consolidating, and defending territory. These supporters are drawn mostly from former Iraqi Ba'athists, disenfranchised Sunni youth, and foreign fighters attracted for religious reasons as well as a sense of adventure (Siebert, Winterfeldt & John, 2015).

While sometimes described as a "revolutionary totalitarian state" because it seeks to expand via military conquest (Kilcullen, 2015, p. 61), IS can claim to meet the requirements of statehood under international law given it has a government, a permanent population, holds a defined territory, and has the capacity to enter into relations with other states (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016) even if it chooses not to. Yet IS' claim to a *khilafah* has been widely criticised as it governs a relatively small population in contrast to the worldwide Muslim population of more than 1.5 billion (Lister, 2015) and that its exclusionary approach means it only caters for followers of its variant of Islam, leaving non-Sunnis with minimal rights, if any (Lister, 2015, p. 46). Yet IS asks why should it wait for unity between Muslims when this unity has never existed before and can, indeed, only exist when a *khilafah* is established? Its vision for the *khilafah* is to provide a "uniquely Muslim, indigenous and authentic source of Islamic leadership" in a territory and for a population that have been subjected to consistent political and violent interventions by Western and other powers (Ramadan, 2016, p.1). IS portrays itself, therefore, as an antidote to contending movements that seek to undermine or subdue Sunni Islam as a source of identity and to subjugate its followers. In this way, IS claims credit for creating a political space devoid of Western or other "political or territorial imposition or unwanted influence" (Ramadan, 2016, p. 4) such as had been the case after World War I when the Ottoman Empire – the leading Islamic state in geopolitical, cultural, and ideological terms – was divided into protectorates including several governed by Britain and France.

The key elements of IS' political objective include increasing the scale and geographic spread of its operations and therefore the extent of its territorial control and influence, an improved policy of governance, wealth, and revenue capacity, professionalisation of its information operations, and continued global recruitment. Its five step plan for achieving its political objective includes *hijra*, *jama'a* (congregation), destabilisation of *taghut* (idolatry), *tamkin* (consolidation) and finally *khilafah* (Lister, 2015).

*(i) Statehood*

The political objective of statehood emerges from Hamas' founding Charter, which states that "Palestine is an Islamic *waqf* consecrated for future Moslem generations until judgement day" (Hamas, 1988, p. 1). This notion of an 'Islamic' state was, however, only ever vague, quickly side-lined, and has almost completely disappeared from Hamas' contemporary documentation and language (Hroub, 2010). Hamas asserts that it will not operate as a theocracy, but instead, as a state based on the principles of freedom, equality, and justice with the preferred pathway to achieving this described as "consultation, education and socialisation" (Gunning, 2007, p. 49) — essentially an organic process where people are gradually educated to see the benefits. It also accepts that such a state must be "willed" by the people with a clear majority supporting its establishment, rather than relying on force (Gunning, 2007, p. 60). Its current situation, however, can be described as an "authority operating without any real sovereignty" (Rizqa, 2014, p. 4).

While Hamas' early material envisaged a state spanning territory from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea, this long-term objective has shifted in favour of a more pragmatic *realpolitik* approach of a two-state solution based on pre-1967 borders (Jensen, 2009). It is firmly focused on acquiring legitimacy as well as regional and international diplomatic recognition with an intention to participate fully in the existing political world order (Hroub, 2010). This concern about its place in the world is shared by the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) which has sought, and achieved, membership to international bodies, such as the UN and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and in its diplomatic contact with many states including Iran, Egypt, Russia, Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Switzerland, and Norway (Sharp, 2009).

As an exemplar of so-called “globalised *jihadists*” seeking to expand “holy campaigns” across geopolitical lines in furtherance of pan-Islamic notions that reject ideas of individual Muslim nation-states (Kilcullen, 2015, p. 12), IS provides a stark contrast to Hamas’ favouring of a Westphalian-type state with defined borders. IS’ vision gives no consideration to modern territorial boundaries, but rather, proclaims “the shade of this blessed flag will expand until it covers all eastern and western extents of the Earth, filling the world with the truth and justice of Islam and putting an end to the falsehood and tyranny” (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 12). IS portrays itself as the revival, through communal obligation, of an ancient *khilafah*, as its spokesperson sets out in the official announcement:

The time has come for the *ummah* of Muhammad to wake up from its sleep, remove the garments of dishonour, and shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace, for the era of lamenting and moaning has gone, and the dawn of honour has emerged anew. The sun of *jihad* has risen. The glad tidings of good are shining. Triumph looms on the horizon. The signs of victory have emerged (*Jihadist News*, 2014).

In contrast to Hamas’ belief that a state can only be achieved through popular support, IS defends its imposition of the *khilafah* through force regardless of the views of the broader Muslim population (McCants, 2015), which the Qu’ran requires when the right circumstances exist. In other words, only then would it be sinful not to heed the decision of the *ahlul-halli-wa’l-‘aqd*, which includes senior figures, leaders, and the Shura Council (*Jihadist News*, 2014).

### (ii) *Jihad*

For Hamas, resistance against Israel’s occupation through *jihad* is a key plank of its political programme (Krause & Milliken, 2009) and is strongly connected to its nationalist agenda based on patriotism and the desire for self-determination. Hamas’ Charter calls on Palestinians to “resist and quell” the enemy as the “individual duty of every Moslem” by raising “the banner of *jihad* in the face of the oppressor”. It goes as far as to say that there is “no solution to the Palestinian question except through *jihad*” (Hamas, 1988, p.1). For Hamas, *jihad* is about using violence to obtain particular justifiable political outcomes and linking the two thus provides a powerful method of legitimising its armed struggle (Mulaj, 2010). Hamas operates in a political environment where violence is

commonplace and, consequently, its own record of violence makes it a legitimate political faction in the Palestinian arena (Gunning, 2007). In Western political theory, violence is usually considered separate from 'authority', which revolves around questions of legitimacy and the maintenance of cohesion; respect and identification instead of fear. Yet violence can be both a source of legitimacy and necessary for the maintenance of authority (Gunning, 2007). Hamas' resistance agenda has proven popular, as the group enjoyed a significant spike in the polls during the 2014 conflict, indicating that the ability to commit violence against Israelis is an important source of its political legitimacy (Dunning, 2015).

While both NSAGs pursue a defensive *jihad* as the path to achieving self-determination, IS also adopts an offensive approach to holy war dedicated to uprooting *shirk* wherever it is found. Its use of violence requires the forceful conversion or eradication of all non-believers as a "state-building enterprise" intent on capturing and controlling vast swathes of territory and resources in order to establish a *khilafah* (Kilcullen, 2015, p. 61). This strategy also involves the elimination of the existing rulers in the territory it captures and controls, such as in Iraq and Syria, so that it can expand Islam and *shari'ah* rule worldwide through purging anti-Islamic forces and ultimately recreating the power and glory of Sunni Islam as the true Prophetic 'methodology' (Siebert, Winterfeldt & John, 2015). Its *jihad* is conducted through a range of methods, including the adoption of conventional army-like tactics in large-scale battles for territory and important infrastructure as well as guerrilla-like tactics, such as the use of martyrs as suicide bombers.

While IS appears to share the political objectives of Hamas in semantic terms, its approach to creating a state through *jihad* is very different. Hamas envisages a just and divinely sanctioned resistance pitted against an illegally occupying force in order to liberate a defined territory determined by God to be its rightful religious homeland so that all Palestinians can enjoy the privileges accorded by self-determination in a state within the existing world order. Conversely, IS seeks to eradicate all non-believers and take by force whatever territory it can to establish a global *khilafah* where Muslims who are faithful to the one true Islam can live their lives in accordance with a strict doctrine that rejects vice and promotes virtue so they can honour the Prophet at whose pleasure they exist. Whereas Hamas seeks popular support and encourages the

pledging of allegiance and participation in violence against Israel, IS imposes its will by coercive force, requiring *bay'ah*, *hijrah*, and *jihad*. Whereas Hamas believes that particular Western practices, such as democracy and nationalism, are compatible with Islam, IS finds these practices abhorrent. Further, Hamas demonstrates political pragmatism, but IS sees no place for this in its rigid doctrinal approach. Whereas Hamas seeks legitimacy and a place in the international system of states, IS rejects the very existence of other states as an abomination against Allah.

#### **(d) War-Fighting Capability**

While Hamas' initial forays into violence encouraged its supporters to take advantage of random opportunities for direct engagement with Israeli forces (Jensen, 2009), this evolved into a more strategic and comprehensive approach when Hamas obtained sufficient means to purchase and access weapons in the late 1980s (Ashour, 2009). In January 1992, Hamas officially declared the existence of its armed wing, Izz al-Din Al-Qassam Brigade, named after the Syrian-born Islamic theologian and fighter who was killed in 1935 (Ashour, 2009). Its access to weapons is limited mostly to guns, bombs, and homemade rockets, which have never amounted to a significant military threat to Israel and are used mostly for guerrilla-type attacks, brief shootouts, and suicide bombings (Hroub, 2010). It was in 1994 that Al-Qassam launched its first suicide bombing in response to the killing of Palestinians praying in a mosque in Hebron (Hroub, 2010). While suicide attacks are considered the most visible manifestation of Hamas' aspiration for a Palestinian state (Sen, 2015) and create an aura of strength, therefore giving them increased political leverage domestically, they are also designed to create fear and intimidate the Israeli population (Jennings, 2009). Hamas is careful to link any suicide operations to the targeting of Palestinian civilians by Israel (Hroub, 2010) in its publications as a way of deflecting accusations of random violence by international critics intending to reduce its struggle to a case of terrorism. It emphasises that these violent activities are targeted only at the Israeli occupation within its borders and do not pose a threat to international peace (Hamas, 2017). Hamas' explanation for targeting Israel is not "because they are Jews but because they are occupiers" (Hamas, 2017) with its political leaders reinforcing that "if there was no

occupation, there would be no resistance" (Davis, 2016, p. 52). Today, Hamas and its Al-Qassam Brigade remain designated as terrorist organisations by the US and the EU, as well as by many other countries.

Born out of the first *intifada* (uprising against oppression), Hamas is committed to ongoing 'armed resistance' as a key plank of its political objective to liberate Palestine from occupation. It believes this is its right guaranteed by divine and international law (Hamas, 2017). The first *intifada* was a conflict in which every sector of Palestinian society participated and suffered, which is significant given Hamas identifies as a grassroots political movement relying on popular support for its survival. While its violence is frequently explained away by media and commentators on international affairs as terrorism founded in religious opposition to Israel, Hamas considers its activities to be a "defensive *jihad*", that is, a religious obligation (Ashour, 2009, p. 165) for its people who express such views as: "just like Palestine is a part of me, fighting is also a part of me" (Sen, 2015, p. 220). Hamas justifies its approach because the fight for justice and resistance to oppression can be found at the heart of the Qur'an (Dunning, 2015) where it is characterised as a holy struggle (Jefferis, 2016). Hamas describes its approach as an "all embracing *jihad* until the liberation of Palestine" and explains that the "struggle with the Zionists is not a campaign for a partition of borders, and it is not a dispute over the division of land, it is a campaign over existence and destiny" (Mishal & Aharoni, 1994). Its approach to armed resistance — *Muqawama* — is sophisticated and can be described as a "doctrine of constant combat" (Barackskay, 2015, p. 526) with critics claiming it uses its social organisations to recruit young fighters and as a "front for terrorist training and attacks" (Barackskay, 2015, p. 523).

Estimated to have had at its peak more than 30,000 fighters, IS' armed forces operate more like a conventional army than a "guerrilla" organisation (Kilcullen, 2015, p. 57). It has, for example, a hierarchical unit organisation and rank structure that runs intelligence, cyber warfare, and public information activities as well as a recruiting network and training camps (Kilcullen, 2015). Almost all its military leaders are former members of Iraq's Ba'athist army (Coles & Parker, 2015). It holds and defends its territory using conventional urban tactics seeking to control lines of communication, govern the area under its control, and extract resources for its war efforts (Kilcullen, 2015, p. 63). Its early



strategy was to undermine occupying forces in Iraq and encourage sectarian violence that created the right climate for its emergence as defender of the Sunni community (Lister, 2015). Its intention was to root out Shi'ah opponents first as al-Zarqawi signalled in his final public address: "the Muslims will have no victory or superiority over the aggressive infidels such as the Jews and the Christians until there is a total annihilation of those under them such as the apostate agents headed by the *rafidah*" (a derogatory reference to Shi'ah) (Lister, 2015, p. 8).

The group's early military success caught the world by surprise, including at least one of the Great Powers when US President Barack Obama dismissed them as a 'jayvee' or junior varsity basketball team (Kessler, 2014), stating: "I think there is a distinction between capacity and reach of a bin-Laden and a network that is actively planning major terrorist plots against the homeland versus *jihadists* who are engaged in various local power struggles and disputes, often sectarian" (Remnick, 2014, p. 1). That view has now changed, however, with US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel more recently saying: "They're beyond a terrorist group. They marry ideology, a sophistication of strategic and tactical military prowess" (Alexander & Alexander, 2015, p. 51).

The group's war-fighting capability has suffered from an internal split between foreign and local fighters who have differing views on strategy and the hierarchical structure under which they are operating. Initially, that hierarchy saw fighters of US, European, and Eastern European descent working in the middle ranks in improvised explosive device production facilities, training camps, and on the frontline. Central Asians comprise the majority of suicide bombers. Native Arabs filled the top leadership positions and the rank and file (Mironova & Hussein, 2016). At its peak, IS held significant territory, including key cities, in Iraq and Syria as well as having a military presence through armed groups who have pledged allegiance in other places as distant as Indonesia and the Philippines. It commanded forces of tens of thousands of fighters, governed a population of up to 10 million, and, according to a plan published in June 2014, projected its territorial reach would include Spain, North Africa, the Sahel, Balkans, and entire Middle East (Alexander & Alexander, 2015). However, its initial rapid advance has not continued unabated due to attacks led by Iraqi security personnel, Kurdish fighters, Sunni Arab tribesmen, and Shi'ah paramilitary forces as well as the military action taken by a US-led coalition of 60



countries (Speckhard & Yayla, 2015). As of July 2016, that coalition had carried out 14,093 airstrikes in their attempt to “degrade and defeat” IS (Laub, 2016, p. 1). In early 2016, the group lost hold over approximately 22% of its territory (Al-Tamimi, 2016) as well as oil resources and important supply routes near Turkey. Approximately 300,000 people have died since 2011 and more than five million have fled as refugees (BBC, 2016c). While US-led air strikes have arrested its momentum, the continuing political turmoil in the Middle East, particularly in Libya and Yemen, continues to create conditions conducive to IS’ existence and potential expansion (Laub, 2016). IS currently operates in 18 countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mali, Egypt, Somalia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines as well as continuing to inspire attacks in Turkey, France, Belgium, and the US (Stewart, 2017).

