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## Cultural Assessment of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

31 MAY 2016

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## Executive Summary

What follows is an assessment of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) from a socio-cultural perspective. We have employed a modified PMESII-PT framework for analysis (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Physical Terrain, Time). We have modified PMESII-PT in three ways to emphasize the socio-cultural aspect of this analysis. First, we have expanded the concept of Military to cover all coercive forces in the area of interest. The expanded category includes law enforcement, pro and anti-government paramilitaries, militias, external forces, etc. Second, we added Population and Culture as separate categories. Arguably, these categories could be covered in PMESII-PT under Society, but we saw them as sufficiently important to merit separate chapters. Third, we have expanded the concept of Information, which we have titled Communications, to account for both how information is communicated and how it is received within the society under analysis. With that as background, here is a synopsis of our major findings by category in our modified PMESII-PT framework.

**POLITICAL:** ISIL has developed a political system in the image of the 7th Century Islamic Caliphate, which includes executive and judicial branches of government, but not a legislative branch. The legislative branch was unnecessary because Sharia is interpreted from the original religious sources, not created. In the ISIL system the executive branch interprets Sharia and communicates its interpretation to the greater organization. The judicial branch oversees the implementation of the executive's interpretation of Sharia law by means of multilayered security and legal systems.

**SECURITY:** ISIL has concentrated power in its military and state security apparatus in order to expand its dominion to areas outside its current control and enforce its interpretation of Sharia within its territories. In order to weaken resolve in areas outside its control and to gain compliance in areas it controls, ISIL has created a culture of terror through the institutionalized use of local and media based public spectacles of primordial violence.

**ECONOMIC:** ISIL has a rentier economy, which derives a significant portion of its revenues from the sale of oil and gas to external clients. ISIL's total cash and assets are estimated in the billions of dollars. Despite recent financial setbacks, ISIL has sufficient funds to maintain, or even expand, its security forces. As long as its security forces are effective, and in the absence of outside opposition, ISIL will continue to control its current territory. At its current funding rate ISIL can fight a holding action in the Levant while continuing to export terror to the rest of the world.

**POPULATION:** The population of ISIL-controlled territories is estimated at between six and eight million people. An estimated ten to twelve million people have fled from ISIL territory and adjacent regions affected by the Syrian Civil War. The conflict in the region has been devastating to the population, which is suffering excessive unemployment, food scarcity, economic paralyzes, and generalized poverty. The vast amount of displaced persons is straining Iraqi and international humanitarian relief efforts.

**SOCIETY:** ISIL is an autocracy superimposed on top of tribal society, which by its nature is the antithesis of an autocracy. Social identity in ISIL-controlled areas is derived from three identity parameters (Arab, Muslim, and Sunni) shared by the general population. Historically, tribal affiliation has been the primary determinant of social status in both Syria and Iraq, but ISIL has altered this by elevating its members, many of whom are former Baathists, and foreign fighters to the upper echelons of ISIL society. ISIL further undermined the Sunni tribal leaders by usurping the economic means of production and distribution.

**CULTURE:** ISIL's cultural folklore envisions a return to a 7th Century Islamic "Golden Age" when the original "pure" Caliphate ruled the Arabian Peninsula. The past is portrayed as an Islamic Eden unspoiled by infidels or apostates. ISIL narratives describe a final apocalypse in which the retrogressive forces of Islam triumph over the progressive, corrupted, non-believers of modernity, creating a new world order. This vision animates ISIL's actions. ISIL justifies its brutality, deviation from traditional Islamic values regarding women, and crimes against humanity as service to the state. Because the Islamic State is everything, it follows that survival of the Islamic State is paramount. Based on ISIL's actions when threatened with defeat in Iraq, if the situation in the Levant becomes untenable, ISIL leaders will most likely seek to relocate to a location, such as Libya, where they can continue their jihad.

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** To date, ISIL has shown the ability to maintain its physical infrastructure at an acceptable level of functionality, although its infrastructure has certainly deteriorated due to years of war and neglect. How long ISIL can continue to maintain its infrastructure is uncertain, particularly in light of ISIL's recent drop in revenue and Coalition bombing. ISIL has employed a "scorched-earth" policy by destroying the infrastructure when driven out of urban or rural areas. ISIL will most likely continue this policy, if and when it has to cede more territory.

**COMMUNICATIONS:** ISIL has developed an almost textbook information operations campaign using all mediums of communications at its disposal to further its strategic goal of establishing a Caliphate. Using symbols and assorted media, ISIL is employing a multi-layered communications strategy to promote its ideology, secure its base, attract foreign fighters, create affiliates, and turn Muslim public opinion against the West.

**GEOGRAPHY:** In terms of the physical geography, ISIL occupies an area with very narrow and linear habitable areas generally surrounded by vast expanses of desert. Because of the desert terrain and lack of significant rainfall, life in the region is almost entirely dependent on the Tigris-Euphrates river system.

# 1. POLITICS



ISIL has established what it deems a Caliphate: an Islamic form of government led by a religious-political successor to the Prophet Mohammed, who holds the title Caliph.<sup>1</sup> The Caliph is revered as the leader of the *umma*, the Muslim community.<sup>2</sup> The foundation of the Caliphate is predicated on the principle that the head of the state, the Caliph, is the undisputed ruler whose purpose is to implement the will of God. Because the Caliph is merely an instrument implementing God's will, all Muslims are obligated to obey his decrees.

Based on this philosophy, ISIL has developed a system of government that concentrates political power in the hands of relatively few men, many of whom are former members of the Baathist Party of Iraq. This philosophy has also engendered a dichotomous worldview among ISIL leaders that allows them to morally justify their duplicity in dealing with other organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra Front (NF) and their brutality in dealing with those they deem apostates such as the Yazidis. Their conviction that they are fulfilling God's will also makes it difficult for them to compromise or ally with other entities because to do so would refute the whole premise behind the founding of the Caliphate.

