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## Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's Islamic State, a Weberian Hybrid

Short research paper

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## 1. Introduction

To the chants of “My Nation, A Dawn Has Appeared” an Islamic extremist rebel group calling themselves Islamic State roams the lands of Iraq and Syria today. The group, which anthem should rather be “My Nation, Dusk Shall We Bring” destroys historical heritage and slaughters thousands of men, women and children in creative cruelty. Under the Prophet Mohammed’s personal standard, the black banner of *al-Uqab*, the group now controls a massive contiguous territory irrespective of the Iraq-Syria border.

In the following paper, this so-called Islamic State will be analyzed in regard to Max Weber’s typology of the three pure types of legitimate rule. It is assumed, the group might not fit distinctly into one of Weber’s three types of domination and rather constitute a theoretical hybrid. It constitutes an attempt for a better understanding of the group and its leadership, which can also be a first step to improve an effective counter strategy.

## 2. Max Weber’s Three Pure Types of Legitimate Rule

Max Weber was one of the most influential sociologists of the twentieth century and is considered among the three founders of sociology, along with Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim (Kim 2012). Instead of linking the concept of legitimacy to state and forms of government, he related it to domination. For Weber, there is no such thing as illegitimate domination. Either one obeys and submits to domination or there will not be obedience and therefore no domination.

Weber (1919: 1f.) defines the state as a “human community that, successfully, claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”, the *Gewaltmonopol*. It is considered to be the sole actor of society which holds the entitlement for the use of violence. Following this, Weber concludes, the modern state is “a compulsory association which organizes domination” (Weber 1919: 4).

In his book *Economy And Society* and essay *The Three Types of Legitimate Rule*, Weber distinguishes “three pure types of authority” (*Idealtypen*) or legal domination, their differences reasoning in the logic of claiming legitimacy based on *rational* grounds, *traditional* grounds or *charismatic* grounds.

Domination by *legal authority*, or acceptance, is based on a system of rules that is applied administratively and judicially<sup>1</sup> and might be called domination by some sort of legal constitution (Weber 1992: 217ff.). The persons dominating are appointed or elected by prescribed legal procedures and are themselves subject to legally established impersonal order, limiting their power. The administrative staff is separated from the ownership of the means of administration and separates their private life from their official duties. The organization of power follows the principle of hierarchy, is systematically divided in spheres of competence of different administrative organs and all acts are formulated and recorded in writing. Persons who obey authority, on the other hand, do so as members of the community and the law. Those obey their obedience not to the leading class as individuals, but to the constituting impersonal order. This purely bureaucratic type of administrative organization is, so Weber, the most rational sort of exercising authority and superior in performing in an efficient manner. The bureaucratic apparatus is driven to continue functioning, since no society could survive without it. This turns the question of power, after revolution or occupation, to the question of who controls the bureaucratic machinery.

Following the concept of *traditional authority*, legitimacy is believed in by rules and powers established over history, forming age-old traditions (Weber 1922: 226ff.). The authority is considered as a “personal master,” the administrative staff as retainers, and the ruled as comrades (*Genossen*) or subjects (*Untertanen*), rather than members of an organization or society. Obedience is owed to the ruler because of his traditional status, not any kind of legislation. The relation of the ruling and the ruled is determined by personal loyalty and the exercise of power is bound on the subject’s interpretation of the restrictions given by tradition. Therefore, law cannot be created by legislation and legal decisions can only refer to traditional sources. The obeying believe in the sanctity of those traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority according to them, thereby occupying traditional positions of authority.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, Weber (1922: 241ff.) discusses the principle of *charismatic authority*. The leader’s personality is considered extraordinary by his disciples and treated as if endowed with supernatural or otherwise exceptional powers, which are believed to be of divine origin and therefore “not accessible to the ordinary person.” This model of domination, if occurring in “primitive

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<sup>1</sup> Weber (1922: 217) noticed, that any legal norm may be “established by agreement or by imposition, on grounds of expediency or value-rationality or both, with a claim to obedience ... usually extended to include all persons within the sphere of power in question - ... the territorial area - who stand in certain social relationships.”

<sup>2</sup> Weber (1922: 227) even refers to *Sultanism* as an extreme form of Patrimonialism, which “arises whenever traditional domination develops an administration and a military force which are purely personal instruments of the master. Only then are the group members treated as subjects.” If this can be applied on the Islamic State will be discussed further down.

circumstances” according to Weber, might rest on the belief in magical powers of prophets, the wise, leaders in the hunt or war heroes. The right to dominate thereby lies in the leader’s unique charisma and it’s recognition by his followers<sup>3</sup>, not in any tradition or legal rule. The charisma might also be of genuine character, when submission rests on the conception of a duty to recognize the authority’s genuineness. An organized group subject to this kind of authority is called a charismatic community (*Gemeinde*) by Weber, and grounds on an emotional form of communistic relationship. The leader’s administrative staff is rather made up of charismatic individuals, than officials in the classical sense or personal affiliates. The system of power distribution works neither with appointments or a hierarchal career, nor a definite sphere of competence or a salary. Agents are appointed due to the authority of the leader’s charisma or their own and the system works without established administrative organs. The judiciary is not based on any kind of legal precedent, previous judgements are newly created and regarded as divine judgements, revelations or oracle.