\* \* \* \* \*

Far more complex than the label of ‘terrorism’ suggests, Hamas and IS share a number of commonalities as NSAGs. They operate in the same region, emerging from a volatile security situation in conflict-ridden territory, and endure political and religious persecution, with a particularly young population suffering from the consequences of severe economic deprivation, occupation, and invasion. Both groups are steeped in religious history and, therefore, born of a religious mandate founded in a particular form of Islam sharing common principles or values, such as *shahada*, *zakat*, *hajj* or *hijra*. They each have a long pre-history embedded in violent religious movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda, and are often designated as ‘terrorist’ entities. For these groups, politics and violence are inextricably entwined and motivated by what they perceive as illegitimate intervention in the region. This is because both groups have arisen as a reaction to belligerent foreign policy of much more powerful state actors. The two groups have clear religious and political leadership as well as capable armed wings, though IS’ is considerably larger and resembles a conventional military. Both groups’ formal governance structures also provide their respective populations with extensive social services and humanitarian assistance. Both groups have attracted significant support, with IS’ rise energising the global *jihadist* movement and consequentially making its particular ideology more popular while Hamas enjoys continued, although somewhat reduced, domestic support as well as growing international recognition about the right of the Palestinian people to

self-determination. The key point here, however, is that where both groups search for statehood, Hamas seeks to do so by armed resistance within a state-based framework, whereas IS seeks to use violence as a means of disrupting the status quo. As the next two chapters demonstrate, this divergence has a profound impact on the ways in which both groups calibrate their war-fighting activities to their communications approach.

## 5. HAMAS AND THE ONLINE FRONTLINE

This chapter explains how Hamas' communications approach is carefully calibrated with its war-fighting activities in order to achieve its political objectives. Utilising the analytic framework depicted in Chapter 3, the chapter argues that Hamas' communications approach relies on a clear and simple narrative, framed by streams of key messages. More specifically, its communications material coheres around a strong narrative promoting Palestinians as brave, righteous, but largely defenceless. This narrative is framed in terms of statehood and *jihad* and is supported by messages which assert, for example, that: Palestine will only gain independence after the siege of Gaza has ended; Israel disrespects the rights of others; international support for Hamas exists; Hamas is an underdog and the 'Zionist invaders,' as opposed to Jewish people, are the enemy; and Palestinians, particularly women and children, are blameless victims. The chapter also notes that, during an intense period of conflict, Hamas' online communications material was increasingly delivered across multiple platforms by its armed wing. While Al-Qassam's war-fighting activity features across all messaging streams, it is strongest in those streams framed in terms of a *jihad*, which endorses, rather than disrupts, the Westphalian systems of states.

### (a) Political Communication

Hamas has always recognised the importance of political communications to advance its cause. Its founding Charter states that "*jihad* is not confined to the carrying of arms and the confrontation of the enemy. The effective word, the good article, the useful book, support and solidarity together with the presence of sincere purpose for the hoisting of Allah's banner higher and higher - all these elements of the *Jihad* for Allah's sake" (Hamas, 1998, p. 1). The messaging in its first leaflets, issued in the early days of the first *intifada*, asserted that its violence was an Islamic response to occupation and part of a bigger Islamic movement designed to "break the Jews and destroy their dream". Its references to the Israelis were particularly aggressive and derogatory, such as "brothers of the

apes, assassins of the prophets, bloodsuckers, warmongers” who are “murdering you, depriving you of life after having plundered your homeland” (Mishal & Aharoni, 1994, p. 15). Martyrdom also featured heavily in its early communications: “In all the villages, all the refugee camps, our martyrs have fallen... But they have died in the name of Allah and their cries are those of victory... In the name of Allah, Allah is great... Death to the occupation”. These religiously-focused communications were designed to cater to a specific receptive and supportive audience and were often followed by a similarly targeted political “lament” (Jefferis, 2016, p. 39) explaining its violence as:

a resounding rejection of the occupation and its pressures.... It also comes to awaken the conscience of those among us who are gasping after a sick peace, after empty international conferences, after treasonous partial settlements like Camp David. The *intifada* is here to convince them that Islam is the solution and the alternative (Jefferis, 2016).

They were, in effect, preaching to the converted.

While its prioritisation of political communications has not changed, Hamas’ language — particularly its religious referencing — has appreciably altered as the group matured and recognised that its transformation from an activist armed group to a legitimate political actor required it to capitalise on the meaningful political space that had opened up (Jefferis, 2016). While Hamas’ Charter, with its intensely religious preoccupation, is now considered “naïve and simplistic and largely irrelevant” (Hroub, 2010, p. 23), it has not been altered or replaced out of fear such a move could be seen as an abandonment of the group’s basic principles. However, where communications were previously infused with Qu’ranic verses, hadiths, and quotations from prominent religious experts, the language used by Hamas is now much more politically nuanced (Hroub, 2010). A strategy document circulated internally in 1993 provides an example of the shift towards political pragmatism given it features none of the references to scriptures that were regularly used in its public communiqués at the time (Jefferis, 2016). While words, such as ‘resistance’, ‘occupation’, and ‘liberation’, remain in common use today (Hamas, 2017), Hamas has largely abandoned the particularly abusive descriptions of the occupying force in its formal communications in favour of definitions couched in the language of international law asserting war crimes and other human rights violations. (An exception to this can be found in

its armed wing, Al-Qassam, which continues the tradition of more derogatory and incendiary terminology). In describing itself as providing a “moderate” Islamic school of thought, Hamas is positioning itself on the spectrum of all Islamic NSAGs (Hamas, 2017)). It also consistently uses the term ‘sovereign’ when referring to its desire for statehood, which resonates within the current Westphalian world order and distinguishes it from more ‘radical’ groups, such as IS, which seek a transnational Islamic state.

Hamas relies upon a range of online platforms in order to reach its supporters. It operates, for instance, a variety of official and unofficial Twitter feeds, such as @hamasInfoEn, which it uses to run online question-and-answer sessions with political leader Ismail Haniyeh and often interacts directly with Israeli accounts in an attempt to challenge and disprove their claims (Hamas Movement, 2014). However, Hamas is not immune to the challenges confronting other NSAGs whose communications are severely hampered during particularly intense periods of conflict when platform owners restrict or deny their access while the state or groups they are opposing continue their virtual activities unchecked. In these situations, Hamas relies more heavily on the various online accounts controlled by its military wing, Al-Qassam. Al-Qassam often uses consistent hashtags across all platforms, making it easy for interested parties to search for all related topics, such as #GazaUnderAttack, #stopIsrael or #PrayForGaza (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 14f) which is used by supporting organisations and individuals around the world. It also makes use of hashtags that mimic those used regularly by traditional media, such as #Breaking or simple location tags, such as #Gaza, for those searching for the latest news relating to the conflict (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 12c). Al-Qassam also reaches out to traditional media outlets with its communications by messaging them directly (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 17). Al-Qassam tends to use strong rhetoric in its communications, providing some cover to Hamas’ political leaders who, at times, distance themselves from these comments.

Hamas and Al-Qassam in particular, are especially skilled at exploiting video footage as a key ingredient in their communications material. There is clearly a high degree of convergence between war-fighting activities and the communications approach when cameras are seemingly deployed everywhere in order to capture the impact of the conflict, such as at the entrance of the hospital

where they filmed and photographed graphic images of the injured and dying arriving (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8c; Al-Qassam, July 16b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20a). Hamas' cameras gain access to areas, such as hospital resuscitation and operating rooms as well as mortuaries, which would be considered a gross breach of privacy and out of bounds in most other countries. This unfettered access provides the group with the ability to communicate the full horror of war from the impact on the individual through to families and the community more broadly (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8c; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20a). Featuring gruesome images, such as children's bodies torn apart by missiles, to capture the audience's attention, these stories are often accompanied by facts and figures about the death and injury toll (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 24; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 12a; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 16d; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20a). The footage often seems to come from citizen journalists who film events as they unfold before them. At other times, it appears that professional camera operators arrive on the scene within seconds of an incident and are intent on filming it, rather than providing assistance to the injured (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 11a). On other occasions, these camera operators appear in position before an incident occurs in order to ensure that footage is captured and quickly available for release. An example of this can be found in so-called "sacrificial attacks" where a teenager is deployed to stab an Israeli soldier in the expectation that they will fail and will, in fact, be killed. This is done in the knowledge that the grossly disproportionate response will have a much bigger impact on the audience (Levitt, 2009). The speed with which this kind of footage is posted online indicates easy access to technologies and sophisticated production and distribution systems.

Over thirty years Hamas has developed a sophisticated communications approach that coheres around a tightly-framed narrative, consistent framing, and disciplined messaging. As a core part of its approach, Hamas established a clear narrative promoting Palestinians as a brave, righteous, but defenceless people justly rising up to resist a cruel and oppressive occupying force intent on denying them the right to self-determination in a territory determined by God to be their homeland. This is a simple narrative of sacrifice and resistance as the path to liberation, self-determination, and, ultimately, statehood (Sen, 2015, p. 212). Hamas uses two key frames — statehood and *jihad* — as a way of presenting this narrative. Streams of core messages are delivered through both of these frames. The remainder of this chapter examines Hamas' communications approach

during so-called Operation Protective Edge, which commenced on 12 June 2014 in response to the kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers. At the time, Hamas denied responsibility for the kidnapping, but did not condemn the action taken, with one of its political leaders, Khalid Mishaal, instead praising the kidnappers for creating the opportunity for a prisoner exchange with the Israelis (Jefferis, 2016). In response to the incident, Israel initially conducted raids in the West Bank, arresting and detaining thousands of Palestinians. Hamas responded by firing rockets into southern Israel from Gaza. On July 17, Israel launched a ground offensive in Gaza with a focus on destroying tunnels used to store and transport fighters and their weapons. Over a 50 day period, Hamas fired 4,500 rockets while the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) claims to have hit 5,000 targets in Gaza. At least 2,500 Palestinians died, approximately 500,000 of the 1.8 million people living in Gaza were displaced (UNGA, 2015) and massive damage was caused to Gaza's infrastructure and economy with at least 10 per cent of factories destroyed, along with office buildings and large swathes of farmland. Since that time, very little of the infrastructure has been rebuilt, mostly due to the slowness of the international aid response.

### **(b) Frame 1: Statehood**

The Palestinian people in particular, and a potentially sympathetic global audience more generally, intuitively understand the concept of statehood given they inhabit the Westphalian system of states. Hamas has carefully created and cultivated their narrative, framed in terms of statehood, by applying this concept specifically to its experience in the disputed Palestinian territory in a way that resonates with a broader Muslim story in the Middle East where resistance is a struggle to preserve traditional notions of identity, culture, and values in the face of an encroaching Western world bent on secularisation (Crooke, 2009). Hamas repeatedly delivers three streams of core messaging framed in terms of statehood: firstly, self-determination through liberation of the land; secondly, the establishment of a state with an Islamic frame of reference; and thirdly, establishing a place for the Palestinian state in the existing world order through unity and community.

#### *(i) Self-Determination*

Although Hamas' Charter focused heavily on the necessity to "obliterate Israel" (Hamas, 1988, p. 1) before a Palestinian state would be successfully established, Hamas now pays attention to the right to co-exist of those of all religions, proclaims that nationalism is part of its religious creed, and insists that there is a mutual responsibility of all citizens to create a sense of unity and community within the new state. Subsequent documents, such as the Change and Reform electoral platform (Hamas, 2006), also set out the clear objective of liberating Palestine and establishing an independent state with national unity and the protection of minority rights as a priority. It outlines a vision for a state with separate legislative, executive, and judicial branches and an independent economy and monetary system, which is echoed by Hamas' political rival, the PA, where it advocates for UN resolutions supporting Palestine's bid for self-determination. These efforts resulted in the right to be referred to by the UN as the State of Palestine (Permanent Observer Mission of The State of Palestine to the United Nations, 2013, August 1). In so doing, the PA appeals to the UN to help realise its legitimate nationalist aspirations.

Hamas' armed wing buttresses its political leaders' messages by regularly releasing online 'news' reports and Twitter posts concerning international support for Palestine's bid for statehood with coverage of marches and demonstrations (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10g; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10h; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 16b). During the specific period at the heart of this thesis, it harnessed that international support by launching a hashtag on social media in direct response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stating that the "entire Arab world" was against Hamas (Jerusalem Post, 2014). This hashtag, #WeareHamas, topped first place in the Arabic language on Twitter and second in frequency of global use with 34,000 tweets delivered in record time (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 21a). Its messaging calls for unity by "forgetting the past and rising up as one... in the face of the occupation and its aggression" (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10a) and asserts that Palestinians are "one nation" regardless of location and all its people have the right of return (Hamas, 1988) with the forced transfer of Palestinians a grave breach of international humanitarian law. It asserts that a Palestinian state will follow after the siege of Gaza is lifted and the core of the conflict – Israeli occupation and settlement – ceases (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 28a).



### *(ii) Islamic Reference*

In its early days, the Hamas movement relied heavily on religious framing of its communications relating to statehood but has gradually minimised this usage to broaden its appeal beyond a particular Islamic audience to win the hearts and minds of a global audience. While the Charter announces Hamas' intention to raise the banner of Islam over "every inch of Palestine" (Hamas, 1988, p. 1), Hamas' communications material now more often favours legal terminology based on the norms of international law (Hroub, 2010) with religious references heavily reduced. Where religious rhetoric features, it is used by Al-Qassam to justify the violence it commits as defending Islam and pursuing self-determination for its people. While it repeatedly refers to Allah being "with us" (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10c), on occasions Al-Qassam references "God" backing its efforts (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 20b), rather than "Allah", perhaps attempting to broaden its appeal to Western audiences. While Hamas toned down its religious rhetoric, it still makes regular use of subtle spiritual messages that have broad appeal, such as believing in a God, being true to your faith, caring for your neighbour, supporting the vulnerable, and striving to live a decent life underpinned by strong moral values.

