CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE FIGURES IN ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ

AND SYRIA (ISIS)

In taking the decision the actors will find a lot of possible options and there is no exact pattern applied in all actors' preference because of their difference identity will create different outcomes. Constructivism believes that understanding the reasons behind the interest creation is crucial to understand the international phenomena. It tends to analyse the identity of the actors to generate the reason behind their creation of the interest.

The development of ISIS were also can't be denied for the role of their actors behind their presence and were able to make ISIS become an international issue. The writer believed that there are two figures that are influenced in the development of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and these figures are the actors behind that, started from establishing a small resistance group in Iraq expanded into a jihadist organization with all their controversies, in the mid-2014 they have reached to declare into the Islamic State. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is the founding father of ISIS, and his successor Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi continues his idea and mastermind ISIS declaring to establish the Islamic State.

Constructivism believes that the non-material structure mentioned before is important to form the identities of the actors, and the identity is the crucial factor

that determined the interest of actors both individual and state actors, in consequence interest will produce the actions.

A. Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a Jordanian-born who started to radicalize as a young man while in prison for drug possession and sexual assault. He travelled to Afghanistan in the late 1980s with the intention of joining the fight against Soviet occupation (Teslik, 2006). During the 1990s, Zarqawi adopted a Salafist ideology. While in prison, he gained a following by smuggling statements out of prison to be published on Salafist websites.

These statements caught the attention of Osama bin Laden after Zarqawi was released from prison in 1999 (Kirdar, 2011). The two allegedly met after Zarqawi's release, although conflicting reports claim that they had little contact. Bin Laden was reportedly suspicious of Zarqawi and disagreed about several targeting and tactical issues. The key ideological difference between the two was that Zarqawi preferred to target his "near enemies," such as Israel and the Jordanian government, whereas AQ leadership often focused on the "far enemy," the United States (Bergen, 2008). Zarqawi also had a strong hatred for Shiites that bin Laden did not agree with. Nonetheless, bin Laden allegedly asked Zarqawi to join AQ. Zarqawi refused, but bin Laden instead reportedly provided him with money to set up a training camp in Herat, where Zarqawi would train between 2,000 and 3,000 Salafist terrorists by October 2001. Zarqawi and his men moved

through Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and Kurdish areas of Iraq after the 2001 American strikes in Afghanistan (Kirdar, 2011).

While Zarqawi's militants formed groups that were sometimes reported as separate organizations, U.S. State Department would eventually classify them together under the name of the most prominent Zarqawi organization, Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad (JTWJ). JTWJ's first operation was in Jordan, when it organized the murder of USAID officer Laurence Foley in 2002 (Boucher, 2004). The force had a strong foundation of foreign fighters, particularly from Jordan, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kurdish regions (Laub & Masters, 2014). Some joined from the Kurdistan-based jihadi group Ansar al-Islam, which had been operating in Iraq before Zarqawi's group came, and JTWJ began to actively recruit other Iraqis (Felter J. B., 2007).

In Iraq, the group quickly became active after the American invasion of the nation in 2003. JTWJ was one of the factions that attempted to drive U.S. and coalition forces from the country and to disrupt the governmental transition as part of the insurgency. JTWJ quickly gained notoriety for its violent tactics and targeting non-combatants, such as aid workers and native Iraqis. For example, it carried out suicide bombings that killed civilians while other insurgent groups used guerilla attacks that targeted the U.S. and coalition forces. It also drew international attention for its assassinations and gruesome beheading videos that it released on the Internet after kidnapping and killing non-Arabs in Iraq. JTWJ's also routinely carried out attacks on Shiite targets to incite sectarian conflict and complicate the occupation and the government transition (Boucher, 2004). Both

JTWJ and Zarqawi quickly found themselves among the most prominent faces of the insurgency.

In October 2004, Zarqawi came to an agreement with bin Laden and formally joined Al Qaeda, renaming his organization Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn Zarqawi, known as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in English. (Kirdar, 2011) Despite the official pledge of allegiance to Osama bin Laden, Zarqawi and AQ leadership still disagreed on some key tactical issues, such as AQ's willingness to cooperate with other groups against enemies, and its focus on the U.S. and the West rather than "near enemies." These differences would create tensions that lasted for the duration of the affiliate relationship.