There are not definitive data regarding how much public support ISIL has in the territories it controls. It is possible that the populace remaining after the mass exodus of civilians from ISIL-controlled territory in 2014 and 2015 genuinely support the Caliphate. On the other hand, there are several indicators that ISIL's control over the people in its domains is tenuous and only maintained by force.

## ISIL's Political System

ISIL's Caliphate has executive and judicial branches, but lacks a legislative branch. The highest level of the executive branch, known as *Al-Imara* (the building), contains the Caliph and two Senior Deputies (Emirs), one for Syria and one for Iraq.<sup>3</sup> The Caliph and Senior Deputies are advised by the Shura Council, which is a consultative body that in principle not only approves the Caliph's appointments, but has the authority to remove the Caliph. Whether the Shura Council could actually remove the Caliph is doubtful. Beneath the Senior Deputies, the executive branch has seven

cabinet level councils that, as outlined below, set and manage policy.

The judicial branch, the *Sharia Council*, oversees the implementation of Sharia law throughout the Caliphate.<sup>4</sup> The Sharia Council answers directly to the Caliph. It is comprised of military, security, and media councils which set and oversee policy in those areas. It also contains the *Shariat Troika*, which is a three person panel of self-proclaimed Islamic experts who set religious policy, and the Sharia Commissions, which enforce religious policy through the Sharia court system.<sup>5,6,7,8,9,10</sup>

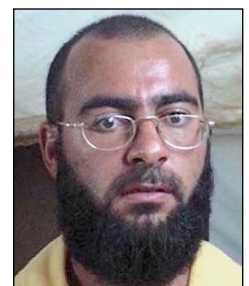
Geographical territories within ISIL-controlled territory are sub-divided into Governorates with appointed Governors who report to their respective Deputies. There are 12 governors in Iraq and 12 in Syria. Governors are referred to as Emirs and preside over regional government councils. This network provides ISIL's national government the structure necessary to impose its policies in ISIL-held territories.

## Organizations

Within the Islamic Caliphate there appear to be three informal power blocs: ex-Baathist Party members, foreign fighters, and indigenous fighters from the Sunni tribal system. Although these three blocs have been identified, little is known of how they fit together to make ISIL. It is known that many of the top leaders are former Baathists; that ISIL organizes foreign fighters into brigades by country/region of origin; and that despite all the publicity foreign fighters have garnered, indigenous fighters still make up the preponderance of ISIL's army.

## Leadership

**Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.** His birth name was Ibrahim Awad al-Badri on 28 July 1971.<sup>11,12</sup> He received a Bachelor of Arts (1996), Master of Arts (1999), and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) (2004 or 2007) from the Saddam University for Islamic Studies. His family was associated with the



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Baathist Party under Saddam Hussein. In 2004 he was incarcerated at the US Army Detention Center at Camp Bucca for ten months. In 2007 he joined the Advisory Council established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He was chosen Emir of Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2010, which was the precursor to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Al-Baghdadi declared a Caliphate with himself as Caliph in 2014.

**Abu Ali al Anbari** is the current Deputy Emir for ISIL in Syria. He is an ethnic Turkoman, from Mosul, Nineveh Governorate, Iraq.<sup>13</sup> He was born in 1970.<sup>14</sup> Anbari was a Baathist party member and a major general in Saddam Hussein's army. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein, Anbari joined the extremist Iraqi Islamist group known as Ansar al-Islam. However, he was expelled from the group for engaging in financial corruption. Anbari then joined Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) where, with al-Baghdadi, he rose through the ranks until they transitioned to ISI. He is the Deputy Emir to al-Baghdadi and the Emir of Syria. He was also a close associate of al-Baghdadi's most trusted advisor, Hajji Bakr.

## Known ISIL Cabinet Members

**Abu Louay** - Minister of Security.

**Abud Abdul Kadr** - General Project Manager.

**Abu Mohammed** - Minister of Prisons.

**Abu Hajar al-Assafi** - Minister of Communication (for internal communications).

**Sleiman Daoud al-Afari** is a former chemical weapons expert in Saddam Hussein's regime.<sup>15</sup> There is a potential link between him and confirmed chemical attacks on the Kurds.<sup>16</sup> He was captured by US Army Delta Force in late February 2016 and is detained near Erbil.<sup>17</sup>

## ISIL's Council Level Finance and Treasury Leadership

**Faysal al- Zahrani** has been identified as in charge of "oil and gas operations."

**Husayn Juayn Juaythini** was born in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. He traveled to Syria in September 2014 where he facilitated al-Baghdadi's alliance with anti-Israel militant groups and with Libyan based weapons financiers and funding streams.<sup>18</sup>

**Turki al-Binali** was born around 1982 and is a member of a prominent Bahraini family.<sup>19</sup> He was deported from Dubai while engaged in religious studies at the Islamic and Arabic Studies College.<sup>20</sup> In November 2014 he was identified as ISIL's "chief religious advisor" and described as an "ideologue" and "spiritual leader."<sup>21</sup> His primary tasks center on providing assistance in "the recruitment of foreign fighters."<sup>22</sup> Particularly noteworthy is his alleged role in providing ISIL the religious justification for "enslaving woman of ethnic minorities" stating in an online forum for jihadists that: "there is no doubt that enslaving woman of infidel warriors" is permitted; and "it is not permitted to kill woman and children but they become slaves to Muslims."<sup>23</sup>

## Ministers of Communication and Media: The "Digital Caliphate"

**Taha Sobhi Falaha** is the spokesperson for ISIL. He is reported to have been born in 1976 and from Banash.<sup>24</sup> He reportedly met al-Baghdadi when they were both prisoners at the US Army's Camp Bucca.<sup>25,26</sup> He helped establish terror cells in Syria 2012, which aided in the creation of ISIL.<sup>27</sup> His most important contribution to ISIL is his role in social media "crowdsourcing" and running the digitized Caliphate.<sup>28</sup>