Some of Hamas' communications material signal the religious discrimination experienced by Palestinians. This material features stories of Israeli soldiers questioning Palestinian Muslims on their way to prayers (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 29), the "spiteful and barbaric" bombing of mosques are described as a "flagrant violation of divine laws and international conventions" (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 14b), and the killing of worshippers in missile strikes (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 11b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 13a; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 22a), accompanied by images of dead bodies scattered in the courtyards of the mosque. Moreover, the material gives attention to Muslim Palestinians who are prevented from celebrating Ramadan as they are forced to stay indoors as a result of curfews (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8d), the refusal to grant access to iconic holy sites, such as the al-Aqsa Mosque (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 15d), and the vandalism of that structure by "rabbi settlers" (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 19c). Israel is thus

characterised as hypocritical since, despite being a deeply religious nation, it does not respect the religious beliefs or tolerate the spiritual practices of others.

*(iii) Place in the World*

From its inception, Hamas indicated its desire to play a role in the existing world order by fostering “balanced political relations with the international community”, including the potential for signing international economic and trade agreements (Hamas, 2006). Much of this messaging is echoed in official statements made by the PA at international forums, announcing Palestine’s desire to take its “natural place” among the international community (Permanent Observer Mission of The State of Palestine to the United Nations, 2013). Yet Hamas takes a carrot-and-stick approach to its messaging related to its place in the world. While consistently appealing for international intervention to assist its achieving of statehood in more than name, it is also critical of the international community’s failure to protect Palestinian civilians, enforce the rule of law, or hold Israel to account for refusing to pursue the two-state solution (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 14d&e). It highlights the failure to punish Israel for breaching occupation law, which prohibits an occupying power from initiating armed force against the population residing in the territory it occupies (Occupied Palestine, 2014, August 29a; Occupied Palestine, 2014, September 2a&b). Al-Qassam also highlights the international support it receives from protestors in other countries expressing “outrage” and “shock and horror” about the “illegitimate war” and “genocide” in Gaza (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20d), and the sale of arms to Israel by the UK and US (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10d; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 15b; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 25g). In this way, Hamas seeks to pit world opinion against Israel and deliberately uses the language, used by the UN to condemn other mass atrocities, to regularly accuse Israel of contravening international law and conducting “genocide” that “must trouble any conscience in the world” (Occupied Palestine, 2014, August 29a).

Hamas also communicates its interaction with other states in order to demonstrate the widespread support for its cause, including Jordan’s support for protecting holy sites from “Judaization plans” (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 16a), the Malaysian Government’s provision of medical supplies (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 18b), and the Turkish President’s visiting of wounded Gazans as well as

comments by that country's Prime Minister that Israel is "playing with fire" with its "wanton" offensive against civilians (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 18a). Comments by the Austrian President that Israel should not criticise those who condemn the conflict as anti-Semitism also feature (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 25h). Reports by international bodies that support Hamas' messaging are also regularly reposted, such as comments by a UN representative that Gaza had suffered "unprecedented" destruction (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 19d), its health system being on the verge of collapse (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10e), and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon describing the situation as "troubling and volatile" (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8i). Helpful international reaction is also often cited, such as the Egyptian Government blaming hostility towards Islamists in general, and Hamas in particular, for the inability to negotiate a truce (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8i).

Al-Qassam messages are more aggressive than Hamas' official statements. This two-pronged approach caters for two different audiences. On the one hand, there are compassionate Westerners who are receptive to calls for emergency sessions of the UN, the findings of human rights organisations (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 15; Al-Qassam, 2014, June 23a; Al-Qassam, 2014, June 23b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 2c; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 6b; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 20b), and comments by Hamas leaders that the war was "imposed on us.... we have no choice but to defend ourselves" (Occupied Palestine, 2014, August 29a). On the other hand, there are those who are receptive to more aggressive messaging giving focus to the "strong Jewish domination of the American government and Congress" that enables Israel to evade meaningful censure of the international community (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 11d).

The three streams of key messaging framed by statehood are important for conveying Hamas' strategic narrative, particularly 'self-determination' and 'place in the world'. Key messages concerning 'Islamic references' are perhaps, deliberately, the weakest in this regard as Hamas seeks to persuade and influence a broad, and predominantly secularist, global audience. Moreover, it is the key messages framed by *jihad* which better demonstrate the careful calibration of war-fighting activities to Hamas' communications approach.

### **(c) Frame 2: *Jihad***

If the Palestinian people intuitively comprehend the concept of statehood, then the notion of *jihad* is second nature to most. *Jihad* — through resistance — is a founding principle for Hamas and can be applied across all parts of Palestinian life, from individual's actions in defiance of Israeli power to popular uprising, strikes, armed attacks, and suicide bombings (Hroub, 2010). Given that journalists and political commentators now frequently associate the term with violence of so-called radical Islamic groups charged with carrying out acts of 'terrorism', it is perhaps unsurprising that Hamas has, to a large extent, dispensed with such a reference, particularly in its English language communications, in favour of the term "armed struggle" (Hamas, 2017). In order to promote its narrative of brave, righteous, but defenceless Palestinians justly rising up to resist a cruel and oppressive occupying force intent on denying them the right to self-determination in a territory determined by God to be their homeland, Hamas delivers three streams of messaging framed in terms of *jihad*. These key messaging streams are focused, firstly, on the conflict with Israel, secondly, on establishing Israel as the enemy and an illegal occupier, and, thirdly, on the victims of that conflict, including both civilian and martyred *jihadists*.

*(i) Conflict*

One stream of key messages conveys a deliberately ironic depiction of a biblical story about an epic battle between the Palestinian people cast as David — the future King of Israel — and Israel cast as the giant Philistine Goliath. This scene dominated the official Hamas website in 2014 with a Palestinian youth slinging a rock with a backdrop of holy sites surrounded by flames. There are also regular online postings of images, videos, and stories about violent clashes between young Palestinian 'resistance fighters' armed with rocks or knives confronting heavily armed Israeli soldiers leading the 'occupation forces'. Hamas uses this simple but well-known David-and-Goliath story as a motif resonating with a secular audience that it is trying to persuade with its version of the underdog fighting a much larger, more powerful enemy. This messaging is persistent throughout its communications, with a repeated focus on the scale of the Israeli "aggression" and "war" (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 11b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 15a) on the "besieged" and "defenceless" people of Gaza (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 1) and the disproportionate scale of Israel's military response compared to the severely limited Palestinian response based largely on crude rockets that are "little more

than tubes with dynamite placed inside which are fired blindly without any possibility of aiming them" (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8d). It highlights the conflict's disproportionate human cost in that, while Israel has lost 27 soldiers, 605 Palestinians have died (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22d).

Further, Hamas regularly posts reports on the conflict on all its online platforms. These reports reinforce the conflict's one-sided nature by revealing that an Israeli "offensive" involving naval artillery strikes and tank fire killed 250 civilians in a matter of hours (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 18b). Communications material is presented in the form of infographics, which are visually quick to digest. One such infographic includes a breakdown of the geographic locations, age and gender of those killed in the conflict (Occupied Palestine, 2014, August 30c). Another offers an example of Israel using the equivalent of six nuclear bombs by dropping 20,000 tonnes of explosives on Gaza in one month (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 22b), signalling these explosives were US-made and implying that Palestinians are not only facing the giant that is Israel, but also its even more powerful allies.

Hamas often release graphic images as a means of attracting viewer's attention to the conflict's uneven human costs, such as photos of bloodied, dead children piled up on a morgue table, or lists naming the dead. A running tally of the conflict's human cost is provided, with one example identifying 12,352 Israeli raids, 561 dead, 3504 injured, and 3122 houses damaged (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22c). Broader social and economic destruction is also highlighted, such as the discontinuation of prison visits, closure of trade crossings (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 14), attacks on infrastructure (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 11c; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 13c), and community facilities, including mosques and sports clubs (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 12a) with the monetary cost of the "disaster" quantified at US\$262 million (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19f; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 18c). Hamas also releases detailed battle reports (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22e; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 21a; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 22c; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 28b) on the targeting of Israeli special forces (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20b), mortar attacks on military bases (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 24c), images of the aftermath of a rocket attack on an Israeli military SUV (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 21b), the sniping of 11 soldiers (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22c), and an ambush on Israeli soldiers east of Gaza where 14 are killed and 30 wounded (Al-Qassam,

2014, July 19g). This latter report features proof that al-Qassam had taken a soldier hostage, displaying his name, military ID number, and a photo of the group of soldiers he was part of with a red ring identifying him as Shaul Aaron. It used this information in a number of communications over several days (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20b).

While Hamas celebrates its military successes in its communications (Occupied Palestine, 2014, August 29c), it always prefaces these with justifications that they are simply responding to aggression by the “Zionist enemy” (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 4; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8a). In one example, Hamas accuses Israel of crossing “red lines” by targeting civilian homes in an online statement warning of an “earth-shaking reprisal as a natural response to crimes against Palestinians: “We are not afraid of your threats and will not surrender to your conditions, we will respond to your crimes”. Hamas also justifies its violence as a reaction to the ‘disaster’ being inflicted on Gaza. Many of these communications feature photos of fighters wearing military gear and masks, warning that there are thousands of fighters just like them ready to protect the Palestinian people (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19g; Occupied Palestine, August 30b). Hamas appears keen to demonstrate its fighting capabilities and ability to develop technologically. It revealed, on its website and YouTube, that it manufactured an unmanned aircraft capable of carrying out long-distance reconnaissance, including over the Israeli war ministry in Tel Aviv (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 8). It also revealed that it has three models in production for reconnaissance, offensive action, and suicide-type attacks. This achievement was tweeted around the world with links provided to the footage (Kershiner & Lyons, 2014).

Hamas’ unrelenting commitment to the conflict is reinforced by the regular presence of masked armed fighters in the background of press conferences and parading in the streets in official photographs in communications accompanied by messages that they will resist the Israeli “threat” (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 17a) at all costs and that the Israeli “massacre” of civilian Palestinians will “open the gates of hell” on it (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 19b). Hamas issues calls for unity while demonstrating that Palestinians are prepared to die for their cause (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 14a). The communications material dealing with ‘conflict’ is unrelenting, even issued during a ceasefire when the focus turns to minor clashes,

such as an Israeli soldier “kidnapping” a Palestinian youth with an image of him being held in a headlock and criticism of “fanatical” settlers throwing stones (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 19e). While this stream of messages focuses on the courage of its fighters — who are on “pins and needles to confront the Israeli coward soldiers” (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10b), warning that there will be “no safe place for Israel until there is a safe place for Palestine” (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 19a) — it provides detailed coverage of Hamas’ willingness to negotiate a ceasefire (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 6a; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19h; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 21b). This may be a response to domestic pressure from its own people who are suffering immense loss, particularly when they acknowledge the “blood and sacrifice” and promise that this sacrifice will not be wasted (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 6a).

*(ii) The Enemy*

Early on, the Hamas movement identified the enemy as “Zionist invaders”, who controlled the world’s media and wealth, and were responsible for war and acts akin to those carried out by the Nazis in the Second World War (Hamas, 1988, p. 1). While there has been a shift over time towards more legalistic references to breaches of international humanitarian and human rights laws, the rhetoric used to characterise the enemy remains emotive with Israel variously described as a “heartless” (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 29a), “barbaric” (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 25b), “occupying force” (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8c). Accused of disregarding human life, the Israeli “war machine” is blamed for violent, racist, and “spiteful” illegal acts (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 25b) to expand its presence in the Middle East and the use of “experimental” or banned weapons, such as toxic gasses (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19e), to “massacre innocents” (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22d) that are at odds with its claims to be a democracy and the world’s most moral army. The comments of credible external parties are reposted by Hamas to bolster its depiction of Israel including the first-hand account of a Norwegian doctor working in Gaza dealing with patients “torn to pieces”, “disfigured”, and “beheaded” during heavy bombardments. This is accompanied by an image of a child screaming in pain due to shrapnel in his head, neck, chest, and abdomen, which featured in news reports around the world (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19). According to Hamas, this behaviour emulates the Nazis in “slaughtering” children (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 11d). Focus is also given to the broader impact of the



conflict with “heartless” Israel held responsible for the power crisis (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 20b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 2b), the inability to access fuel, medicine, and other supplies (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 20a) as well as the destruction of businesses and public facilities and charities, including hospitals and schools (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 11e). In contrast, Hamas outlines how its rockets have caused no serious casualties while there has been a disproportionate response from Israel, including targeting the homes of senior Hamas members (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8i).

Israel’s military forces are not the sole target of Hamas’ communications material relating to ‘the enemy.’ Its messages also focuses on Israeli settler violence, accusing them of attempting to kidnap and kill children (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 5; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 7b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 15c), and of causing widespread property damage (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 7c; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 28c). The activities of these settlers are a common feature of this communications material given the ongoing construction of homes in disputed territory (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 14b; Al-Qassam, 2014, June 18), attacks on Palestinians (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 17c), vandalism of mosques (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 19c), attempted abductions (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 15e), and the killing of children (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 25). Settlers are portrayed as “armed and unlawful combatants violating international law through living in occupied lands and committing daily attacks and crimes against Palestinian civilians” (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 25b).

The international media is sometimes presented as an enemy for painting Israel as the victim defending its people against irrational Palestinian rocket fire (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 16e). As Al-Qassam puts it: there is “no equating the killing and maiming of dozens of innocent Palestinians with scared Israelis seeking shelter from crude rockets that rarely cause damage” as it accused the ABC television network of “deliberate lies or wilful ignorance” when a correspondent misidentified footage of a bombing in Gaza as having occurred in Israel (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10f).