Initially, many Sunnis in Iraq were sympathetic to AQI and its goal of driving American and coalition forces from Iraq and preventing a Shiite government takeover. The Shiite majority in Iraq had been oppressed by the Hussein regime, and many Sunnis feared the Shiites gaining power. However, AQI's extreme and violent tactics began to alienate potential supporters. Many Iraqis, including Sunnis, took issue with AQI's use of suicide bombings and other violent attacks like assassinations; its willingness to target Iraqis and popular Sunni leaders; its perceived foreign membership and leadership; and its intentional incitement of sectarian violence (Felter J. B., 2007).

The violence was also criticized by AQ leadership. AQI's increasingly violent attacks prompted Ayman al-Zawahiri, an AQ leader under bin Laden at the time, to send Zarqawi a letter urging him to foster better relations with Iraqi leaders.

However, Zarqawi often ignored AQ orders, and continued to alienate potential supporters with his tactics, such as the bombing of a hotel in Amman that killed mostly civilians in November 2005 (Kirdar, 2011). Many Islamist groups also condemned Zarqawi's strategy of killing large numbers of Shiites and destroying Shiite religious sites to incite sectarian violence (Hunt, 2005). On February 22, 2006, AQI bombed the Askariyah Shrine, also known as the Golden Mosque in Samarra. The attack prompted at least 27 retaliatory strikes against Sunni mosques the same day in Baghdad alone, and violence between Shiites and Sunnis escalated until a curfew was instated for several days, demonstrating that in many ways, the AQI strategy was succeeding (Worth, 2006).

Local backlash against the group continued, prompting AQI to join an umbrella group of extremist Salafist groups in Iraq. The move was an attempt to present AQI as a more Iraqi group, willing to work together with other organizations as part of the insurgency. The umbrella organization, called Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin (MSM), was a collective of six jihadi groups in Iraq that sought to consolidate jihadi efforts to expel U.S. and coalition forces from Iraq. The MSM was a coordination body at most, a media front at worst, and had little to no control over what AQI did (Bergen, 2008).

Ideologically, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi handed down to his heirs a radical Islamic, uncompromising legacy whose traces is evident in ISIS's actions to this day. Noteworthy is its hostility toward Shi'ites in general and Iraqi Shi'ites in particular, whom he referred to in strong terms ("human scum", "poisonous snakes", "deadly poison"). He regarded the Shi'ites as a fifth column who, along

with pro-American Sunnis, was trying to institute a new Shi'ite regime in Iraq, anti-Sunni and pro-American. That anti-Shi'ite legacy, based on Arabic Islamic sources from the middle Ages, gave al-Zarqawi what he considered "Islamic legitimacy" to carry out mass-killing attacks on Shi'ites and the Shi'ite-affiliated central government. His objective was to instigate a Shi'ite-Sunni civil war that would destabilize public order, prevent the establishment of a Shi'ite regime and support Al-Qaeda's takeover of Iraq. ISIS has continued its brutality towards the Shi'ite population in Iraq and Syria, implementing the legacy of al-Zarqawi, who, after his death, became a revered figure and role model (Keneally, 2015). On June 7, 2006, Zarqawi was killed by an American airstrike.

Zarqawi's leadership was a chief factor in shaping the group's emergence as well as directing its course throughout its evolution. His leadership style was tied to the time he had spent in prison, where he "found" Islam and became a fully hardened criminal and gang leader. His embrace of Salafist Islam likely stemmed from his pre-prison exposure to radical Salafist preachers in Zarqaa's lawless Palestinian refugee camp where his foray into criminal life began. In prison, his captivating personality and nascent brutality earned him the loyalty of a criminal gang, foreshadowing the cult-like following he would eventually engender as a terrorist leader (Kirdar, 2011).

During the group's emergence period, Zarqawi's charisma enabled him to recruit and indoctrinate a loyal following as well as a network of funders and supporters. Throughout the region, he developed a support network that fueled his control over the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq and provided funding and

recruits for his operations. In addition to resilience against efforts to shut down the inflow of weapons and fighters, Zarqawi's networking directly endowed the group with significant amounts of its operational funds (Bahney, Shatz, Granier, McPherson, & Sude, 2010).