**Abu al-Athir Amr al-Absi** is a Shura Council Member and Head of Media Council. He is sometimes referred to as "the propagandist to Allah."<sup>29</sup> He is reported to have been born in 1979 as a Syrian national, but of Saudi Arabian ancestry. He is considered to be one of the top five leaders in ISIL and a potential al-Baghdadi successor. He is credited with ISIL's social media and recruitment campaign, which in turn is credited with bringing Omar Shishani and his Chechen fighters to ISIL. Al-Absi is the founder of ISIL's on-line magazine *Dabiq*. His brother, Firas al-Absi was killed in 2012 by other opposition groups in Syria while fighting for ISIL.

## International Relations

ISIL lacks a foreign policy in the conventional sense. It has not been recognized by any existing government, nor does it enjoy diplomatic relations with any existing government. ISIL has formed temporary alliances with other militias in Syria, but those alliances were always short-lived and ended with ISIL betraying the other group.



ISIL's lack of a conventional foreign policy, however, does not mean it totally lacks one. ISIL's foreign policy is to export *jihād*. ISIL has established what the US Department of Defense classifies as First Tier threat-level Governorates beyond Syria and Iraq.<sup>30</sup> These include Governorates in the Sinai area of Egypt, Libya (Sirte), and Algeria. Second Tier Governorates are in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria (Boko Haram), Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bangladesh and along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (Khorasan). Cell-elements in Europe, Russia, India, China, and Indonesia are also operational.

## Socio-Political

### Ideology

ISIL's explicitly stated ambition, as declared in 2014 by al-Baghdadi, is to form a world-wide Islamic Caliphate. ISIL seeks to implement this ambition through a campaign of terror to either subjugate or annihilate the population within its area of control.

ISIL's ideology is based on its leader's interpretation of the Quran. Al-Baghdadi sees himself as a divinely selected leader, the Caliph of the "Army of the Righteous," whose purpose is to enact the will of God on earth. He further believes that all Muslims are obligated to follow his decrees. Al-Baghdadi's interpretation creates a dichotomous worldview in which righteous Muslims that follow the path as laid out by him and wage jihad are arrayed against all non-Muslims and those Muslims that do not ascribe to his view of Islam. These latter two groups are "apostates."<sup>31,32,33</sup>

### Legitimacy

For the purposes of this analysis, political legitimacy involves the degree to which a government has the consent of the governed. In more open societies this variable can be quantified through means such as polling. Unfortunately, there are no quantitative data available to assess the degree to which the population in ISIL-controlled territory consents to ISIL's governance.

The absence of definitive quantitative data relating directly to ISIL's political legitimacy requires the use of proxy variables in their stead. This analysis yields three proxy variables that have merit: regional polling

of ethnically and religiously similar populations; population movement trends; and ISIL's ability to continue to attract volunteer fighters.

While no scientific polling of the population has been conducted in ISIL territory, the population adjacent to ISIL territory has been surveyed. In January 2016 the Iraqi polling firm Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies (IIACSS) conducted a series of polls throughout Iraq, including ISIL-controlled territories seized in 2014.<sup>34</sup> This poll found that 96% of all Sunnis in Iraq, including some from ISIL-controlled territories, view ISIL as illegitimate.<sup>35</sup> The problem with relying too heavily on this poll is that it does not differentiate between answers from Sunnis in or out of ISIL-controlled territories. The survey also only included people living in Iraq and did not cover anyone living in the ISIL-controlled section of Syria. Therefore, this January 2016 nationwide survey of Iraq is of limited value.

A second poll that may be used as a proxy variable is the 8th Annual ASDA's Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey (2016), or AYS. The results indicated that 50% of Arabs between ages of 18 and 24 living in 16 Arab countries saw ISIL as a major problem, and 80% denied any support of ISIL, even if it were to renounce its violence.<sup>36</sup> In addition, 76% perceived ISIL as a doomed effort with respect to its aim of establishing a Caliphate.<sup>37</sup> While neither of the two polls is conclusive, combined they show a lack of support among respondents sharing the ethnicity, religion, and culture of the population under ISIL control. It is not unreasonable to conclude, therefore, that their attitudes toward ISIL are shared with some portion of the population under ISIL's governance.

The second proxy variable is population movement. Any comparison of the number of people fleeing ISIL territory to the number of foreign fighters immigrating (with or without their families) to ISIL territory is lopsided. According to the United Nations (UN) ISIL's brutality has precipitated the exodus of an estimated three-million people from ISIL territory<sup>38</sup> and contributed to ten-million refugees fleeing the region.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, estimates for the number of foreign fighters immigrating to ISIL range between 20,000 and 27,000.<sup>40</sup> These figures indicate that by a 481:1 (13 million: 27,000) ratio more people are trying to escape from either ISIL-controlled or neighboring areas. To be sure, it would be folly to suggest all 13

million refugees were from ISIL-controlled territory. Nevertheless, ISIL and the other parties in the region have created such a toxic environment that it prompted the mass exodus on a scale so massive that it dwarfs the number of foreigners rushing in to help ISIL. Another comparative statistic reflecting how ISIL is perceived is that the number of refugees (13 million) exceeds the number of people living in ISIL-occupied territory (6-9 million).