On occasions, Hamas’ depiction of Israel as a military monster brutalising defenceless and innocent people is at odds with its communications that taunt Israel for its failure to wipe out the resistance movement. Hamas issues direct



challenges to the IDF, describing its soldiers as “terrified mice” and threatening to “cleanse all of our land of the filth of the remaining occupiers (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 12). It warns the “Zionist enemy” (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8a) that its people will bear the consequences of its “barbaric and criminal aggression” (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8c; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 11b). Even after a ceasefire was declared, Hamas accused its neighbour of attempting to “cover-up the Israeli defeat and state of despair”, with a particularly personal attack on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for appearing “exhausted” and “dog tired” with puffy eyes and cheeks “prefiguring a near breakdown”. Netanyahu is described as mimicking “a feeble contestant sipping the cup of his own overthrow” and when Netanyahu had said “mission accomplished” with his chin lifted up it was “as if his own body was striving to both conceal and absorb a sort of internal and unfathomable pain”. Described as “the biggest loser”, it is noted that his “eye pupils moved up and down in a hysterically circular movement that reflected very much a hidden state of panic” with fellow ministers and military leaders exhibiting symptoms of schizophrenia or appearing to be on the verge of a mental breakdown (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 28d). Netanyahu is a favourite target, often featured as a “child killer” leading an army perpetrating a “holocaust” as Israel “replicates what Hitler did years ago” (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 21b). He is villainised when images appear of him mourning the death of an Israeli child in a rocket attack while 550 children died in Palestine (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 24b).

### *(iii) Victimhood*

Hamas deliver a stream of messages illustrating Palestinians as victims. It released constant updates of the number of victims affected by the conflict through its official website and Al-Qassam’s Twitter account (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 12c; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 15c; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22d). These reports are almost always accompanied by graphic images of the victims, such as in photo essays containing dozens of images without the need for a textual explanation (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19a; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19b). These include burnt-out buildings, parents carrying their dead children to their graves (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19c), children with significant head wounds being resuscitated (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 19b), those injured by shrapnel (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 19d), mutilated and dead toddlers piled together on a table in the morgue (Al-Qassam,

2014, July 18d), body parts, a teenager with his lower limbs missing (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 15), a whole family of dead children dragged to the hospital on a mattress with their father holding and kissing their bodies (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 21a), and many other graphic images (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 13b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 14b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 14c; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 16a). The names of the dead, such as whole families killed in airstrikes, are often included to humanise the victims (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 18b, Al-Qassam, 2014, July 18e; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20e; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22b; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 24d). These lists are accompanied by emotive descriptions of their deaths, accusing Israel of “murdering” civilians (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20a) in its “illegitimate offensive” (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22a). Every so often communications are released updating the overall death toll from the ‘war on Gaza’. For example, Al-Qassam released a list indicating 2000 civilians dead and 10,000 wounded in 40 days of aerial and artillery attacks, including 541 civilians under the age of 18 (2014, August 18a). A breakdown of those killed is also common in relation to the categories of elderly, women, and children (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 12; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 25f).

Hamis is, however, accused of misusing children as communications “pawns” illustrating Israel’s ruthlessness and generating public sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian people (Kenny, 2014, p. 1). Hamas does seek to connect this plight with the emotions of parents around the world through infographics (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10i.), such as one version featuring an image of a Caucasian girl sleeping on a comfortable bed holding a teddy bear compared with a photo of a dead Palestinian child lying on a hospital bed. The accompanying text provides a clear contrast: “That’s the way children all over the world sleep. That’s the way our children sleep forever” (Seo, 2014, p. 157). There is a consistent focus on Palestinian children with the majority of images used to illustrate the conflict’s human cost often featuring gruesome images of children being treated in hospital with open wounds, broken or missing limbs, and head injuries screaming in pain (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 12b; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 20a; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22a; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 22b; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 30), the bodies of five children from one family strewn among the debris of bombed out houses (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 10a), or surviving children crying over their dead parents (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 18a). Particular images, such as a young girl lying wrapped in a shroud on a morgue table with blood pooling

under her head (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 18c), are used repeatedly. CCTV footage is even utilised to show the conflict's impact on young Palestinians, including images of teenagers taking part in Nakba Day solidarity protests being shot in the street by Israeli soldiers. The edited footage begins with the teenagers milling around in the street before one is shot from a distance. When the others run to him, they are also shot (Beaumont, 2014).

This stream of victimhood messages also focuses on children and young people detained by Israelis (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 8f). The 2014 conflict was sparked by the alleged kidnapping of teenaged Israeli settlers, followed by several Israeli soldiers searching for them, resulting in sweeping raids of Gaza and the arrest of hundreds of residents. Hamas' initial communications relating to the incident, released through Al-Qassam sources, was limited to mentioning the "missing" soldiers (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 13b) as part of a larger story about Israeli drone strikes failing to cause any injuries among Palestinians (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 14d). The messaging later shifted to reposting quotes from the Israeli security services alleging responsibility for the abductions lay with Hamas and featuring images of the suspects (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 27). Hamas issued denials from the suspects' families, who alleged that Israel fabricated the event to strike at the heart of national reconciliation (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 28). In the aftermath of the incident, the communications focus quickly shifted to mass detentions (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 14b) with the release of detailed numbers revealing 120 Palestinians have been taken in a day, including six legislators and two former government ministers (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 15). Hamas described these raids as "intensive arresting campaigns" (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 22b) of more than 790 homes (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 17b) where 529 Palestinians, mostly Hamas supporters, are "kidnapped" within a 20 day period. At the height of the conflict, Hamas asserted that 2478 Palestinians have been detained, including 412 children and 39 women (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 2a).

While these messages are distributed mostly via Al-Qassam's various newsfeeds, they are reinforced by Hamas' political leaders who refuse to confirm or deny responsibility for the soldiers' disappearance, but use the incident to praise the opportunity it gives: "blessed are the hands of those who have kidnapped three settlers because our prisoners have to be freed from the occupation's jail (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 25b). Images show heavily armed

Israeli soldiers in full military regalia dragging away mostly young men in ragged t-shirts and pants, highlighting again the David-and-Goliath depiction of the conflict. The detention messaging also focuses on the plight of those incarcerated by featuring stories about their hunger strikes and allegations that Israel is violating international law and conventions (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 12; Al-Qassam, 2014, June 21a), particularly when it passed a force-feeding law (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 23c). Young people feature heavily in the stories of detainees, with claims that 250 Palestinian “children” are in jail, which is, of course, a breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 25a). Claims are made that Palestinians are guilty only of throwing stones or, at worst, Molotov cocktails. Images of these children being taken are often contrasted with those of their parents holding a smiling photo of them as a child (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 21b, Al-Qassam, 2014, June 22a; Al-Qassam, 2014, July 25). Video of the arrests are also often released, including one showing a nine-year-old boy being beaten by a soldier (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 25a). Stories of other innocent victims are highlighted too, such as Palestinian workers killed when an Israeli truck ran over them while on the side of the road fixing their car, featuring images of the dead men lying on the road (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 7b). The deaths of journalists are also noteworthy because these incidents interest international media outlets (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 25e), particularly when images of mutilated bodies are released or female reporters are kidnapped (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 2).

Another category of victims featuring in Hamas’ communications material are the martyred *jihadis* who sacrifice “life and all that is precious for the sake of Allah” (Hamas, 1988, p. 1). These mujahedeen feature regularly in stories about their commitment to the cause with photographs of them as young teenagers contrasted with them later in fighting regalia (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 7), such as Hussein Salama who passed away during a mission as one of the “best men in the playground of death” (Al-Qassam, 2014, February 8). Those who die after having spent long periods of time in Israeli custody are also featured as martyrs to the cause, such as Majdi Amed Hammad who was one of the founding members of Hamas and died of heart disease after being detained (Al-Qassam, 2014, March 19a). Even those who die by accident are given the honour of being celebrated as martyrs, such as a twenty-year old who died cleaning his gun (Al-Qassam, 2014, March 29; Al-Qassam, 2014, April 13) or another young man who

perished in a car accident (Al-Qassam, 2014, March 19b). Five Hamas members who died in a tunnel collapse “doing their duty” by “reaffirming their commitment to the resistance” (Al-Qassam, 2014, June 20c) are celebrated alongside extensive coverage of seven Al-Qassam fighters killed in tunnels during missile strikes, which features images of their bodies being loaded into vans while women weep over them. The incident is described by a Hamas spokesperson as an “assassination” for which “the enemy will pay a very heavy price” (Al-Qassam, 2014, July 7a). Political leaders targeted by the IDF also feature as martyrs. Extensive coverage of their deaths includes photos of them as civilians in suits, wearing military-type uniforms, firing weapons together, and inspecting tunnels, although no information is given about how they died (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 2; Al-Qassam, 2014, August 21c). The attempted assassination of the Al-Qassam commander-in-chief who lost his wife and baby in an airstrike during a ceasefire (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 21d) is also promoted in a bid to send a message that these attacks “will not break our will” (Al-Qassam, 2014, August 21e). While focusing on the suffering of victims, Hamas also highlights its support of those affected including its donation of millions of dollars to the owners of destroyed homes.

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Drawing on the framework designed specifically to analyse communications material produced by NSAGs, this chapter demonstrates that Hamas portrays itself as a resistance force consisting of moral, committed fighters doing God’s work by seeking to repel the occupier in order to provide a secure homeland for the Palestinian people. In the development and delivery of a clear narrative, frames, and streams of messaging, Hamas demonstrates a coherent and disciplined communications approach that reflects its underlying historical context and governance structures as well as successfully supporting its efforts to achieve its political objectives of statehood through *jihad* as outlined in Chapter 4. While war-fighting activities feature heavily in the messaging streams framed in terms of *jihad*, this violence is important to Hamas’ overarching narrative, which sits at the heart of its communications approach, and its political strategy. To this end, Hamas uses communication as part of its overarching strategy while its war-fighting activities are, at important times, carefully calibrated with its communications approach to the point of convergence.

## 6. ISLAMIC STATE AND THE ONLINE FRONTLINE

This chapter explains how IS carefully calibrates – and, at times, choreographs – its war-fighting activities with its communications approach in order to achieve its political objectives. The chapter argues, more specifically, that during a particularly intense period of conflict IS offers a narrative promoting itself as the righteous, true, and prophetic Islamist movement that will establish a global *khilafah*. IS frames this narrative in terms of statehood and *jihad*, and conveys it through a series of messages which, for example, assert that the *khilafah* will enable the *ummah* to live in accordance with their faith without fear of intervention from other powers. The *khilafah* will be established through the conquering of territory by a powerful fighting force prepared to martyr itself for the cause and mandated by Allah to fight against enemies, such as the Jews, Crusaders, their allies, and all other religions of the *kufirs* (denier of truth). The three streams of messaging reinforcing the *jihad* frame related most closely to IS' calibration, or even choreography, of its war-fighting capability with its communications approach. The exception is 'victimhood' which IS downplays in order to promote its narrative that it is a powerful force supported by dedicated fighters prepared to die for the cause of establishing a global *khilafah* that defies the current world order.

### (a) Political Communication

IS' media outreach is unprecedented in the history of global *jihadist* movements (Alexander & Alexander, 2015), particularly in terms of the resources it deploys for communication purposes, the variety of platforms it uses, the high-quality of its products, and the vast army of 'virtual' supporters who ensure the rapid dissemination of its online communications material. Its information office strictly controls the flow of all communications material, reviewing all videos, still images, and written reports before these are published. This ensures consistent and disciplined messaging demonstrating extraordinarily ideological conformity. This NSAG also conducts its own official information operations distributing videos and the online magazines, such as the *al-Hayat* media centre, which is a

multi-lingual media source. It also operates the *al-Furqan* Institute of Media, which produces CDs, DVDs, posters, pamphlets and other web-related products, the *I-tisa'am* Media Foundation, which produces HD-quality photos and professionally edited films, and the *al-Bayan* FM radio. *Al-Furat* focuses on non-Arabic contingents that have joined IS and ensures its communications material is targeted to their respective populations at home (Whiteside, 2016). *Al-Ajnad* produces *nasheeds* (vocal music) while *al-Naba* is a weekly Arabic newspaper. *A'maq* News Agency operates as an 'independent' provider of news 'scoops' that are often treated as legitimate sources of information by international traditional media organisations. IS also has media outlets operated by its various *wilayats* (provinces) reporting on regional activities and news. Its online magazine — *Dabiq*, named after a small Syrian town where theologians predict the West and Islam will eventually clash at the site of a historic Ottoman battle — is published in English, Russian, German, and Arabic. It has been rebranded as *Rumiyah* since IS lost control of that township. Most of IS' communications are released in multiple languages including English, Turkish, Dutch, French, German, Russian, and Indonesian (Ghambir, 2014).

Communications material is distributed across multiple digital media platforms, including official and affiliated websites, social media such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and file sharing platforms including Ask.fm, WhatsApp, PaITalk, Kik, JustPaste.it, and Tumblr (Klausen, 2015) as well as through music, videos, and video games released online (Alexander & Alexander, 2015). This material is quickly disseminated by activists who retweet it and repost it to large audiences of followers with the video *The Clanging of Swords* released on YouTube on 17 March 2014 prompting 56,988 views in the first 24 hours and tweeted 32,313 times over a 60 hour period (Lister, 2015). Like Hamas, IS makes extensive use of Twitter hashtags to attract attention to their communications, such as *#calamitywillbefallUS* as a warning to the US in June 2014. It creates internet memes, such as *#catsofjihad* (Alexander & Alexander, 2015) and hijacks hashtags of popular events, such as the 2014 soccer world cup with *#Brasil2014* and *#WC2014* linked to IS communications material (Lister, 2015). When Twitter started deleting its accounts in August 2014, IS migrated its communications material to sites such as Friendica (open source software that implements a distributed social network), Diaspora (an online social network) and VK (a Russian online social media service) (Fishwick, 2014). Its activists are



expert at quickly transferring accounts as they are deleted. One particularly active IS supporter, with more than 90 suspended Twitter accounts, was able to get most of his followers back within hours through sharing new account details in private online chat rooms where identities are unknown and cannot be suspended (Amarasingam, 2015).