Weber describes bureaucratic authority as specifically rational, bound to “intellectually analysable rules,” while charismatic authority is specifically irrational as “being foreign to all rules,” and traditional authority bound to historical transferred rules and customs (Weber 1922: 244).

### **3. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s Islamic State**

On the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan of the year 1435AH, 2014AD, a group called Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) proclaimed a worldwide Islamic State, making it the first time restoring the Muslim caliphate since it’s abolishment by Atatürk in 1923 and rebranding itself as “Islamic State”/IS (Mortada 2014). It’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (al-Husseini al-Qurashi) or Caliph Ibrahim, born as Ibrahim Awad Ibrahim al-Badri and also referred to as Dr. Ibrahim – since he obtained a doctorate in Islamic studies – thus named himself Commander of the Faithful (*emir al-mu’minin*) and claimed religious, political and military authority over the global Muslims community. The group originally derived from al-Qaeda in the land of two rivers (AQI), before it split from al-Qaeda’s Syria branch Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and gained thousand local and foreign fighters through former al-Qaeda networks (Zelin 2014). After declaring the caliphate, radical jihadi groups around the world pledged their allegiance to it’s leader Abu Bakr, so for example the Nigerian Boko Haram (Bergen 2015).

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<sup>3</sup> The recognition by those subject to authority is the main source of legitimacy, or validity, for ruling by charisma. According to Weber (1922: 241ff.) it is freely given and guaranteed by what is held as a proof, resulting in a “devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader”.

In the following pages, this so-called Islamic State will be analyzed in regard to Max Weber's typology of the three pure types of legitimate rule.

### 3.1 Charismatic authority

Weber describes charismatic authority as a condition, in which the leader's right to execute domination based on his alleged knowledge or divine powers. Weber calls this "charismatic", because the leader gets his status due to his family background, for example as a relative of a spiritual leader, or his supernatural character, when he might be admired for his wisdom or bravery in the scene of battle. Weber distinguishes between different types of leaders, who are endowed with charisma in this sense: The berserk, the shaman, the swindler, the litterateur and the charisma of men who are considered heroes, prophets and saviour (Weber 1922: 242).

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, or Dr. Ibrahim, set himself up as a ruler "by the order of God," calling himself "Commander of the Faithful" and claiming to be a successor of Prophet Mohammed (Mortada 2014), thereby ensuring his subordinates of his exceptional and divine status. IS scholars, when rebranding ISIS as the Islamic State, insisted, they had fulfilled all requirements necessary for the declaration of a Caliphate (SITE 2014) and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself claims his lineage to the *Quraysh* tribe, while his *nom de guerre* recalls the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, father in law and advisor of the Prophet Mohammed (The Week 2014).

This charismatic domination does not require a judiciary paradigm of any kind, because judgements are created out of a divine order. This argumentation is not the case for the Islamic State, as one will see in 3.2. It is rather sticking to traditional judicial patterns and certain scholar's legal opinions – even though it is considered to be divine law, this narrative refers to traditional sources and cannot be changed by Caliph Ibrahim.

Weber states, in charismatic authority, there is no hierarchy. The leader simply intervenes in certain cases, to appoint or dismiss individuals. Also do officials have no definite sphere of competence, nor does a system of formal rules or legal principles exist (Weber 1922: 243f.). Although there is no specific information on an Caliphate-intern "career system," there are in fact sources indicating a system of power attribution and limitation within the group (see 3.3). Nevertheless it can be assumed, that IS agents are rather appointed by the leader than elected through a nationwide jihadi assembly. The caliph might appoint envoys to every *wilaya* (district) of the Islamic state's territory (Mortada 2014), however there is no substantial knowledge, yet, about the circumstances of those choices. Therefore it could be assumed, that governors and other state

agents are appointed by their charismatic quality or personal relationship to al-Baghdadi, rather than inheritance.<sup>4</sup>

Under charismatic authority, the leader's staff is not technically trained, since it is chosen by a "call of instance" of the leader (Weber 1922: 243). Looking at IS's administrative executives (Sherlock 2014) it can be assumed, that even if, only a handful – by any chance those previously working under Saddam Hussein – ever participated in any kind of state affairs.