Zarqawi's time in Peshawar in the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan conflict deepened his exposure to Salafist doctrinaires. In addition to Maqdisi, Zarqawi forged a relationship with Abu Kutaiba al Urdani, whose letter of introduction would be instrumental in Zarqawi's association with bin Laden in the late 1990s. Moreover, Zarqawi's natural networking skills allowed him to cultivate important relationships with fellow militants, especially those whose wealth would form the base for his international support network in the years to come (Kirdar, 2011).

The loss of popular support and the global backlash against AQI's indiscriminate violence both in Iraq and abroad, as in the Amman hotel bombings that led Zarqawi's own tribes to publicly disown him, added pressure on the group to reform its operational strategy and change its leadership structure. Despite the lack of information on AQI and Zarqawi's management style prior to his death, recently declassified intelligence gives evidence of the managerial changes that followed it. First, it is likely that AQI maintains much closer ties to al-Qaeda core today than it did during the height of Zarqawi's reign. Zarqawi's dangerous autonomy, not only was a primary factor in his group's destruction, but also heavily damaged al Qaeda's global brand. A managerial reorganization gave al Qaeda core an opportunity to rein in its affiliate and reevaluate its strategy in the country and region. Evidence of this reorganization came in the form of an ISI

operative captured a month after Zarqawi's death in 2006. The operative revealed to U.S. forces his role as al Qaeda core's strategic messenger to leaders in ISI (Cruickshank, 2007). Given that al Qaeda core's repeated and unsuccessful attempts to influence Zarqawi's behaviour were sent in letters that risked being (and indeed were) intercepted, it seems unlikely that such a position had existed prior to his death.

Following Zarqawi's death, AQI's organizational structure became more bureaucratic and institutionalized. Discovered AQI documents dated for a month after Zarqawi's death demonstrate that the group placed a premium on managerial control, in which operational security was repeatedly sacrificed. The documents include a standardized recruiting "application" form and detailed records of the group's revenues, spending, and resource allocation methods, despite the risk that such records could be found and used by the MNF (Felter & Fishman, 2007).

While it is difficult to assess the internal decision making of a covert terrorist organization, it seems likely that pressure from al Qaeda core, articulated as early as July 2005 in a letter from Zawahiri, and followed more directly with a letter from an al Qaeda core leader identified as Atiyah, to cease the divisive attacks on Shiites and rein in the indiscriminate attacks that were costing so many innocent Muslim lives, had at least some effect (Combating Terrorism Center, 2006). Though Zarqawi appears to have resisted the former request, the latter "suggestion" seems to have been followed in January of the following year, when AQI subsumed itself within the MSM.

Despite significant gaps in public records, it is widely believed that this represented a gradual shift at most and, more likely, a cosmetic one at that. However, the gradual shift from a leadership-centric organizational structure to that of a highly institutionalized bureaucracy greatly accelerated after the death of Zarqawi in June 2006. Despite the high praise Zarqawi received, his death most likely was a relief to al Qaeda core leaders; his successor, Abu Muhajir, was a member of Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad and enjoyed a relationship with the senior al Qaeda core leader dating back to 1982 (Kirdar, 2011).

The importance of this shift is demonstrated by the fact that, despite periods of change in leadership marked by successful counterterrorist strikes against successive leaders and, perhaps more damaging, questions about the leaders' authenticity, the group has maintained some degree of operational activity. This includes its alleged involvement in global plots, including the World Cup plot and the more recent attacks against Egypt's Coptic Christian population (Al-Shishani, 2011).

While the loss of Zarqawi's charismatic leadership and the resistance or inability to replace it, has led to a reduction in profile, funding, and recruitment rates, it has also made the group less vulnerable to targeted strikes against its leadership. Despite successive strikes against Zarqawi, Abu Omar, Abu Muhajir, and, most recently, Abu Sulayman, in addition to the scores of arrests and killings of other AQI commanders, AQI attacks have continued at a steady, albeit much reduced, pace (Kirdar, 2011). In this sense, the group has become less dangerous, but also less likely to expire.

B. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Islamic State's leader who now styles himself "Caliph Ibrahim," He was born in 1971 with original name Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri. Like Bin Laden and Zawahiri, Baghdadi is well educated. In fact, he has more serious religious credentials than Al Qaeda's leaders, having received his PhD from the Islamic University in Baghdad.

Baghdadi joined the jihadist resistance to US forces in Iraq in 2004, if not earlier. US forces detained him for most of that year, but he was ultimately deemed not to be a particularly dangerous threat, indeed, according to some accounts, he got along well with camp officials and was released. In 2006, his group joined the umbrella organization for Iraqi jihadists, known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). (I and others often use ISI interchangeably with Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which dominated the organization, though technically it was not the only group.) Baghdadi became a member of the group's senior leadership council. For several years, Baghdadi controlled forces in the western Iraqi town of Qaim, where the Pentagon claims "*he was connected to the intimidation, torture and murder of local civilians*" (Freeman, 2014).

Baghdadi became the leader of the ISI in 2010, just before the group began moving into Syria. As the leader, Baghdadi oversaw ISI action against Iraqi security forces, various Shi'ite groups, the Iraqi government, and the Sunni leaders who worked with it. He helped ISI rebuild after the devastation it suffered during the US-led "surge" that began in 2006. Baghdadi appointed a number of

former military and intelligence officers who had served under Saddam in senior positions in ISI. Under Baghdadi, ISI also launched the "Breaking the Walls" campaign, which freed hundreds of ISI members from Iraqi prisons and sent Baghdadi's prestige soaring within the organization. He cleverly exploited the Syrian civil war to further rebuild his organization, using the fighting there to develop a haven and attract new recruits and support (Byman D. , 2015, p. 165).

Local political tensions, in addition to the absence of foreign security, expedited ISI's return to prominence. In December 2012, Sunnis in Iraq began protesting the policies of the Shiite Maliki government in Anbar province. When Iraqi security forces invaded protest camps, Sunni attacks against Shiite targets increased; the civilian death toll in 2013 was double that of 2012. When Iraqi security forces attempted to clear a protest camp in Ramadi at the end of 2013, a local uprising drove the security forces out of much of Anbar Province, paving the way for later ISI expansion.

Meanwhile, AQI used the ongoing Syrian Civil War as a training ground and tool for expansion. In April 2013, Baghdadi announced AQI operations in Syria and changed the group's name to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). He also claimed that AQI had created al-Nusra in Syria, and that the two groups were now merged into one. Both al-Nusra leadership and Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri disputed the merger. Zawahiri dictated that ISIS should limit its operations to Iraq. On June 14, Baghdadi publicly rejected Zawahiri's statement. (Laub & Masters, 2014, p. 3) ISIS continued to operate in Syria, often clashing with other Islamist groups and ignoring calls for mediation. Attempts at

reconciliation with al-Qaeda leadership failed, and AQ officially renounced any connection with ISIS in February 2014.

Despite ISIS's split from AQ, ISIS grew in size and power as it carried out military offensives in Syria and Iraq. It fought against the governments of Iraq and Syria, tribal groups and militias in Iraq, the Kurdish peshmerga, and various rebel groups in Syria. ISIS made large territorial gains beginning in January 2014, when it first defeated Iraqi forces and took control of Fallujah. The following March, it seized Mosul (Semple, 2014). The funds seized through these invasions, combined with income from foreign donors and from criminal activities such as smuggling and extortion of local businesses, gave ISIS an estimated $2 billion in assets. As of September 2014, experts estimated that ISIS's oil revenues alone brought in between $1 million and $2 million per day.

On June 29, 2014, Baghdadi tried to take ISIS to a new level when, coincide on the first night of Ramadan in 2014. After significant territorial gains in Iraq and Syria, the group again changed its name, this time to the "Islamic State" (IS), declaring a Caliphate, with himself as leader. As caliph, he would be the "commander of the faithful," and thus 'at least in theory' Muslims everywhere would owe him obedience. (Pizzi, 2014).

However, Middle Eastern regimes, Sunni religious leaders, and even most jihadist groups reject Baghdadi's leadership, not to mention the tens of millions of Muslims around the world who find his proclamation absurd. The prominent

theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi declared that Baghdadi's declaration "is void under sharia" (Byman D. , 2015).