Given IS' political objective of creating a global *khilafah*, the advent and spread of the internet is especially propitious because online social space is considered communal and Islam is predicated on the notion of the *ummah*. Since its relatively recent rise, IS has developed a sophisticated and disciplined communications approach that coheres around a specific narrative, repetitive framing, and tightly-controlled messaging across the full ambit of online platforms in order to reach its supporters, but as also to strike fear into the hearts and minds of its enemies. Its communications approach is based on a relatively simple narrative that promotes itself as the "righteous, true and prophetic" Muslim movement (Whiteside, 2016), which will establish a global *khilafah* cleansed of apostates and based on a strict interpretation of *shari'ah* law (Alexander & Alexander, 2015). Its key messages are framed in terms of statehood and *jihad*. In relation to statehood, those messaging streams are: (i) self-determination; (ii) Islam as the frame of reference; and (iii) determining its place in the world through the unity and commitment to the one true faith. *Jihad* is used to frame key messages concerning: (i) the nature of the conflict; (ii) clear identification of its enemies; and (iii) victimhood. Through these key messages IS seeks to persuade and charm its audience of supporters with utopian images of life under its governance (Kingsley, 2014), but it also deliberately provokes global outrage and anger with its online videos and images featuring carefully choreographed violence (McCants, 2015), including the beheading of Western journalists and aid workers. This approach has been described as violence designed to "intimidate and enrage" and as a form of "marketing manipulation and recruitment, determined to bring the public displays of savagery into our lives, trying to instil in us a state of terror" (Stern & Berger, 2015, p. 3). It can also be seen as an attempt to increase its media footprint by attracting interest from Western-based traditional media. In this way, social media is used as a "tool of offensive psychological warfare" (Stern & Berger, 2010, p. 7). The remainder of this chapter focuses mostly on IS' communications material



released during a surge of violence that took place in Syria and Iraq between June and October 2014.

### **(b) Frame 1: Statehood**

As a framing device, statehood is important to IS because it links directly to its political objective, namely, the “complete unification of all Muslim peoples and lands under the single authority of the *Khilafah*” (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 40-41). Messaging framed in terms of statehood began with a multi-layered approach across all communication platforms with the official announcement of the *khilafah* on 29 June 2014. Notice of the upcoming announcement was given via IS’ own Twitter accounts (Al-Tamimi, 2016). This was followed by the release of a written statement issued by the group’s official spokesperson, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, as well as audio material in five different languages along with two hour-long videos explaining the group’s political objectives titled “Breaking the Borders” and “the End of Sykes-Picot” (Lister, 2015). A week after the announcement, video of a speech given at Mosul’s Grand Mosque by al-Baghdadi declaring himself Khalif Ibrahim was also released on social media (Kilcullen, 2015). IS dedicated the first edition of *Dabiq* to the announcement (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 7), featuring excerpts from the speech promising that the *khilafah* would return the “dignity, might, rights and leadership” of the true believers accompanied by images of armed soldiers in a convoy triumphantly waving flags. Depicting the *khilafah* as a state for all Muslims belonging to its particular form of Islam, IS proclaimed that there is “no nationality”: “We are Muslims, there is only one country. God willing, we want only one caliphate” (Al-Hayat, 2014a).

While IS has been reluctant to publicly profile its leaders due to the dire risks associated, including their consequential targeting by military opponents such as the US, the important announcement of a new state demanded its leader’s identification, if the message was to be credible. Advance notice of the intention to profile its leader was given by *Al-Furqan*, which first tweeted that “big news” was coming to Mosul before releasing photos of al-Baghdadi on the same twitter feed followed by a video of his sermon at al-Nuri Mosque (Al-Furqan, 2014c). Days later, this was followed up with the release of al-Baghdadi’s official biography on Twitter (SITE Intelligence, 2014). Subsequent videos feature al-

Baghdadi preaching about the return of the *khilafah* framed by an acknowledgement that the "state is on show for the world to see" (Al-Hayat, 2014f) while highlighting the progress that has been made with judicial processes established, *hudud* implemented, *zakayt* collected, and prayer routinely enforced.

*(i) Self-Determination*

Messages about self-determination reinforce the "remaining and expanding" nature of the new *khilafah* achieved through conquering territory, building new, and enhancing existing, infrastructure, the provision of public services as well as evidence of citizens enjoying everyday life (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 18). The gaining of additional territory regularly features in IS communications material (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 12), such as in the Sinai, Libya, Yemen, Algeria, and the Arabian Peninsula. Stories and videos of these achievements are illustrated with images of its soldiers operating in these territories, blowing up infrastructure, and parading through the streets on tanks and horses with guns and flags. Statements reinforce the claim that IS' expansion is inevitable given the "flag of the *khilafah* will rise over Makkah and al-Madinah even if the apostates and hypocrites despise such" (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 3). On the one hand, a sense of unity is portrayed where villagers appear to publicly celebrate IS' arrival and its provision of a state where "Muslims of all colours under one banner and one leader... rid the land of the *tawaghut* and raise their swords in unity against the Jews and crusaders" (Al-'Itisam, 2014). On the other hand, the threat of non-acceptance is also made clear, such as in Algeria where a French citizen is executed as the result of French "aggression" towards IS along with the message that the new state will "remain because it was built on the corpses of martyrs and it quenched its thirst with their blood" (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 20).

This stream of messages also focuses on IS' territorial expansion through *bay'ah* (Al-Hayat, 2014c, p. 3). Scattered throughout its video, audio, and written online communications are examples of various NSAGs in other countries — including those as geographically distant as Indonesia, Nigeria, and the Philippines — pledging allegiance to IS (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 20), illustrated by formal statements from leaders of those groups and images of their troops and local villagers embracing their new masters, in the form of IS fighters (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 21). The acknowledgement of the *khilafah's* existence by others,

including its enemies, is also common, such as a US official's comment that IS is a "real if nascent and unrecognised state actor" (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 32-33).

The duties of citizens are also clearly set out as part of IS' communications relating to self-determination, including first among their obligations, which is *hijrah* (Al-Hayat, 2014b; Al-Hayat, 2014c; Al-Hayat, 2014e). This features repeatedly in various messages focused on the *khilafah's* need to achieve a critical mass of citizens and fighters to support its political objective of surviving and expanding. Advice intended for a global audience is often given that those undertaking *hijrah* should not "fear arrest, worry about money or accommodation... there are plenty of homes and resources to cover you and your family." This is followed up by warnings that life will not be perfect given that "soldiers and inhabitants of the state are human beings not infallible angels" and "you may see things that need improvement and that are being improved!" (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 33). Calls are regularly made for those with particular skills and experience, such as doctors, engineers, and teachers (Al-Hayat, 2014b). There is a sense given that new arrivals will not be alone given that "caravans of migrants" are arriving in the *khilafah* (Al-Furqan, 2014a). The acceptance of life as a citizen is frequently celebrated in videos as foreign fighters publicly renounce their citizenship of other nations by tearing up their passports amidst statements that the "lands of the Muslim are one" and that "our state will expand and expand and expand until it removes your thrones" (Al-Furqan, 2014a).

Actions confirming the credibility of the *khilafah* are also prominently featured in IS' communications material, such as the launch of a new currency. An explanation is provided that this shifts the *ummah* away from exposure to currencies manipulated by central banks elsewhere and that it is a practice adopted by previous *khilafah* whose old gold coins are now being sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars at international auctions, which indicates the value placed on them by the West (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 18).

### *(ii) Islamic Reference*

The establishment of the new *khilafah* is firmly entrenched in Islam as the only method by which a state that promotes virtue, prevents vice, and implements *shari'ah* can be achieved (IS, 2014, July 5). Giving people choice in their religious beliefs and practices or as IS puts it: "absolute truth and complete falsehood" is

seen as giving into a “twisted or polluted ideology” (Al-Hayat, 2014c, p. 9). The justification for this approach is rooted in historical religious explanations, such as the story of Noah and the ark where those who do not believe the true prophecy today are “ignorant just like those in Noah’s time” (Al-Hayat, 2014c, p. 10). Religious scripture is also used to bolster the argument for the importance of *hijrah* (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 7) as moving from “hypocrisy to sincerity” (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 25) and to justify the path to self-determination as through *jihad* which is considered *fard ’ayn* (an obligation) with *qu’ud* (abandonment of *jihad*) considered the “worst of sins in modern times” (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 32). “We are not here to fight for dirt or earth or imaginary Sykes and Picot. We are not here fighting to replace an Arab *taghut* with a Western *taghut*. Our *jihad* is loftier. It is higher. We are fighting to make the word of Allah the highest. All this is entirely for him” (Al-Hayat, 2014a).

Religious justifications shape the demand for strict adherence to *shari’ah* given that, if any part of Islam is abandoned or ignored, “Satan and his soldiers will fill the vacuum” (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 16). Particular attention is paid to the religious defence of punishments, such as stoning women for adultery (Al-Hayat, 2014c) and crucifixion in response to online criticism with the provision of scriptural evidence of the practice dating back to the Prophet: “Indeed the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and his messenger and strive upon earth to cause corruption is none but that they will be killed or crucified or their hands and feet will be cut off... or they will be exiled from the land” (Al-Furqan, 2014a). The words of the Prophet himself are used to explain the killing of tribes who shield traitors, such as thieves who killed the Prophet’s shepherd and stole his camel: “They were captured and brought to him. He ordered their hands and feet to be cut off, their eyes be put out with hot irons and they be thrown onto an area with black stones and given no water and they died” (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 13-14).

Slavery is also given particular focus with an extensive argument provided through Islamic research into the religious beliefs and practices of enemies. The Yazidis, for example, who are “devil worshippers,” cannot be put into the category of *dhimmi*s who are able to pay *jizyah* (tax) to live in the *khilafah*. Instead, Yazidis are able to be enslaved and sold at markets because desertion of this practice could lead to an increase in *fahish’ah* (adultery and fornication) (Al-Hayat, 2014g). The slave market day features in *Dabiq* and also in videos

released online with women and children sold for cash and weapons (Fields, 2014, November 3).

The end-of-days prophecy also features heavily in IS' communications material, emphasising the importance of being part of the *khilafah* before Muslims face the predicted historic final battle against the Crusaders (Al-Hayat, 2014b; Al-Hayat, 2014e; Al-Hayat, 2014g). Depicted with images of young masked armed men standing among ruins in flames or soldiers with swords and machine guns indicating the connection between the past and present (Al-Hayat, 2014b), this battle represents the moment when heroic *muhajadeen* (one engaged in *jihad*) will come from all corners of the world to answer the call of the Prophet (Al-Hayat, 2014f).

Much of IS' communications material is designed to attract support through ideological and political appeal by depicting civilian life in IS-held territories, including the enforcement of law and order, economic activity in relation to agriculture or retail in the local markets as well as social and religious events (Winter, 2015). Much of this online communication is mundane as it deals with organisation, proselytising, and everyday life in the territory, ranging from tweets providing religious instruction through to pictures of soldiers buying Nutella in a shop, hugging cats, or eating their dinner (Klausen, 2015). The *khilafah* is pitched as a place where, in theory, all peoples can come together as an *ummah* whether they are "Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the Easterner and the Westerner" because as Muslims they are "all brothers... loving each other for the sake of Allah" (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 7). It is depicted as a community established in the face of enormous opposition in the form of a "political, economic, military, media and intelligence war waged by the world" (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 5). The benefits of belonging include property rights, access to public services, security, guaranteed availability of food and other commodities, and the provision of financial aid for the needy through the collection of *zakah* (alms-giving) from all citizens (Al-Hayat, 2014b). Family and community images are often used to bolster this utopian presentation of life in the *khilafah*, such as fighters pushing children on swings, distributing toys, children enjoying bouncy castles, bumper cars, riding ponies, and eating candy floss (Alexander & Alexander, 2015). The message is that: "IS fights to defend the Muslims, liberate the lands and bring an end to *tawaghut* (idolation) while

simultaneously seeking to guide and nurture those under its authority and ensure that both their religious and social needs are met" (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 16). This kind of messaging is often accompanied by images of a *Qur'anic* school, leaflets about the *khilafah* being distributed to citizens, and people pledging allegiance or repenting as well as destruction of tombs and tobacco. The message is that villages are not "liberated" only for fighters to move on, abandon its people, or ignore their needs (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 27). Instead, fighters understand that a *khilafah* cannot be maintained without some of the "sincere soldiers of Allah" looking after both the religious and worldly affairs of their people, including repairing bridges, restoring electricity, cleaning streets and providing important services for residents, such as health care. These activities are well illustrated in a significant number of its communications, including images of children receiving cancer treatment holding IS flags (Al-Hayat, 2014g), food being distributed to the needy, and communities sharing a meal provided by fighters (Al-Hayat, 2014c).

However, while the establishment of the *khilafah* is designed to unite the *ummah* (Al-Hayat, 2014f), in practice strict requirements are placed on its citizens; for instance, they must live their lives by the moral code dictated by *shari'ah*. For those who have previously failed to live up to this code, they are offered the opportunity to repent and receive clemency. Scattered throughout various communications material are examples of this happening in line with the message that people should not repent out of fear of IS because "if you fear us there is no good in you. We want your repentance and return to be due to the fear of Allah the exalted" (Al-Hayat, 2014f). IS uses passages from the *Qur'an* and quotes from the Prophet and other spiritual leaders as the basis for its communications approach as it targets a particular audience attracted to the prospect of life in a community, which strictly adheres to a radical form of *shari'ah* that includes harsh punishments mandated by Allah, such as the amputation of limbs and execution through crucifixion, beheading, shooting and hanging.

### *(iii) Place in the World*

IS' mission is described in its communications material as "neither local nor regional but rather global" as it seeks to establish itself as a force to be reckoned with on the world stage (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 13). It consistently uses the "words of the enemy", such as US politicians, military representatives, and renowned

academics, to assert its status as a recognised state. Former UK journalist, but now hostage, John Cantlie regularly appears as the author of articles and narrator of videos detailing IS' role as a "global player" (Al-Hayat, p. 36). The message here is that IS is undertaking a mission that will "transform the political landscape of the world... the return to the *khilafah*" (Al-Hayat, 2014f). That vision is for a place where people are emancipated from the "modern day slavery" of the West where employment, regular working hours, and recompense through wages leaves Muslims in a "constant feeling of subjugation to another master" (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 28) because "living among the sinful kills the heart, never mind living amongst the *kuffar!*" (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 32). The world is placed into two camps; the camp of Islam, faith, and the *muhajadeen*; and the camp of *kufr*, the Jews, Crusaders and their allies" (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 10). Accompanying that new utopia is a threat to those in the world who do not share the same ideals "will hear and understand the meaning of terrorism and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy and uncover its deviant nature" (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 8).

Here, then, IS' strategic narrative is conveyed, at least in part, by three streams of key messages framed by statehood, namely, 'self-determination', the creation of a powerful 'place in the world' for its followers through an 'Islamic' frame of reference, although communications materials concerning the latter are perhaps the most important in this regard. Yet the key messages framed by *jihad* better demonstrate the careful calibration and, at times, choreography of war-fighting activities to IS's communications approach.