In Weber's model, charismatic authority is often obeyed, because of a narrative of the *duty* to recognize the authority's genuineness. Likewise do Islamic State scholars believe pledging alliance to the new caliph is a duty for every Muslim and everyone rejecting pledge is considered an apostate<sup>5</sup> (Mortada 2014).

"Recognition is a duty. When such an authority comes into conflict with the competing authority of another, who also claims charismatic sanction, the only recourse is to some kind of a contest, by magical means or an actual physical battle of the leaders" (Weber 1922: 244).

This prediction of Weber can be seen coming into reality in the Islamic State's frictions with the al-Qaeda Central Leadership (AQC) and al-Zawahiri, from which the movement originally derived.<sup>6</sup> IS disobeyed the AQC in several instances, expanded its influence beyond Iraq and tried to gain control over al-Qaeda's Franchise JN, which finally led al-Zawahiri to announce dissociation from IS (Gulmohamad 2014: 2).

### 3.2 Traditional authority

Traditional domination, according to Weber, is characterized by rules and powers handed down from the past. It is based on a system in which authority is legitimate, because it has always existed. The last caliphate was destroyed in 1924 by Atatürk, therefore has not always been existent.

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<sup>4</sup> A closer look on al-Baghdadi's cabinet staff reveals no family connections between respective members of the governmental system (Sherlock 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, spokesperson for the Islamic State, elaborated when he was announcing the declaration of the Caliphate: "Beware of splitting the ranks. Those who want to split the ranks, strike their heads with bullets," and directed a message to other militant Islamist and Salafist groups, noting: "The legitimacy of your groups is null and void. It is a sin for any of you to sleep this night without pledging allegiance" (Mortada 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Baghdadi's Islamic State of today has its roots in Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which merged with the Mujahedeen Shura Council in Iraq and Jund al-Sahhaha ("Soldiers of the Prophet's Companions") under the Egyptian Abu Ayyoub al-Masri into an Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), and was rebranded Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) in April 2013 (Gulmohamad 2014: 2) before it was declared a global Islamic Caliphate (IS) under Caliph Ibrahim, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

But it could be argued, that IS leader al-Baghdadi, or Dr. Ibrahim, reintroduced the caliphate, referring to the everlasting character of the Islamic community. After Prophet Mohammed's death the *umma* has always been there, it was just without a leadership.

Simply Dr. Ibrahim's choice of his *nom de guerre* already reveals two links to the history of Islam. With *Abu Bakr*, he refers to the first successor of the Prophet Mohammed (*khalifa*, the Caliph), and *al-Baghdadi* associates him firstly with the historical place of the Abbasid Caliphate (whose dress code of black robes Caliph Ibrahim is complying to, nowadays) and secondly sets up a military conquest of his home city as a re-enactment of Mohammed's return to Mecca after the *hijra* to Medina (Salzmann 2014).

In traditional domination, law is created in reference to traditional sources. Definitely, ruling which legal knowledge is considered traditional and which is not, will not be a matter of chance. Islamic State's system of law has its origins from radical Islamic jurisprudence, literally abiding *fatwas* and dogmas of certain radical Islamist scholars. The most influential one of them is Sheikh Taqi Ibn Taymiyyah,<sup>7</sup> moreover a well-known scholar to fundamentalistic Islamist and Salafi-jihadi movements like al-Qaeda and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (Khilkhil 2014).

According to the legal tradition of the old caliphate, ruler and state are not above the law, but bound by it.<sup>8</sup> The ruler's powers are derived and defined by *sharia* (Al-Bakhit et al. 1996: 205ff.), which matches Weber's typologic criteria, that in charismatic domination law cannot be created by legislation, and legal decisions can only refer to traditional sources.

According to classical Islamic theory,

“the election of a ruler is based on consensus (*ijma'*) and takes place through a pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*), which is a contract of obedience between the ruler and the ruled, ... [which] includes consultation (*shura*) and proclamation (*mubaya'a*), ritualized by a handshake (*musafaha*) and exercised by ‘the men of resolution and contract’ (*ahl al-hall wa-al-'aqd*), who are those formally qualified to elect or depose a ruler (Caliph or Amir or Sultan) on behalf of the Muslim community (*umma*)” (Lohlker 2012: 103, own emphasis).

The newly established Islamic State under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi refers to this tradition. As stated by Islamic State “seniors”, the group's declaration satisfied all requirements caliphs presumably needed since 1400 years ago (Mortada 2014). By its declaration, all other jihadist organizations are

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the most important *fatwas* for IS seem to be the *ardin fatwa* on imposing *Sharia* within Islamic countries and another *fatwa* on “collateral damage”, which allows *mujahedeen* to kill Muslims to reach their goal (Khilkhil 2014),

<sup>8</sup> A system with this kind of supreme position of the law is called Nomocracy: God's representative is deriving his authority from the divine law, charged with executive powers; unlike theocracy, where God himself is the ultimate sovereign (Al-Bakhit et al. 1996: 205ff.).

abolished and must pledge *bay'a* to al-Baghdadi<sup>9</sup> (Peralta 2014), who himself is monitored by the highest advisory body in IS, the *Shura* council (Taylor 2014).