The third proxy variable is the presence or absence of popular support as manifested by a willingness to serve in ISIL's army. There is anecdotal evidence that many of the young men in the ISIL-controlled territory are reluctant to enlist in the army. Defectors report that ISIL forces are engaging in heavy-handed, thuggish conscription.<sup>41</sup> On February 19, 2016 ISIL issued an order to residences in Raqqa mandating that "every man, including youth over the age of 13, is required to join ISIS as a fighter."<sup>42</sup> In addition, households that cannot provide conscripts are being required to provide household weapons and ammunition, specifically, one AK-47 and 1,000 rounds, respectively.<sup>43</sup> Those who are noncompliant with the order have been told to leave Raqqa, and in some instances have had their homes bulldozed or demolished.<sup>44</sup> This hardly seems the behavior of a government that enjoys the popular support of its citizens.

## Political Behaviors

ISIL political design includes structures for power sharing, such as the Shura Council and the Shariat Troika. The degree to which these organizations influence policy is not well documented. What is known of ISIL political behavior is that ISIL is a theocracy in which power is concentrated in the national government. The Caliph, al-Baghdadi, with or without the advice of the Shura Council and trusted associates, makes policy. When necessary, the Shariat Troika provides moral justification for ISIL policies. Policies are then transmitted to the appropriate ministries for implementation. For example, ISIL's legal apparatus consisting of the religious police and the Sharia courts enforces policies concerning faith and morals.

ISIL employs a two-pronged approach to governance. ISIL provides material rewards to Muslims who observe its policies and terrorizes those who resist. Muslims who comply with ISIL's policies are provided with basic necessities and social services. On the other

hand, ISIL employs various forms of brutality against Muslims who resist and non-Muslims in general, including the systematic rape and enslavement of women, mass murder, beheadings, crucifixion, and burning prisoners alive. ISIL broadcasts its brutality over social media in graphic detail as part of a psychological terror campaign to induce obedience.

## Analysis

The ISIL political system centralizes power among al-Baghdadi and a few of his associates. As a group, ISIL leaders appear to be philosophically and personally close. Several of them have long relationships involving shared hardships, such as service with AQI and incarceration at Camp Bucca. All have collaborated in gaining and consolidating ISIL's power in its occupied territory. If there are fissures among ISIL's leaders, there is no direct evidence of them in open source reporting.

While there is no indication of ISIL splintering along factional lines, there are at least three potential factions within ISIL: Baathists, foreign fighters, and indigenous Sunni fighters. When it organized foreign fighters by country/region of origin, ISIL in essence created blocs of armed ethnic militias. Given the history of armed ethnic militias across the globe, this could present a problem for ISIL in the future. There are even some indications that the indigenous fighters resent the perks and notoriety the foreign fighters receive, which might also present ISIL with a problem in the future.

Similarities in philosophy and background at the highest level of ISIL leadership portends a degree of continuity within the organization even if al-Baghdadi was killed. Indeed, recent news reports have indicated that ISIL is attempting to build depth in its organization by identifying replacements for its key leaders before anything happens to them. It is quite likely, given the number of key ISIL leaders who have been killed, that al-Baghdadi has already selected who will replace him if he is killed and that his successor shares the same strategic outlook.

Al-Baghdadi's dichotomous worldview provides the moral justification for ISIL's treachery and brutality. In al-Baghdadi's way of thinking, because apostates do not share the protections of the umma, ISIL sees no sin in betraying or brutalizing them. This view then legitimizes ISIL's betrayal of former allies and the brutality visited upon those labeled apostate, as in the

rape and enslavement of the Yazidi women.

ISIL's "you are with me or against me" attitude also has the operational benefit of coercing people to flee the ISIL-controlled territory. Forcing nonconformists out of ISIL-controlled territory provides ISIL with four benefits. It helps ISIL consolidate its base by eliminating dissention within the Caliphate. It floods Europe with a tide of refugees, which pollinates Europe with Muslims, who may be radicalized at some future date. It enables ISIL to infiltrate operatives into Europe. Finally, it also solves a potential housing problem for ISIL. ISIL uses the homes left vacant by the refugees to house its fighters. Furthermore, because many of those fleeing were from the more affluent neighborhoods, ISIL was able to house its fighters in better conditions than they otherwise would have had.

A third effect of ISIL's dichotomous worldview is that it renders it virtually impossible for ISIL to form alliances. Because al-Baghdadi is implementing God's will, he can neither accept compromise nor have a partner. To do either would bring the whole premise of the Caliphate into question. This is why ISIL establishes Governorates outside the Levant, rather than forming alliances. ISIL leaders view the jihadists outside the Levant that align with them as subordinate to ISIL and require them to take oaths of allegiance. Whether those groups view themselves the same way is unknown.

ISIL's dichotomous worldview also precludes leaders of other Islamic states from extending formal recognition and/or establishing diplomatic relations. For a head of state to do so would be tantamount to subjugating themselves and their states to al-Baghdadi's rule.

Although there is a dearth of definitive data regarding how people in ISIL-controlled areas view their government, there is evidence that ISIL does not enjoy widespread popular support. ISIL's extreme (almost unanimous) unpopularity among people sharing ethnic, religious, and cultural traits with those in ISIL-controlled areas supports this assertion. The mass exodus from the region is a second indicator. While not everyone fleeing the region is fleeing ISIL, there are enough people voting with their feet, to indicate disgruntlement with ISIL. Finally, ISIL's recent need to conscript young men, rather than have them rush to enlist, is a third indicator of resistance to ISIL.

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## 2. SECURITY



The purpose of ISIL's security forces is to enforce all tenets and goals of its Caliphate, implementing a carefully crafted military strategy based upon Neo-Salafist jihadist doctrine. Specifically, the group uses fear, terror, intimidation, indoctrination and information (i.e., cyber warfare) operations to control its fighters and noncombatants held within its domain and to export its values outside of its area of control.