### **(c) Frame 2: *Jihad***

*Jihadism* is an ongoing obligation that IS reinforces in its communications material as a requirement to participate in or face harsh sanctions, such as public execution. It uses history to connect its contemporary *khilafah* with the creation of previous versions of these kinds of states through *jihad* and the overarching experience of *jihad* throughout the Middle East (Al-Hayat, 2014b). For IS, achieving self-determination is seen as inseparable from *jihad* as its first online magazine sets out: "there is no life without *jihad*" (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 31). There is also considered to be no true *jihad* without *hijrah*. "The life of *jihad* is not



possible until you pack and move to the *khilafah*" (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 36-39). IS provokes fear in its opponents to hasten their submission and avoid prolonged conflict (Bunzel, 2015) by causing chaos and instability to the degree permitted by *shari'ah* through direct combat, bombs, and the use of *istishhadiyyin* with the stories of these fighters who are "prepared to die for the sake of Allah" (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 28; Al-Furqan, 2014c; Al-Furqan, 2014a).

### (i) Conflict

The conflict created by IS' *jihad* dominates its communications approach, which is renowned for the use of extreme brutality to capture a global audience's attention. It seeks to create an impression of power by portraying its military in control or on the offensive, creating an aura of supremacy, momentum, and religious righteousness (Winter, 2015). This messaging stream focuses significantly on its military exploits with videos, still images, and stories reporting on its battles, including raids on army bases (Al-Hayat, 2014g), street fighting, and firing rockets (Al-Hayat, 2014b). Hour-long videos are largely dedicated to this stream, including footage of battles filmed with multiple cameras based in various locations to capture the action from all angles (Al-'Itisam, 2014). Close-up footage is provided by fighters wearing body cameras, such as Go-Pros or carrying hand-held devices (Al-Furqan, 2014a). The battles have English-language voiceovers and take viewers to the frontline in a virtual battlefield. In one example, a map of the region identifies the territory where a battle is taking place (Al-Furqan, 2014a) and, in another, an explanation is given about how soldiers prepare for battle (Al-Hayat, 2014f). Reconnaissance work is shown before an attack, which involves rockets being fired and soldiers hunting tanks with RPGs, demonstrates the "epitome of sacrifice" when they achieve *shahid* (martyrdom). Frontlines "enter the fray" as the "stallions of life as they valiantly rush in and fight their way forward to key strategic positions" (Al-Hayat, 2014f). Once trenches are occupied, fighters are shown resting and praying before the final push as they "keenly pursue the noblest of deaths in the heat of the action" (Al-Hayat, 2014f). In this particular video, viewers never actually see the enemy so it is possible that the battle has been staged solely for communication purposes. These battle videos often feature background *nasheeds*, interviews with military leaders (Al-'Itisam, 2014), and soldiers quoting the Prophet (Al-Furqan, 2014a). In addition to the depictions of conflict, IS issues numerous



battle updates showing new areas under its control illustrated by maps, images of victory parades, and large gatherings of citizens celebrating their advance (Al-Hayat, 2014b; Al-Hayat, 2014i) with vox-pops or brief interviews peppered throughout the story.

These victories are celebrated in photo essays that provide extensive historical and religious context about why the particular area or enemy is targeted (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 10). Battle reports describe in detail armed confrontation, with gruesome images of dead enemy soldiers, IS martyrs, and the war booty captured (Al-Hayat, 2014c). On occasions, aerial drone footage (Al-Hayat, 2014a) is used. These pictures illustrate IS' military prowess, bolstered by other images of fighters blowing up army bases, firing rockets and guns. Suicide bombers are also shown preparing for, and carrying out, their mission. The aftermath of battle features destroyed buildings and captured enemy weapons as well as the destruction of banned products, such as drugs and cigarette caches (Al-Hayat, 2014h; Al-Hayat, 2014e). IS' communications material celebrates its victories, at times making use of the same David-and-Goliath scenario adopted by Hamas, by describing the extensive effort of its enemies against it: "look at how much the US is spending to fight IS. I read in the news \$20 billion. They have lost in Iraq, Afghanistan and will lose in Syria because we will be waiting for them". This material is often accompanied by edited-in sounds of swords and guns, perhaps reflecting the ancient and modern elements of IS (Al-Hayat, 2014a). On rare occasions, IS acknowledges it has retreated from certain territory in response to doubts or concerns raised on social media (Al-Hayat, 2014b) or claims made about its losses conveyed in traditional media. It describes these situations as a "tactical withdrawal" in order to fend off "cowardly aggression" (Al-Hayat, 2014f).

The management of prisoners receives extensive coverage in IS' 'conflict' messages. The messages are mixed with stories about those who repent receiving clemency although others, particularly enemy fighters, who seek to surrender are gunned down or publicly executed. Video footage shows IS fighters overwhelming Syrian soldiers at an outpost with a voiceover saying that mercy should not be shown to "any of the filth that speak evil" (Al-Hayat, 2014d). In this particular case, gruesome images are shown of soldiers killed in the battle and, when others surrender, IS fighters gun them down. Humiliated prisoners are marched to their death in their underwear, chained together before mass

executions by firing squad (Al-Hayat, 2014a), left pleading for their lives (Al-Hayat, 2014i), and forced to dig their own graves or to make statements denouncing their own beliefs. Video and still images of these killings are frequently released, including close-ups of the wounds inflicted (Al-Hayat, 2014b).

Significant focus is given to the spoils of war won by IS. As one military leader puts it: “The West keeps giving and we will keep taking” (Al-Hayat, 2014a). Images of “war booty” included captured US humvees, tanks, anti-aircraft missiles and guns accompanied by justification that it is “seized from one who does not deserve it and who uses it contrary to the obedience of Allah” (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 10). The destruction of symbols and idols representing other religions are also shown in communications material, with photo essays dedicated to the bombing of *shirk* in Mosul, such as temples, shrines, and tombs (Al-Hayat, 2014a; Al-Hayat, 2014i).

‘Conflict’ messages are also heavily dedicated to inspiring and celebrating attacks carried out by supporters in other countries. Whether or not there is a direct connection to these groups, IS claims credit for these attacks as proof of its wider strategic capability to create fear in those distant from the battle zone. According to IS, examples of lone wolf attacks reveal:

what a deadly tinderbox is fizzing just beneath the surface of every Western country, waiting to explode into violent action at any moment given the right conditions. Suddenly the *muhajadeen* of the IS weren’t some esoteric concept fighting in a land nobody knew or cared about, they were living on the doorstep of millions of people living in some of the biggest, most modern cities in the Western world (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 37).

Responsibility for this “international insurgency” is evidence that IS’ sphere of influence has expanded to the degree that it can order attacks on foreign soil by word alone. These attacks are sheeted home to the “continual American intervention” in the Middle East (Al-Hayat, 2014h. p. 39).

### *(ii) The Enemy*

IS' enemies are clearly identified in a stream of consistent and frequent messaging as "the Jews, the Crusaders, their allies and with them the rest of the nations and religions of the *kufir*, all being led by America, Russia and mobilised by the Jews" (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 10). The case against these enemies is explained as their repeated transgressions against Muslims around the world, and, in particular, their political and military interference in Iraq and Syria, which results in the killing or mutilation of innocent women and children (Al-Hayat, 2014g). Images of atrocities feature alongside those of US leaders, such as President Barack Obama, allegedly describing these incidents as "collateral damage" (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p.3). Messages to America feature with warnings, such as "Know O Defender of the Cross, that a proxy war won't help you in Sham just as it didn't help you in Iraq. As for the near future, you will be forced into a direct confrontation with Allah's permission despite your reluctance" (Al-Hayat, 2014f).

The actions of its enemies are used by IS to justify *jihad*. Firstly, it inspires repeated threats of violence: "you will be broken and defeated. We will conquer Rome, break your crosses, enslave your women by the permission of Allah the Exalted. It is you who started the aggression against us, thus you deserve blame and you will pay a great price". Enemies are warned about the violent reach of IS: "You will pay the price as you walk on your streets turning left and right, fearing the Muslim. You will not feel secure even in your own beds" (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 7). Secondly, the actions of the enemy demand a response from Muslims around the world by either undertaking *hijrah* or, if that is not possible, to strike out at the enemy wherever they live. Calls for international 'lone wolf' or group attacks are a common thread of IS' messaging as it encourages every Muslim "find a crusader and kill him" (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 44). Civilian populations are identified as targets: "if you can kill a disbelieving American or European especially the spiteful and filthy French or an Australian or Canadian or any other disbeliever then rely upon Allah and kill him in any manner or way however it may be" (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 9). These communications complement IS' branding as a regional force able to achieve significant publicity and global outreach. Thirdly, IS blames the intervention of the US and other enemies in the Middle East, and particularly their opposition to the *khilafah*, for the resulting retaliation, which includes the public execution of hostages.

A key feature of its communications approach in 2014 was the release of a series of videos featuring spectacular executions, such as beheadings and crucifixions. While these executions were justified as necessary for religious reasons, politics also played an important role in its messaging to critics, locally and globally, that opposition would attract serious consequences. This strategy was strongly, but most often privately, criticised by senior al-Qaeda members who believed that such atrocities would never be “palatable” to Muslims more broadly and risked putting short-term military goals ahead of longer-term political ambitions because it would alienate the Muslim masses (McCants, 2015, p. 13). A number of journalists and aid workers were taken hostage and executed during the height of the 2014 conflict with video and still images as well as written text released publicly by IS on multiple online platforms. In the case of journalist James Foley, who was beheaded on 19 August 2014, the actual act of removing the head is not featured, although still images released show the body with the head resting on it (Liveleak, 2014). IS placed responsibility for this outcome with the US President who had “blood on his hands” (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 37) after being warned this would be the consequence of continued airstrikes. Foley was himself also blamed for embedding himself with US troops, taking photographs of the deaths of “poor Afghani and Iraqi Muslims” and “glorifying the Crusaders”, and being captured with “spying tools” on him (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 39). Foley’s execution was described as “a cooling balm for the believers’ hearts” and contrasted with the outcome for other European prisoners released after ransom deals were struck with their governments (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 39). As in the case of other executions, an alleged message from Foley prior to his death is published on IS communications platforms: “Our government has stretched our military around the world to interfere in their affairs. They have killed in the name of preserving life, tortured and raped in the name of humanity, destroyed in the name of rebuilding and ruined the lives of millions of people. It could very easily be you in my place tomorrow”. Alongside an image of Foley working as a journalist, contrasted with him in an orange jumpsuit with a shaved head, he is claimed to have said: “I guess all in all, I just wish I wasn’t American” (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 39-40). Attempts were made by Twitter to block the sharing of the images of his execution with accounts suspended as well as those opposing it being shared using the communal hashtag #ISISmedialblackout. It was also

removed from YouTube but it can still be found on video-sharing websites (Liveleak, 2014, August 20).

In the case of Steven Sotoloff, a public message was sent to his mother via IS communications channels before his beheading in what could be considered an attempt to turn the families of hostages against their own political leaders. Alongside an image of him in an orange jumpsuit with his passport is the message: "Mom, please don't let Obama kill me" (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 47) with the claim he died because the US continued to intervene militarily. A copy of a US Defense Department press release is featured next to a picture of Sotoloff's head resting on his body making a direct connection between the execution and a particular airstrike (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 51). Once again the message to the world is that continued intervention justifies IS' response: "just as your missiles continue to strike our people, our knife will continue to strike the necks of your people" (Lamothe, 2014, p. 1). Similar messages were sent to the UK Government when five men were executed as alleged British spies with the video including narrated warnings that the UK would be "invaded" by IS and the executions were a just response for "daring to challenge the might" of the group (BBC, 2016a, p. 1). This video also features a young British boy dressed in fatigues and an IS headband proclaiming that "we will kill *kuffar*" (Greenwood, 2016). British jihadi Mohammed Emwazi, known as *Jihadi* John, was also used in films executing six men, including British aid workers David Haines and Alan Henning (Leaksource, 2014a&b).

*Dabiq* dedicated specific pages to its enemies, using the enemy's own words to reinforce its own status or undermining its enemy's counter-narrative. In the first edition, IS quotes a US military expert as confirming its achievement of a *khilafah*: "ISIS is no longer a state in name only. It is a physical, if extra-legal, reality on the ground... It is a real, if nascent and unrecognised, state actor..." (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 32). Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel acknowledges that "IS poses a real threat" while representatives of the RAND Corporation talk about the futility of the campaign against IS because "destroying IS, even in a couple of years, is just not possible" (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 45). In other editions, the US President is featured wearing a Jewish kippah (cap) alongside allegations he is acting in the interests of his Israeli ally and his own "capitalist gluttony" by behaving as a warmonger just like his predecessor (Al-

Hayat, 2014e, p. 35). Obama is blamed for establishing a corrupt government in Iraq and allowing Israel to commit systemic massacres, chemical warfare, rape, and starvation (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 35). Former UK war correspondent John Cantlie, who as mentioned earlier was abducted in 2012, also regularly features in IS communications material, including fronting and narrating videos and writing columns and articles for online publications. In *Dabiq*, he writes the “real story behind my videos” to answer allegations that he is being forced to take part in IS communications. Once again, he blames the UK and US governments for his predicament (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 52). Cantlie also features in a specific communication entitled “If I were President Today” with advice for Obama: “I’d probably switch off my cell phone, lock the Oval Office doors and go to play golf instead. The war against the Islamic State just isn’t going to plan at all. Much to the dread of western political leaders, the Islamic State is now truly moving with great momentum” (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 35).

Other enemies are targeted in IS’ communication material explaining why *jihad* is the path to a *khilafah*. The proxies of the US operating in territory held or desired by IS are vilified in messages, including the “commies and terrorists” of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the “feeble” Free Syrian Army and the “fainthearted” Peshmerga (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 38). These groups feature prominently in battle reports as “running like cowards” while the soldiers of Allah leave them “dead and humiliated because they fought for a secular state” (Al-Hayat, 2014f). When fighters from these groups are captured alive, they are often then publicly executed with still images and footage posted online as in the case of three Syrian soldiers crucified in a marketplace with children crowding under their bodies and close-ups of a statement taped to their chests declaring their guilt (Syracide, 2014). At times, IS draws a distinction between populations they are targeting and those within it who are the real enemies — most likely in response to online criticism from IS supporters who identify with those populations. In this vein, IS explains that it is not fighting the Kurds because they are Kurds, but “rather we fight the disbelievers among them, the allies of the Crusaders and the Jews in the war against Muslims” (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 12).