The group tries heavily to follow historical and religious traditions, as Salzmann (2014) sums up: The Prophet Mohammed established Medina as *dar al-islam*, house of Islam, from where he launched his campaigns against Mecca. In a similar way, IS is driving Christians out of their territory and destroying popular shrines and historical places in an attempt to purify their lands. Even in military tactics the group tries to resemble the first caliph Abu Bakr, by establishing alliances with tribes and nomadic groups and focusing on rural areas.

It is a tough question however, if all of Islamic State's references to *sunna* and *quran* should be seen as traditional or charismatic (Abu Bakr as a predecessor of the Prophet Mohammed) elements regarding Weber's typology.

Because many decades have passed by since the last Ottoman caliph Abdul Mejid II, scholars agree, that there are two ways a new caliph can be chosen. Either, a group of Muslims takes the initiative under four conditions – the territory of the elections is under Muslim authority, Islam enjoys full sovereignty there, *sharia* is implemented, and the appointed caliph must fulfil all conditions of eligibility and duty – or a provisional emir is appointed to manage the affairs of the state, while a council of the *umma* narrows down the candidates and a caliph is chosen by general elections of the Muslim world (Kazimi 2008).

While others also did the effort to resurrect the dusted caliphate – ISI took the initiative (*ijtihad*) under Abu Omar al-Baghdadi in 2006 and declared an Islamic “state”, rather than an emirate, for the first time (Kazimi 2008) – IS asserts to have done everything required to restore the long-expired Islamic State. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi stakes its claim to the caliphate on the basis that it controls large parts of territory, additionally possessing funds, an army, and a population under its control. Spokesperson al-Adnani specified the role of the state as appointing governors and judges, collecting taxes, and spreading religious education, among other functions (Mortada 2014).

### 3.3 Legal authority

Weber's type of legal domination is tied to legal rationality, legitimacy and bureaucracy, the latter meaning a domination through knowledge (Weber 1922: 224). He describes this form of authority as “sine ira et studio,” without hatred or passion: Exercising power is a duty without regard to personal considerations and every servant is treated equal by law (Weber 1919: 10). In

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<sup>9</sup> The *bay'a* as an oath of loyalty and ritual to elect a leader goes back to the time of the Prophet and was used by jihadi groups, for example when al-Zarqawi subordinated himself and AQI to Osama Bin Laden in 2004 (Lohlker 2014: 103).

short, legal domination “rests on the belief in legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority to issue commands” (Weber 1922: 215).

This cannot be said about the Islamic State, but there are certain characteristics of it, which fit Weber’s type of legal authority: In legal domination, the chief of an organization occupies his position of dominance due to election or designation for succession. The Islamic State named Abu Bakr as their new leader “after consultations with the group’s leaders, influential people and ‘opinion makers’” (Shahid 2010). Although it is not obvious due to which criteria al-Baghdadi was chosen, this proves his “election” came as a result of some kind of dialogue.

The leader, furthermore, is subject to an legally established impersonal order, limiting his powers (Weber 1922: 217). Within the Islamic State, the *Shura* Council can be seen as an institutionalization of this impersonal order. As a religious monitor it makes sure, all local councils and governors are sticking to IS’s interpretation of Islamic law and it is able to even censure the leadership and dismiss the caliph, if they are not in line with *Sharia* law (Thompson/Shubert 2015). Also a “hierarchy light” seems to be existent, as well as spheres of competence of different administrative organs and recordings of political acts, like the declaration of the caliphate, in writing.

In a sense, the Islamic State has a developed bureaucratic state structure, divided into provinces to ease it’s administration: It consists of the executive branch of the government (*al-Imara*), made up by the commander in chief (the caliph) and the consultative *Shura* and *Sharia* councils, as well as the deputies of Iraq and Syria with each 12 governors, and different councils responsible for financial, media, military and other issues. The system is able to provide basic services (Thompson/Shubert 2015). Apparently, the group even established a central bank, the Muslim financial house, and started to micromanage education and mosque preaching (Cordall 2014).

#### **4. Conclusion**

This short analysis undergirds the assumption, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s Islamic State can be, in fact, characterized as a hybrid in Weber’s domination theory. The caliphate’s form of dominance and authority accumulates different elements of all three Weberian types, thus overlapping all categories – however sharing more aspects with traditional and charismatic domination, than with their legal theoretical equivalent. This opens up possibilities for further research to specify the group’s classification or if, according to a Weberian approach, the group can be considered a state. The more about Islamic State’s authority structures can be found out, the better a classification process can advance.

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