ISIL's coercive forces are organized into two groups: armed forces (i.e., foreign and local fighters comprising seven fighting units organized nationally and regionally) and internal security personnel (i.e., law enforcement, morality and religious police and counterintelligence groups.) There are two all-female internal security brigades who enforce Sharia Law on women. ISIL's hierarchical legal system is based upon Sharia Law and the ruling Sharia Council, Shariat Troika and Shura Commissions all have different responsibilities for jurisprudence across the Caliphate.

ISIL's top military leaders are ex-Baathists from Saddam Hussein's regime and report directly to Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The group's military apparatus relies upon weapons seized from at least 21 countries, in addition to purchasing other needed supplies and hardware. ISIL runs 46 training and indoctrination centers, including some for young boys. ISIL's allies and supporters include 31 jihadi terrorist groups, 12 of which have been recognized by ISIL. It is generally agreed that ISIL's foreign fighter brigades and its sophisticated media organization were pivotal in the group's 2014 to 2015 successful military offensives. Several international governments and regional militias are allied in their efforts to degrade and eventually destroy ISIL.

### Coercive Forces

ISIL's political goal is to establish a Caliphate in order to implement God's will on earth. To accomplish this goal, ISIL has developed a military strategy. That strategy is delineated in the 2004 neo-Salafist doctrinal "white paper" on jihadism: *Management of Savagery*. The white paper describes a scenario in which ISIL provokes the West into simultaneous, large-scale, enduring troop commitments in multiple geographical regions. This leads Western forces into asymmetric

wars on the jihadists' home ground, which ISIL leaders believe Western forces cannot win.

According to this strategy, over time the West's heavy commitment of forces will have two deleterious effects. First, the cost of the commitments will put strains on western economies, which in turn damage the West's morale and weaken its will to fight. Second, the West's lack of success will cause frustration, which will incite antipathy, hatred, and violence in the West towards all Muslims, including the innocent and the blameless.<sup>1,2</sup> As a result of these two effects, the entire Muslim world would coalesce around an anti-Western jihad, which would usher in the foreordained Apocalyptic End of Times.<sup>3</sup>

At its core, ISIL's plan for establishing a Caliphate is a version of the time-tested "ink blot" strategy. ISIL's application of this strategy differs from Western applications, however, in that ISIL's application relies on terror to subjugate the population, rather than on development to win hearts and minds.

ISIL has built its security structure to implement this strategy. Specifically, ISIL has developed an army that uses terror to expand and/or defend the territory under its control in the Levant. It has created paramilitary law enforcement entities that use terror to control the population in the territory it occupies. It has established affiliations with like-minded terrorists in thirty-one countries.

It has triggered a refugee crisis of epic proportions that has brought terror to Europe, and according to some has sowed the seeds for further terrorist acts there. ISIL has also developed a media arm to bring all this electronically to the rest of the world.

### ISIL's Armed Forces

Forming a complete picture of ISIL's army is difficult because sources vary on the details of its composition. For example, there is no agreement on the size of ISIL's army. Estimates concerning the number of ISIL fighters in the Levant range from 20,000 to 200,000.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the largest estimates of ISIL's strength come from the Kurds, who could be said to have an interest in inflating the size of ISIL's army.

Also, there is no definitive, unclassified ISIL order-of-battle. The general consensus is that ISIL's military command structure, like its political structure, is highly-centralized around al-Baghdadi.<sup>5</sup> Beyond saying that, he now relies on couriers rather than electronic means to transmit his orders, however, the literature provides little to explain how al-Baghdadi exercises command and control to implement his decisions.

Although little is known of the structure of ISIL's army, it is clear that former Baathists from Saddam Hussein's regime are prominent. Additionally, it is clear that ISIL's army is composed of Sunni Muslims. The army has regional forces assigned to each of ISIL's 24 Governorates and national forces answering directly to the Caliphate. The regional forces contain six military specialties: infantry, sniper, air defense, special forces, artillery, and internal security.<sup>6</sup>

The national forces, collectively referred to as the Caliphate Army, are ISIL's elite. Sources estimate that 80% of the Caliphate Army are native fighters from the Levant and 20% are from foreign countries. The foreign fighters are grouped by ethnicity, geographic region, and language into special brigades.<sup>7</sup>

This arrangement renders the Caliphate Army more an amalgamation of groups than a single, unified force. For example, the five groups below are thought to be part of the Caliphate Army.<sup>8</sup>

- **Inghimasiyun** ("Those who plunge into battle") is "a shock force who frequently lead assaults with suicide bombings aimed at command & control unit elements, commanders or to cause mass casualty shock attacks."
- **Dhabiha** ("Slaughterers") "their purpose is to carry out execution/massacres of enemies of IS in an organized fashion, often in conjunction with media/IO elements."
- **Foreign Fighter Brigade** is "composed primarily of Chechens and Turks, normally used as a spearhead unit, possibly designated defensively as a 'fire brigade' unit (extensive military experience with Russian and 'NATO' tactics & doctrine."

- **Katibat al-Batter al-Libi** (KBL) is a special operations unit fighting in Iraq whose members are all Libyan.
- **Al-Khansaa Brigade** is "an all-female religious police unit with rear-area security functions, also run IS female slaving centers and brothels (primarily European women) as well as participating in internal security duties."<sup>9</sup>

## Weaponry

ISIL lacks the manufacturing base necessary for a conventional arms industry. Therefore, it relies primarily on purchasing or capturing weapons and ammunition, which has resulted in it using weapons from at least 21 countries.<sup>10</sup> Table 2.1 provides examples of some of the weapons in ISIL's inventory.

**Table 2.1: ISIL Weapons and Equipment<sup>11</sup>**

Armor	Artillery	Anti-Tank	Anti-Air
T-55	M198 Howitzer (limited) 59	M79 Osa Rocket Launcher	ZU-23-2 Anti-Aircraft Gun
T-62	Type 59-1 Field Gun	RPG-7	SA-16 MANPADS
T-72	BM-21 MRLs	M79	FN-6 MANPADS
MRAP		Kornet	
BMP-1		HJ-8	
HMMWV		DShK Machine Gun	

While ISIL lacks a conventional weapons industry, it has demonstrated resourcefulness in modifying existing weapons systems. Specifically, ISIL has modified vehicles, including BMPs, for use as suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIED).