On July 1, 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi posted an audiotape in Arabic on YouTube entitled "*Message to jihad fighters and the Islamic nation during Ramadan.*" Al-Baghdadi took advantage of the Islamic religious month of Ramadan and the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate to encourage Muslim operatives around the world to support the Caliphate, join the ranks of the jihad fighters in Syria and Iraq and wage a jihad that would lead to an Islamic takeover of the world (according to MEMRI, translations of the audiotape were distributed in English, German, Russian, Albanian and French through the Al-Hayat Center, the ISIS propaganda unit) (Crethiplethi, 2014).

The main points made by al-Baghdadi:

1. Call for jihad:

Al-Baghdadi called on Muslims to help the Islamic nation through jihad for the sake of Allah. He promised the jihad fighters that bliss awaited them in paradise and said, "*Allah's religion is the victorious one.*" Al-Baghdadi added that the Muslim masses around the world lived in suffering, noting al-Sham (Greater Syria), Egypt, Iraq, Palestine 'which is part of Greater Syria', the Arabian Peninsula, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, China, India, Somalia, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Ahvaz (Khuzestan Province in Iran, with its Arab character). He said that the Muslims in those places were waiting for the Islamic State and the jihad fighters come and help them. He described the world

as split into two camps: one included Muslims and jihad fighters; opposite it stood the camp of the Jews, the "Crusaders" (i.e., Christians) and their allies in all the "infidel countries," led by the US and Russia.

2. Praise for the Islamic Caliphate:

Al-Baghdadi called on Muslims to support the Islamic State to save themselves from enslavement to foreigners. He noted that the Nation of Islam failed after the abolition of the Caliphate (1924) and was taken over by infidels. The infidels stole their resources, denied their rights, conquered their land and appointed collaborators to rule over them by force. The collaborators waved false slogans of peace, democracy, pan-Arab nationalism, nation states and Ba'athism. In contrast, the Caliphate whose creation was declared "*united the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, American, Arab, French, German and Australian, who became brothers, defending each other in the same trench under one flag, the flag of faith.*" He said that the Muslims would erode the power of the nation-state model, destroy the model of democracy and expose the "satanic nature" of those models.

3. Defending ISIS's methods:

According to al-Baghdadi, what the Arab regimes call "terrorism" is actually resistance to their false slogans and implementation of Islamic religious law (sharia). He added "*Is it not terrorism when Muslims are killed and their homes burned in Burma, when they are murdered and their limbs cut off in the Philippines, Kashmir, Indonesia, when they are deported in the Caucasus and buried in mass graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Is it not terrorism when the*

homes of Muslims in Palestine are destroyed, their land is stolen and their rights are violated? Is it not terrorism when mosques are burned in Egypt, the homes of Muslims are destroyed, their women are raped and the jihad fighters in Sinai and elsewhere are oppressed? Is it what's happening in Turkestan not terrorism? Is it not terrorism when women are prevented from wearing the hijab in France?" All this is not terrorism, but freedom and democracy, he added sarcastically.

4. Call for Muslims to join the Islamic State:

Al-Baghdadi rejected the concept of the modern nation states and called on Muslims to join the Islamic State he founded. He said, "*There is no (need for slogans such as) Syria for the Syrians or Iraq for the Iraqis, since the earth is Allah's. The country belongs to the Muslims; Therefore, Muslims, wherever they are, immigrated to the countries of Islam, since the immigration to the area (or region) of the Islamic State (Dar al-Islam) is obligatory.*" He called on Muslims who were able to do so to perform Hijrah (i.e., migration, an important symbolic act in the history of Islam which, in his perspective, is related to the establishment of the Caliphate). He called on Muslim clerics, led by sharia judges, people with military, administrative and academic capabilities, as well as Muslim doctors and engineers in all fields, to join his self-declared Islamic State, arguing that it was a necessity due to the sorry state of Muslims worldwide.

5. The vision of 'Islamic takeover of the entire world':

Al-Baghdadi concluded by saying that if Muslims adhered to Islam, they would rule the entire world: "*If you cling to it (faith in Allah and the principles of*

Islam), you will even conquer Rome (the symbol of Christianity), and the Earth will be owned by you, with the help of Allah".