Particular attention is paid to the Yazidis, a distinct ethnic group of Kurdish origin mostly located in Northern Iraq, who are considered to be “Satanists” who follow a “deviant” religion (Al-Hayat, 2014g, p. 14; Al-Hayat,

2014a). Sunni Muslims are also not exempt if they are deemed to have pandered to Western interests, especially Palestinian and Egyptian politicians, who gave preference to “popularity and rationalisation over pleasing Allah and relying on him”. Their betrayal is because they either follow “deviant methodologies” or have a corrupt desire for fame, wealth and power” (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 38). Described as “exclusive” footage, one particular video features a room full of Sunni soldiers with a voiceover saying: “look at these idiots. They claim they are Sunni but Sunni do not fight the *muhajadeen*” (Al-Hayat, 2014a). In this way, traitors, apostates, and collaborators are treated no differently from the Crusaders because there are only two camps — the camp of the truth and its followers and the camp of falsehoods and factions — with the latter group to be “eradicated” (Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 12). Images and videos of these prisoners show them digging their own graves while being interviewed by a US-accented IS fighter. One victim talks about how this is what he wants and deserves. “Basher is despicable. Where’s he now? Our fate is to be slaughtered”, he says. “Do you have a message for the families?” asks the narrator. “Get their sons out of the army as quickly as possible. Allah has blessed IS”, the victim responds (Al-Hayat, 2014f). Throughout the period explored by this thesis, communications material were released showing Syrian soldiers beheaded with their heads placed on spikes, 53 handcuffed and blindfolded corpses, 700 tribesmen executed in eastern Syrian along with hundreds of members of the Abu Nimr tribe in the Iraqi province of Anbar. Musicians are punished with 90 lashes for playing non-Islamic music and 13 teenagers were executed in Mosul for watching a televised soccer match (Alexander & Alexander 2015). Collaborators are also executed for trafficking, smoking hashish and cigarettes (Al-Hayat, 2014c), and thieves have their hands amputated as it is tweeted live (Kuruvilla, 2014).

IS’ enemies are not only targeted in battle, but also feature in messages being hunted down individually. Videos show IS fighters manning roadblocks, checking peoples’ identification in the “*muhajadeen* wanted database”. Those without ID or identified as ‘wanted’ are interrogated and then shot along with those who attempt to flee (Al-Furqan, 2014a). So-called *rafidah* (rejectionist) hunters carry out harsh penalties against the *kuffar*, including conducting ‘extermination convoys’ pulling up alongside vehicles full of youths, shooting them until they drive off the road and then finishing off those left alive inside (Al-Hayat, 2014f; Al-Hayat, 2014i). Footage is shot of this as it happens, including



extreme close-ups of the victims in the car dying (Al-Hayat, 2014f). Those who escape from the car are chased down with the hunters urging each other on — “he’s still alive, finish him off” — while the escapee begs for his life before being shot. The image of this is interspersed with one of him in his uniform with the message that he was eliminated because he was *Safawi* (pejorative term for Shi’ah muslims). *Safawi* hunters also dress up in enemy uniforms and carry out night-time raids of houses belonging to Syrian commanders and intelligence officers filmed on handheld cameras with night-time vision capability. They are let into the homes because they appear to be fellow officers and the intended victims openly admit their roles in order to explain who they are and avoid arrest. Their confession results in their beheading or death by shooting with one commander made to dig his own grave and make a public declaration to his fellow soldiers to “repent and stop what they are doing” before he is shot and his body is kicked while IS fighters call him a dog (Al-Furqan, 2014a).

This treatment of the enemy contrasts sharply with the depiction of IS’ troops killed in battle. A sense of power over the enemy is portrayed in that IS chooses when and how to take lives. One video shows IS snipers targeting lone enemy soldiers patrolling or guarding outposts. The soldiers are confused about where the shooting is coming from as they try to take cover. The snipers appear to deliberately shoot the arms or legs first before firing the kill shot with slow replays of the victim’s reaction of pain and fear as each bullet hits (Al-Furqan, 2014a). The bodies of enemies are often displayed as they died with close-up images of their faces horribly damaged by bullet wounds, missing body parts, their bloody corpses in body bags or piled in mass graves (Al-Hayat, 2014b; Al-Hayat, 2014g; Al-Hayat, 2014f) with a voiceover explaining that this kind of death awaits IS’ opponents. Enemy bodies are often mistreated after death by being kicked, shot multiple times, or displayed in death with their ID cards, particularly if they were high-ranking (Al-Hayat, 2014e). In comparison, footage of IS’ martyrs depicts them dying peacefully with a strong thread of accompanying voiceover focusing on life in the hereafter: “Allah says: And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah ‘they are dead’ rather they are alive but you perceive it not” (Al-Hayat, 2014h, p. 7). Assassinated IS leaders are also celebrated, not only for their spiritual and political contribution, but for their military prowess with images featuring them as fighters accompanied by photos of their bodies after achieving *shadid* (Al-Hayat, 2014b).



### *(iii) Victims*

Victimhood is a relatively minor messaging stream for IS with civilians killed in airstrikes occasionally featuring to demonstrate the vindictiveness of their enemies (Al-Hayat, 2014b). The numbers of those killed and wounded are included in the coverage which also features evidence of Sunni civilians “murdered by *Safawis*” as they retreat from the IS advance (Al-Hayat, 2014b, p. 16-17). IS’ main focus in this messaging stream is the role of the *muhajadeen* who accept either victory or *shahid*. Multiple still images, moving footage and written stories feature IS martyrs. On occasion, they are filmed while dying as the “difficult path” they are taking is described as they wait for their soul to be “gently lifted” (Al-Hayat, 2014f). Martyrs are almost always shown at peace although images do also show their wounds (Klausen, 2015) such as in the case of one young soldier pictured in his fighting regalia and then bloodied in a shroud with a message that Satan will try to stop others like him following the path chosen for him by Allah (Al-Hayat, 2014c).

\* \* \* \* \*

This chapter demonstrates that IS has a sophisticated, complex, and disciplined communications approach with a clear narrative, frames, and messaging streams. Drawing on the framework designed specifically to analyse communications material, this chapter argues that IS portrays itself as the true and prophetic Islamic movement establishing a *khilafah* mandated by God in order for its followers to live their lives in strict adherence with the tenants of their faith. This reflects its underlying historical context, governance structures, and its political objectives of achieving statehood through *jihad* as outlined in Chapter 4. While IS’ war-fighting activities feature heavily in the messaging streams framed in terms of *Jihad* (with the exception of ‘victimhood’ which is IS’ least used key message), this violence is important to Hamas’ overarching narrative, which sits at the heart of its communications approach, and its political strategy. To this end, IS’ communications approach, which carefully calibrates and, at important times, choreographs war-fighting activities with its communications material, is a key plank of IS’ overarching strategy.

## 7. KEY FINDINGS

Having compared Hamas' and IS' origins, governance arrangements, war-fighting capabilities, and political objectives in Chapter 4, and having explained how both groups' communications approaches contribute to their respective overarching strategy in Chapters 5 and 6, this penultimate chapter captures and conveys the thesis' key findings. While there is a striking degree of conformity between the sophisticated, comprehensive, and disciplined communications approaches used by these two groups, as both offer a particular narrative framing various streams of key messaging, this penultimate chapter argues that key differences during especially intense periods of conflict — specifically, between June and October 2014 — reflect the divergent ways in which Hamas endorses, and IS disrupts, the prevailing world order as each pursues their own cause. This key finding will be of interest to scholars, journalists, communications experts, and self-reflective policymakers as the roles played by NSAGs in contemporary conflict remain relatively under-theorised, as the earlier literature review attests.

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The research and analysis informing this thesis resulted in a number of significant findings. In relation to the first research question — that is, *who are these two groups known as Hamas and IS, under which historical conditions did they originate, how are they organised, and what do they hope to achieve?* — the thesis found that both groups emerged from within a turbulent political situation in the Middle East, the insecurity of which has a powerful impact on their members and supporters, especially severe economic and social deprivation. Both groups were embedded in other violent religious movements and have emerged, in the form they take today, as reactions to hostile foreign armed intervention in the region. Born of a mandate founded in a particular variant of Islam and driven by strong religious-political leadership, these NSAGs are steeped in religion. Both groups have complex and comprehensive governance arrangements that deliver a broad range of public, social, and security services to their citizens and deploy violence through well-structured and resourced armed wings. The groups enjoy significant support domestically, although that support is not constant, and both have attracted considerable international recognition

for their particular causes. However, the groups themselves publicly emphasise their differences with IS criticizing Hamas for its nationalist and secularist approach and its relationships with Shi'ah-dominated Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah. It has accused Hamas of being "tyrants" because the "point of *jihad* is not to liberate land... but to fight to implement the law of God" (Withnall, 2015, p. 1). Also unlike Hamas' Westphalian version of statehood, IS' *khilafah* operates as theocracy with no place for democracy, elections, or the creation of Islamic political parties because, historically, these have simply "handed the dignity of Muslims over to their enemies" (Al-Furqan, 2014b). Put simply, Hamas seeks statehood by endorsing the Westphalian system whereas IS seeks to disrupt that system.

The findings relating to the first research question provide the necessary foundation upon which the answer to the second is built. In relation to that second question — that is, how is communication used as part of both groups' overarching strategy and, specifically, what is the relationship between their war-fighting activities and communications approaches? — the thesis found that both NSAGs share a communications approach that coheres around clear, simple narratives, frames, and messages, each of which are central components in the practice of political communication by state and non-state actors alike.

Three of those common messaging streams are framed in terms of statehood: namely, (1) self-determination; (2) Islamic reference; and, (3) place in the world. In relation to self-determination, IS seeks to persuade and charm its audience of supporters with utopian images of life under its governance while simultaneously promoting its image as an aggressor, using powerful weapons and a vast army to wage war against its enemies in order to both capture huge swathes of territory and form a global *khilafah*. It does so while also instilling fear in a global audience geographically distant from the physical battlefield, but vulnerable to the new imaginaries of war. This is starkly different to Hamas which tells the story of a defenceless people justly rising up to resist a cruel and oppressive occupying force intent on denying them the right to govern themselves in a particular bordered territory. These differing approaches suggest that Hamas believes the best path to achieving self-determination is to persuade a diverse global audience, which may be sympathetic to a poor underdog using stones and knives to battle a militarily powerful and cruel warmonger, to put diplomatic

pressure on Israel until it recognises the right of Palestinians to their own land. Contrastingly, IS seeks to establish itself locally and internationally as the true and prophetic Muslim movement with the capability to dominate militarily and impose its strict form of *shari'ah* law on the population of any territory it captures.

Furthermore, whereas Hamas has, over time, reduced the religious rhetoric in its communications material as it seeks to influence a secular audience that may be fearful of radical Islam, IS does not shy away from its fundamental religiosity. Furthermore, the eschatological and apocalyptic nature of IS' vision and messaging contrasts strongly with Hamas' more secularist approach. Messages relating to the Islamic frame of reference can be found in Hamas' welcoming of people of all faiths to live under the wing of Islam whereas IS seeks to eradicate all other forms of religion in favour of their particular interpretation of Islam.

IS' messages about its place in the world are also starkly different to Hamas, which consistently communicates a desire to be part of the existing states-based system by building political, economic, and social relations with other states. Hamas actively seeks to build international diplomatic relationships, and uses international fora as a bully pulpit through which it speaks to, and seeks to influence, other international actors and a global audience. On the other hand, IS communicates its place in the world through seizing territory and populations and securing pledges of allegiance from other NSAGs located across the world. Its messaging is dominated by the imposition of its might, rather than a desire to engage diplomatically with other states. This is because it fundamentally disagrees with the values and practices of all other states and faith to the degree that, unless they accept IS' leadership, they must be eliminated. It seeks to disrupt the prevailing world order and *jihad* is central to this effort.

The second frame commonly applied by IS and Hamas relates to *jihad* as the path through which they pursue statehood. Both groups share a belief that *jihadism* not only permits the use of violence, but is also, in fact, obligatory and governed by Islamic jurisprudence. The difference here is that Hamas communicates this path as a defensive one carried out by willing participants

whereas IS requires participation, often through coercion. In its communications, IS connects its contemporary *khilafah* with the overarching experience of *jihad* throughout the Middle East. For IS, achieving self-determination is seen as inseparable from *jihad*. Hamas envisions *jihad* lasting only until it achieves its political objective of statehood; IS sees no end to its holy war. IS' strategy is to cause fear in its opponents to hasten their submission and avoid prolonged conflict (Bunzel, 2015). It communicates that strategy by causing chaos and instability to the degree permitted by *shari'ah* through direct combat, bombs, and the use of *istishhadiyyin* (suicide bombers) with the stories of these fighters who are "prepared to die for the sake of Allah" (Al-Furqan, 2014a; Al-Hayat, 2014e, p. 28).

Three distinct messaging streams are delivered through a *jihad* frame, namely: (1) conflict; (2) the enemy; and (3) victimhood. In its 'conflict' messaging, Hamas releases constant updates of civilian casualties, heavily focused on the death toll among children, whereas IS releases battle reports revealing how much territory it has taken, how many enemy fighters it has killed, and how much war booty it has collected. Where Hamas restricts its battlefield to the defined territory of Palestine, IS conducts a local, regional, and global war with violent surges across the territory and coordinated or inspired attacks on distant populations. However, both groups treat the deaths of their own fighters in a similar fashion — by celebrating their contribution to the war effort and their reward for their sacrifice being experienced in the afterlife as martyrs.