## Sustainment

ISIL also lacks a sophisticated sustainment system. Although, its "...doctrine calls for each commander to ensure that there are sufficient supplies to successfully complete the mission," most ISIL plans rely on capturing needed supplies from an enemy or confiscating them from civilians.<sup>12</sup>

## Training

ISIL has established up to forty-six training centers in the Levant.<sup>13</sup> In addition to training recruits on military skills such as tactics and weapons, ISIL's recruit training includes a large amount of religious instruction. ISIL has been conscripting boys ("Cubs") and training them at special camps for children.<sup>14</sup>

## Foreign Fighters

The role of foreigners in ISIL remains a controversial subject, with often conflicting information regarding the size of individual foreign contingents and the significance of foreign fighters in the group's overall campaign. Current estimates of foreign fighters range from 20,000 to 27,000. Although the majority of ISIL's foreign fighters come from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, and Tunisia, nearly one fifth were residents or nationals of Western European countries.<sup>15,16</sup> It is agreed that foreign fighters played a significant role in ISIL's military advances in 2014 and 2015.<sup>17</sup> In the past few months, however, ISIL's recruitment of foreign fighters has dropped by 90% (from 2,000/month to 200/month).<sup>18,19</sup> This drop is often credited to the Coalition bombing campaign and the international community's anti-recruiting campaigns.

## Media

ISIL employment of various electronic media (Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) provides a means for ISIL to recruit foreign fighters.<sup>20</sup> ISIL recruiters have developed an aggressive and sophisticated Internet campaign that allows it to reach Muslims worldwide. According to Dr. Zachary Abuza from the Strategic Studies Institute at the US Army War College, "Importantly, their [ISIL's] ability to recruit through social media has broadened their base and sped up the process of radicalization and recruitment."<sup>21</sup>

## Militant Jihadist Groups Allied with ISIL

As part of his June 2014 pronouncement of the establishment of the ISIL Caliphate, al-Baghdadi called on "the soldiers of... [other] organizations" to pledge allegiance to the group.<sup>22</sup> To date, twelve groups have been formally accepted as part of ISIL and nineteen have pledged support and allegiance.<sup>23</sup> These groups include terrorist organizations based in Egypt, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, the Philippines and Indonesia.<sup>24</sup>

## Law Enforcement

The people within ISIL-controlled territories live in a police state. Religious police called the *Hisbah* (Accountability) Brigades enforce Sharia law.<sup>25</sup> Hisbah Brigades are divided into two sections: religious Morality Police Units and Counterintelligence Combat Support Units.<sup>26</sup> Morality police units comprised mainly of foreign fighters maintain a high visibility

in the population centers. They use checkpoints and vehicle and foot patrols to monitor behavior and enforce ISIL's brand of Sharia.<sup>27</sup> Their policing tactics include intimidation, arrest, incarceration, and draconian forms of punishment. The foreign fighters' reliance on humiliation methods often subvert indigenous locals' sense of honor and freedom of movement.<sup>28</sup>

The Counterintelligence Combat Support Units (CCSU) are a brutal internal security police organization analogous to the Gestapo. They run informants, collect intelligence, arrest nonconformists, etc.<sup>29</sup> Like the Gestapo and clandestine security agencies in other police states, the CCSU create an atmosphere of mistrust within society. This mistrust induces fear into the daily lives of population, which makes them more compliant.

The all-female Al-Khansaa Brigades and Ume Rayhan Brigades are female officers who enforce Sharia laws pertaining to women.<sup>30</sup> They are segregated from the male police brigades in accordance with Muslim practices.<sup>31</sup> The all-female brigades' primary policing function is to identify violations of the dress code (i.e., entirely covered, with no skin showing).<sup>32</sup>

## ISIL's Military Leaders

**Abu Ayman al-Iraqi** is a former colonel in Saddam Hussein's air defense intelligence branch. He was detained by Coalition forces for three years from 2007-2010. He currently serves on ISIL's military council and commands ISIL forces in Edlib, Aleppo, and Lattakia.<sup>33</sup>

**Abu Louay** is ISIL's Minister of Security in al-Baghdadi's Cabinet. He is reportedly a candidate for the number two in overall ISIL command and a possible replacement for al-Baghdadi in the event he is eliminated.<sup>34</sup>

**Sleiman Daoud al-Afari** is a former chemical weapons expert in Saddam Hussein's regime. There is a potential link between him and chemical attacks on the Kurds. He was captured by US Army Delta Force in late February 2016 and is detained at Erbil.<sup>35</sup>

**Abu Ahmad al-Alwani** is another former ex-Baathist that served in Saddam Hussein's army. Al-Alwani is currently a member of the ISIL military council. His real name is Waleed Jassem al-Alwani.<sup>36</sup>



**Abu Fatima al-Jaheishi** was initially in charge of the ISIL operations in southern Iraq before he moved to the northern city of Kirkuk. His real name is Ni'ma Abd Nayef al-Jabouri.<sup>37</sup>

## International Forces against ISIL (Regional and Global)

Several international governments and regional militias are allied against ISIL. The US is leading a sixty-five nation Coalition against ISIL, while Syria and its ally, Russia, occasionally fight ISIL.<sup>38</sup>

The Syrian Army's stated objective is to push ISIL east across the desert to Islamic State-held Deir al-Zour near the Iraqi border.<sup>39</sup> The Iraqi Army has had problems when it faced ISIL, but is rebuilding with US support and has recently taken the offensive.

Each of the following groups is engaged in active combat against ISIL. Many of the groups are also fighting each other in the tangled web of the Syrian civil war.

**Iraqi Shia Tribal Militias:** According to data on Pixtoday.net, there are currently thirty-two Shia Militias operating in Iraq and Syria.<sup>40</sup>

**Hashid al-Sha'abi (aka: Peoples' Mobilization Committee):** This group was formed in 2014 and is an umbrella organization of forty predominantly Shia paramilitary forces. It includes thousands of well-equipped fighters based in Iraq but is assisted by Iran's Quds Forces, the paramilitary wing of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The organization was formed for deployment against ISIL.<sup>41</sup>

**Peshmerga:** The *Peshmerga* are a militia composed of Iraqi Kurds.<sup>42</sup>

**Jabhat al-Nusra Front (NF):** ISIL's nemesis, NF is Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria and has roughly 10,000 well-equipped and trained fighters. They broke away from ISIL due to differences in strategy and methods.<sup>43</sup>

**Free Syrian Army (FSA):** A moderate rebel Syrian militia group fighting both ISIL and Assad's Syrian Government. It is believed to have some 45,000 in its various militias.<sup>44</sup>

**Ansar al-Islam (AI), Syria:** Although its Iraqi branch Ansar al-Islam (Iraq) has recently switched to supporting ISIL, AI's Syrian branch rejected merging with ISIL and continues to oppose it.<sup>45</sup>

**Other Sunni Tribal Militias:** There is increasing evidence that more Iraqi and Syrian tribal militias are joining with the Coalition and its partners to oppose ISIL. In the past, more Sunnis supported ISIL and its predecessor AQI. The second *Sahwa* is a Sunni tribal alliance composed of Sunni militias aligned against ISIL.<sup>46</sup>

## Non-Coercive Humanitarian Groups

There is no record of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or International Relief Organizations (IROs) in ISIL-controlled territory.

## ISIL's Legal System

The Sharia Council, which answers directly to al-Baghdadi, forms the bedrock of ISIL's legal system by implementing Sharia law throughout the Caliphate.<sup>47</sup> It is comprised of military, security and media councils which set and oversee policy in their respective areas. It also contains the Shariat Troika, a three-person panel of self-proclaimed Islamic experts that sets religious policy. Beneath the Troika are the Sharia Commissions, which enforce the Troika's religious policies.<sup>48</sup> The Sharia Commissions issue fatwas (edicts), rulings, laws, and execution orders. The Commissions oversee the Sharia Court System where legal proceedings are conducted in ISIL-held territories.

ISIL heavily regulates civil life within its territories. ISIL has issued regulations on everything from garbage disposal to gender roles and activities. ISIL mandates religious memberships and mosque attendance. It controls commodity exchange and currency exchange, sets tax and permit fees levels, assigns housing, etc.<sup>49</sup> The various police forces mentioned earlier enforce the regulations by either administering justice immediately on the street for minor infractions or arresting perpetrators and taking them to the Sharia Courts for more serious code violations.

## Analysis

From a socio-cultural perspective, ISIL has built its security structure to impose its values on the population within the areas it controls and to export those values to areas outside its control. Within the areas it controls, ISIL's chain of Shariat Troika-Sharia Commission-Sharia Courts-religious police oversees implementation of ISIL's interpretation of Sharia law. ISIL's army supports this by defending and extending ISIL's borders.

Furthermore, ISIL's security apparatus is constructed to induce compliance to its values through fear. At its core, ISIL is a police state where any infraction could bring severe, often disproportionate punishment upon the perpetrator – or even an alleged perpetrator. Its morality and counterintelligence police create an atmosphere of paranoia that causes citizens to limit their public exposure for fear they might be reported for an infraction. As a result, the society becomes compartmentalized as citizens self-isolate to reduce their chances of running afoul of ISIL's rules and regulations.

ISIL security forces suffer from deficiencies inherent to the larger society on which they were founded. ISIL's lack of a manufacturing base is the most pronounced example of this. Because ISIL lacks the capacity to manufacture its own weapons, in order to arm its soldiers, ISIL has to either buy or capture weapons. As a result, ISIL equips its security forces with a mix of weapons, many requiring different types of ammunition. Having to supply ammunition for multiple weapons systems in turn taxes ISIL's tenuous sustainment system.

Sustainment is a second deficiency inherent in ISIL society. The area ISIL controls lacks the raw materials to support a modern army. The population within ISIL-controlled territory also lacks the trained technicians needed to maintain many of the high-tech weapons systems ISIL has captured. As a result, ISIL commanders are relegated to "living off the land" and ISIL is unable to repair and maintain its more advanced captured weapons systems.

ISIL's security apparatus has shown a degree of adaptiveness, which is a trademark of its society. This adaptiveness is most apparent in ISIL's use of technology in information and tactical operations. ISIL

has exploited the electronic and social media to reach a wider audience, thereby garnering additional support in the form of men and materiel for its cause. ISIL has also modified existing weapons systems to meet specific tactical needs, such as the SVBIED BMP.

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### 3. ECONOMICS



The primary purpose of ISIL's economy is to fund its war machine in order to impose complete autocratic control over the people in its territory. Ultimately ISIL seeks to control every military and civic function under the guise of governing.

In September 2014, ISIL was earning at least two million dollars a day, which made it the wealthiest terrorist organization in the world at that time.<sup>1</sup> While still quite wealthy, ISIL's financial strength appears to be on the ebb. ISIL's financial decline is the result of a combination of factors whose cumulative effect portend a decline in ISIL's financial future.

Chief among the factors presaging a decline in ISIL's fortunes is its status as a rentier economy. In a rentier economy the state derives all or a substantial portion of its revenues from the rent or sale of indigenous resources to external clients. In ISIL's case, 43% of its revenue is derived from oil and gas. The combined effects of the slump in global oil and gas markets and the allied air campaign have significantly reduced ISIL's oil revenues.