In reinforcing its key messages relating to the enemy, IS aggressively seeks to eradicate anyone who is not prepared to follow its one true faith, including Crusaders, Jews, Yazidis and Shi'ah Muslims as well as states that are involved in a military coalition against it, such as the US, Australia, the UK, Canada, and France. This kind of communication material appeals directly to an audience that shares its grievances against these groups or the desire to adopt IS' particular religious ideology, potentially enticing them to join the cause physically or with support from a distance either financially or by committing violence on its behalf. In contrast, Hamas paints a picture of persecution by a single brutal and cruel colonising force using overwhelming force against a people that can only resist with paltry and often ineffective weaponry. It criticises Israel's disregard for the lives of Muslims and its targeting of a population on the basis of their religious

persuasion to the extent that they are even denied the right to practice their faith at important places of worship. This approach entices the local population to support, or endure the consequences of, its violence as well as appealing more broadly to a distant audience that condemns breaches of human rights and the disproportionate response of Israel and may be persuaded to provide financial or political support as a result of this communication. While both groups demonise their enemies' political leaders, IS also uses hostages to speak directly to their respective populations back home through audio, video, and written statements condemning their own governments, renouncing their own religion, and urging their own communities to apply political pressure to end the military campaign against IS. While emotive language is used by both NSAGs to describe their enemies more broadly, Hamas adopts the additional tactic of using internationally recognised terminology for breaches of humanitarian and human rights laws, such as 'war criminals', indicating once again its desire to become part of the existing world order. In this way, it speaks in a language that can easily be understood by a global audience.

While the victimhood messaging is largely absent from IS' toolkit, it dominates Hamas' communications material. These contending approaches fit neatly with the groups' differing narratives where Hamas relies heavily on creating a sense of innocent victims brutalised by a callous and cruel enemy that has no compunction in killing even the most vulnerable, including children, and disabled and elderly persons. Meanwhile, IS only occasionally reveals the impact of coalition airstrikes on civilians with images of the horrifically mutilated bodies of women and children. It prefers to use victimhood more frequently in reference to its martyrs whom it features in videos prior to their deaths explaining their readiness to make the ultimate sacrifice and in a peaceful state after death. Hamas also dedicates significant communications material to celebrating the contribution of martyrs to the cause. For both groups, this messaging, along with communication relating to the financial and other support given to the families of the martyrs, is important in recruiting new fighters and encouraging acceptance among the martyrs' relatives that their death meant something. While IS utilises the same techniques as Hamas to capture their stories, differences exist in how they use that material.

There is evidence that both groups carefully calibrate their war-fighting activities to their communications approaches by staging violence in order to provide material for public release that reinforces their narrative. The staging of events as a form of political ploy is a frequent practice of political actors (Castells, 2011) and, in the case of NSAGs, those events are often violent. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Hamas positions cameras at hospitals to capture the full horror of the impact of war on civilians by filming the injured and dying as they arrive and even facilitating full access to operating theatres and treatment rooms to record graphic images of gruesome wounds. Entry is also granted to the morgues where bodies are filmed piled together on mattresses, tables, and in freezers. As explained in Chapter 6, IS ensures that cameras are set up in multiple locations prior to armed raids so that every angle of the violence is captured with this footage then used to promote a sense of a powerful force rapidly expanding its reach across the territory through an army of fighters willing to die for their cause as they seek victory for their God whether that is achieved in life or death. It also carries out executions for the purpose of threatening and creating fear among their enemies through the release of harrowing still and video footage of the event online. Designed specifically for communications purposes, these executions seek to maximise IS' exposure through powerful traditional media sources by using spectacular images to shock audiences. They seek to extend the duration of any coverage over numerous news cycles by successfully prompting reactions by world leaders that heighten media attention on the particular incident. This is because fear-arousing situations tend to attract the largest audience (Castells, 2011).

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While this communications material forms an important aspect of the groups' overarching strategy to achieve their particular political objectives and striking similarities exist in their approaches, this thesis identifies important differences through an analysis of six specific messaging streams employed by Hamas and IS during a particular intense period of conflict between June and October 2014. Hamas' and IS' communications approaches demonstrate that, not only are common frames used to deliver streams of key messages, but also that the groups'

carefully calibrate their war-fighting activities to their communications approaches. This is done in order to produce various spectacles of violence as new imaginaries of war to support the advancement of their respective causes. Where Hamas tends to converge its communications on its war-fighting activities, IS goes a step further by choreographing its violence. This is illustrated by Hamas' approach, which more often ensures that it has the capability to capture the impact of violence committed against its people, proactively releasing footage and still images online for the purposes of communicating its own narrative as well as in the hope that material will be utilised by international media. This approach includes capturing the aftermath of missile strikes by Israel and the human cost of the conflict, using footage of incidents at checkpoints provided by citizen journalists, and in some instances capturing confrontations between Israeli soldiers and its armed wing, Al-Qassam. Where Hamas' approach is more reactive to violence conducted against Gazan civilians, IS is more proactive by carrying out violence against enemy fighters and civilians for the sole purpose of communication. It sets up cameras in multiple positions prior to armed confrontations and suicide attacks to capture the action from every angle, better enabling the professional editing of footage into a coherent and easily digestible communications package that can be narrated in English to tell its story. In a similar manner, it ensures fighters carry hand-held and body cameras to capture the action up-close. It also conducts spectacular and brutal executions, not out of a desire to eliminate the enemy one-by-one, but for the purpose of communicating to a local audience that they must comply with its particular form of *shari'ah* law as well as to create fear and a sense of inevitability about its rise to power within a global audience.



## 8. CONCLUSION

This thesis has answered its first research question by explaining that Hamas and IS are NSAGs that have emerged from within volatile security situations in the Middle East as a response to belligerent foreign policies of more powerful states. With religious mandates founded in Sunni Islam, both possess strong governance arrangements, war-fighting capabilities, and the capacity to provide an impressive array of social services and humanitarian assistance. While both groups search for statehood as their primary political objective, Hamas uses violence in a way that endorses a state-based framework whereas IS uses violence as a means of disrupting that status quo. The thesis has also answered its second research question by explaining how political communication features as a significant component of both groups' overarching strategy. The thesis argued that both groups carefully calibrate their own war-fighting activities with their communications approaches and, where differences exist between them, these differences reflect the divergent ways in which Hamas endorses, and IS disrupts, the prevailing world order as each pursues its cause.

Drawing on a framework designed specifically to analyse a wide range of communications material, the preceding chapters argued that Hamas and IS, two non-state armed groups located in the Middle East, have sophisticated, comprehensive, and disciplined communications approaches that cohere around clear, simple narratives. These narratives are central to the practice of political communication, regardless of whether that communication occurs via the internet or through traditional media sources, because these stories help groups define their identities, explain their role in the world, identify their allies and enemies, and contextualise historical events and policy decisions (Roselle, 2010). NSAGs use narratives as a device to maintain internal cohesion and give direction to military outliers who may carry out 'inspired' attacks. At the same time, these groups construct narratives in much the same ways as states do, that is, by using the persuasive power of ideas and actions to publicise their political aims, provide a rationale for their activities (Quiggan, 2009), and mobilise audiences across national borders to rally to their cause (Betz, 2008). NSAGs may not have access to the same "cultural capital" held by established political actors in terms of the credibility and authority that tends to accrue to office holders (McNair, 2011, p. 151); nevertheless,

their use of narratives helps them establish and position their brand in a crowded, volatile marketplace of political causes (Kapferer, 2004). The remainder of this thesis situates the key findings, articulated in the previous chapter, in the political communication landscape because just as war has two dimensions – physical battlefields and the online frontline – there are underlying global political realities and, in particular, media structures that deserve to be highlighted because they help stimulate contemporary wars .

\* \* \* \* \*

While both groups use social media to communicate directly with their supporters, their reliance on the virtual world to reach a global audience is overstated in much scholarly research (Winter, 2016; Lister, 2015) because Hamas and IS rely heavily on their messaging being picked up by traditional media. This is because while internet users may browse material that they would not otherwise seek out, most still tend to only seek information that is consonant with their worldview and avoid dissonant information (Farrell, Kolodny & Medvic, 2001). Therefore, the global audience is more likely to be exposed to NSAG's messages through 'news' media whether online or in its traditional forms of print, radio, and television. This means it is imperative that these political actors engaged in power-making strategies must secure access to this form of media (Castells, 2011).

This presents obvious challenges for NSAGs as the potential effectiveness of their political communication is limited to the extent that this material is reported by traditional media (McNair, 2011). Moreover, media accounts of war-fighting activities conducted in pursuit of political objectives are often bereft of the group's key messages as traditional media tend to focus on spectacular acts of violence at the expense of explanation and their reporting can be laden with value judgements, subjectivities, and biases (McNair, 2011). This means that, while global audiences may be made aware of the violence, they may not be informed of the group's political objectives (Archetti, 2013). The risk for NSAGs relying on traditional media organisations is that, while violence often generates publicity because it meets the requirements of current news production to attract audience attention, it rarely bestows the groups responsible with legitimacy or media support. This is because while media show the event, they prevent the group from transmitting its unfiltered message. By sapping an incident of its political content, the media often turns the "crusader into a psychopath" (McNair, 2011, p. 171).

Despite these challenges, NSAGs continue to post videos, still images, infographics, and other communications material online. Traditional media often disseminate, at least in part, this material as an abundance of evidence exists indicating well-placed tweets prompt, or help spin, news coverage during periods of intense conflict. One notable example of this during the 2014 conflict was, perhaps, more through luck than design when four cousins playing at the beach in Gaza were running for cover after an Israeli missile struck a nearby fisherman's hut only to be killed when a second missile struck them directly (Robson, 2014). This incident happened within eyeshot of a number of international journalists staying in a nearby hotel, one of whom later reported how he had been kicking a ball around with them only minutes before the incident. Other journalists who helped carry the children's bodies to ambulances reported the profound personal affect this had on them, covering the incident in significant sympathetic detail, including referring to the boys by their first names as if they knew them (Mullen & Wedeman, 2014). Using the human interest angle as a news hook for their stories, media extended their coverage to include much more detail about the overall impact of the conflict as the result of heightened interest from their shocked audiences (Tait, 2014). This incident is unlikely to have received the same international reaction and interest if footage of it had simply been released by Hamas, rather than witnessed and captured live by Western journalists.

In the case of IS, its release of images of 75 Syrian soldiers beheaded in July 2014 was reported by numerous media outlets with combined audiences numbering in the hundreds of millions. Among those outlets was television network *Al Jazeera*, which has 40 million viewers in the Arab world alone as well as three million followers on its English-language Twitter account (Allied Media Corp, 2017). The *BBC* also covered the incident, potentially reaching a weekly global audience of 348 million and 22 million Twitter followers (BBC, 2016, April 29). Other coverage included *The Daily Mail* with 1.65 million online readers (Ponsford, 2015), *Reuters* news agency with almost 13 million Twitter followers across 94 countries (ThomsonReuters, 2017), *The New York Times* with 26.4 million readers (Bond, 2017) as well as *CNN* and *Fox News* with 1.83 million and 3.8 million viewers respectively (Baragona, 2016). IS' execution of Western hostages receives much greater international coverage than the killing of Muslims victims from the region. This is partly due to the increased interest from audiences beyond the conflict zone that are more likely to be captivated by such spectacular violence featuring a victim they can more easily identify with. Many traditional media outlets,

particularly those with predominantly Western audiences, chose not to replay the supplied video of James Foley's execution, perhaps fearing a backlash from an audience sympathetic to pleas from his family that the footage should not be shared. However, the beheading was still covered extensively around the world, including by *The Independent* (Walker 2014), *The Telegraph* (Gunter & Akkoc, 2014), *The Mirror* (Wellman, 2014), *The Sun* (Hawkes, 2014), *The New York Times* (Callimach, 2014), *The Washington Post* (Ernst & Morton, 2014), *Al Jazeera* (2014), *BBC* (2014a), *NBC* (Vinograd, Burke, & Neubert, 2014), *CBS* (CBS, 2014), *USA Today* (Bacon & Hjelmggaard, 2014), as well as by media geographically far removed from the actual incident as *The New Zealand Herald* (2014) and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (2014).

IS capitalises on the fact that killing Western hostages enables them to extend their reach to a global audience that, while it may not have sought this material out on the internet, were willing to watch when it appeared as 'news' on traditional media. IS benefited further when media seized on the reaction of the international leaders to the Foley beheading, including comments by US President Barack Obama that it was "an act of violence that shocks the conscience of the entire world" (Ackerman, 2014) and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon who described it as "an abominable crime that underscores the campaign of terror" (BBC, 2014b), prompting the story to roll over a number of additional news cycles. Despite having declared that the Foley execution should not provoke a "kneejerk reaction" (Assinder, 2014), UK Prime Minister David Cameron's response to the execution of one of his own citizens was much stronger in its condemnation as an "act of pure evil" that featured prominently in coverage by the world's largest newspapers, television and radio networks (BBC, 2014c). Similar coverage can be found in the cases of other Western hostages, such as Steven Sotolof, Alan Henning, and Peter Kassig whose mother had previously reached out to IS online by tweeting a plea to save his life (Walsh, 2014). This reveals that the international media play a key role in stimulating the conduct of faraway conflict.

Despite the differences in their messaging, the analysis informing this thesis demonstrates the effectiveness of both Hamas and IS' communications approaches in reaching global audiences, regardless of whether that audience is sympathetic to, or repulsed by, their various spectacles of violence. These two NSAGs are thus effectively using these new imaginaries of war; instead of killing for military necessity. This thesis further demonstrates that the two groups exploit war-fighting activities for communications purposes in order to advance their political

objectives. While shocking and dramatic violence is a tactic available to weaker actors seeking to level the strategic playing field (Kay, 2006), such violence has no real social meaning if its impact fails to reach the hearts and minds of a global audience through traditional media (McNair, 2011, p. 109). The total number of people killed by NSAGs around the world may not be “much more than the number who drown in the bathtub in the US” (Mueller, 2005, p. 220); however, these two groups successfully use violence whether it is committed by them, or against them, in an online communications war that puts a global audience on the frontline. In this way, the notion that “information and images can replace bullets” (Archetti, 2013, p. 139) on a virtual battlefield informs the ways in which Hamas and IS seek to advance their political objectives.

The key findings of this thesis are significant because NSAGs are becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary world affairs. It is, therefore, important that the scholarly attention paid to them is not limited to viewing their war-fighting activities through a somewhat myopic and limiting ‘terrorism’ lens. Even though this thesis may be of interest to those practitioners seeking to strengthen counter-terrorism policy or improving public relations performance, it offers its reader the opportunity to better understand and more fully explain the phenomenon of NSAGs as political actors pursuing political objectives through comprehensive and disciplined communications approaches. As the frontlines of these contemporary conflicts shift to the hearts and minds of a technologically empowered global audience, scholarly attention given to NSAGs must keep deepening its understanding of social media as an increasingly important means of achieving political objectives.

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