The net effect that the reduction in oil and other revenues will have on ISIL is difficult to predict because ISIL is reputed to have a highly diversified financial portfolio and is extremely adaptable.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, there are indications that ISIL is suffering financial problems that are causing it to reduce pay and benefits to its members while it seeks to open other revenue streams.

#### Sources of Revenue

One of the principal differences in the strategic financial approach between ISIL and Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) is ISIL's emphasis on achieving financial independence. Whereas AQI chose to rely on donations as its major funding mechanism, from its inception ISIL has striven to make itself financially independent. This strategy has resulted in ISIL developing multiple revenue streams, from running a sprawling oil operation to taxing civilians to arms dealing.<sup>3</sup> ISIL's total cash and assets are estimated to be \$2.25 billion from all revenue sources.<sup>4</sup>

According to an analysis by *IHS Jane's Conflict Monitor*,

in December 2015 ISIL's revenue from all economic sectors topped \$80 million per month. Senior Analyst Ludovico Carlino explained, "Its business model, which is heavily focused on intermediaries and taking percentage cuts, also means that the Islamic State is able to make profits from areas and sectors where it is not directly involved."<sup>5</sup>

Ninety-three percent of ISIL revenues come from three sources: 50% of its income from taxes and property confiscation, 43% from oil and gas sales. ISIL taxes almost all public services (e.g., hospitals, schools, farms, markets, and municipal works).<sup>6</sup> It also sells property confiscated from individuals, corporations, and the Syrian and Iraqi governments.<sup>7</sup> The remaining 7% comes from a variety of sources, which include agriculture; extortion of minorities; state-run businesses; and criminal activities such as antiquities trafficking, bank robbery, drug smuggling, and kidnapping for ransom.<sup>8</sup> Other secondary or less lucrative revenue sources are assets seized from captured territories, foreign exchange of Iraqi dinars<sup>9</sup>, munitions sales<sup>10</sup>, illicit human organ sales (obtained from executed ISIL fighters), tolls for crossing its territory and permits for antiquity mining.<sup>11</sup>

The antiquities black market, in which all sides in the Syrian civil war participate<sup>12,13</sup>, is estimated to be worth at least \$1.6 billion.<sup>14</sup> The currency exchange for Iraqi dinars is estimated to earn \$20 to \$25 million per month.<sup>15</sup>

Christians and others who refuse conversion to Islam are forced to pay the *jizya* (i.e., an Islamic submission or "protection tax").<sup>16,17</sup>

#### Socio-economic Variables

ISIL operates off a centralized budget at the national level. It pools revenue from its various revenue streams to pay its national expenses and allots a portion of the national revenues to its Governorates. Its operating principles "... are still those of a militant organization. Isis (sic) has built an efficient war machine that lavishes money on loyal members while squeezing others."<sup>18</sup>

ISIL spends approximately two-thirds of its revenue (\$600 million) on its fighting forces. It spends the



remaining one-third on social services and civic institutions, such as healthcare, schooling, agriculture and municipal work. For example, ISIL spends roughly the same (\$10 to \$15 million a month) for municipal work<sup>19</sup> as it does for each of its security agencies, the *hisba* (i.e., morality police) and *amniyat* (i.e., intelligence forces). Both of these groups collect taxes and levy fines on civilians in ISIL-held territories.<sup>20</sup>

ISIL's twenty-four Governors also manage their own budgets and have discretionary spending authority over expenditures, such as for education or security forces.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned above, they receive funds from the national government to supplement the revenue they raise locally.

## Fighters

ISIL pays its fighters well, but unequally. ISIL spends approximately \$20 million monthly on its elite forces, which are primarily comprised of foreign fighters and make up 20% of its armed forces.<sup>22</sup> It spends an equal or slightly less amount, another \$15 to \$20 million, on local fighters and auxiliaries who make up the remaining 80% of its army.<sup>23</sup>

ISIL pays foreign fighters the highest salaries. Although their base salaries—between \$50 and \$100 a month—are on par with local fighters, they are eligible for special payments that increase their pay considerably. With stipends and bonuses, the average foreign fighter earns about \$600 a month, but can earn as much as \$1,000 per month. Foreign fighters are also eligible for other perks such as a one-time sign-up bonus and a \$200 relocation fee (Oftentimes, foreign fighters move their families to the Levant.)<sup>24</sup> Local fighters who have pledged allegiance to ISIL (*mubayeen*) are also paid a base salary of \$50 to \$100 per month. With stipends and bonuses, however, the average *mubayeen* only earns \$200 to \$300 a month.<sup>25</sup> ISIL has a competitive advantage over other rebel groups in Syria whose average pay is \$160 per month and who are often delinquent on payment.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to their monthly pay, *mubayeen* and foreign fighters receive an extra \$50 for each wife and *sabaya*, or enslaved woman. They also receive an extra \$35 per child, whether from a wife or enslaved woman.<sup>27</sup> Both *mubayeen* and foreign fighters receive other forms of compensation, including freedom from paying taxes, medical care for themselves and their families, free housing, paid utilities and food allowances.<sup>28</sup>

A third category of ISIL fighter is the local fighter who has not sworn allegiance to ISIL, the *munasireen*. Fighters in this category are considered to be little more than mercenaries. They are paid a base salary comparable to foreign fighters and *mubayeen* of \$50 to \$100 a month, but receive no stipends or bonuses.<sup>29</sup>

## Social Services

There is a lack of information regarding ISIL's spending on social services. What information does exist indicates that ISIL does not spend a lot on social services and that civilians depend on the black market and bartering for the necessities of life (e.g., petrol, diesel and heating oil).<sup>30,31</sup>

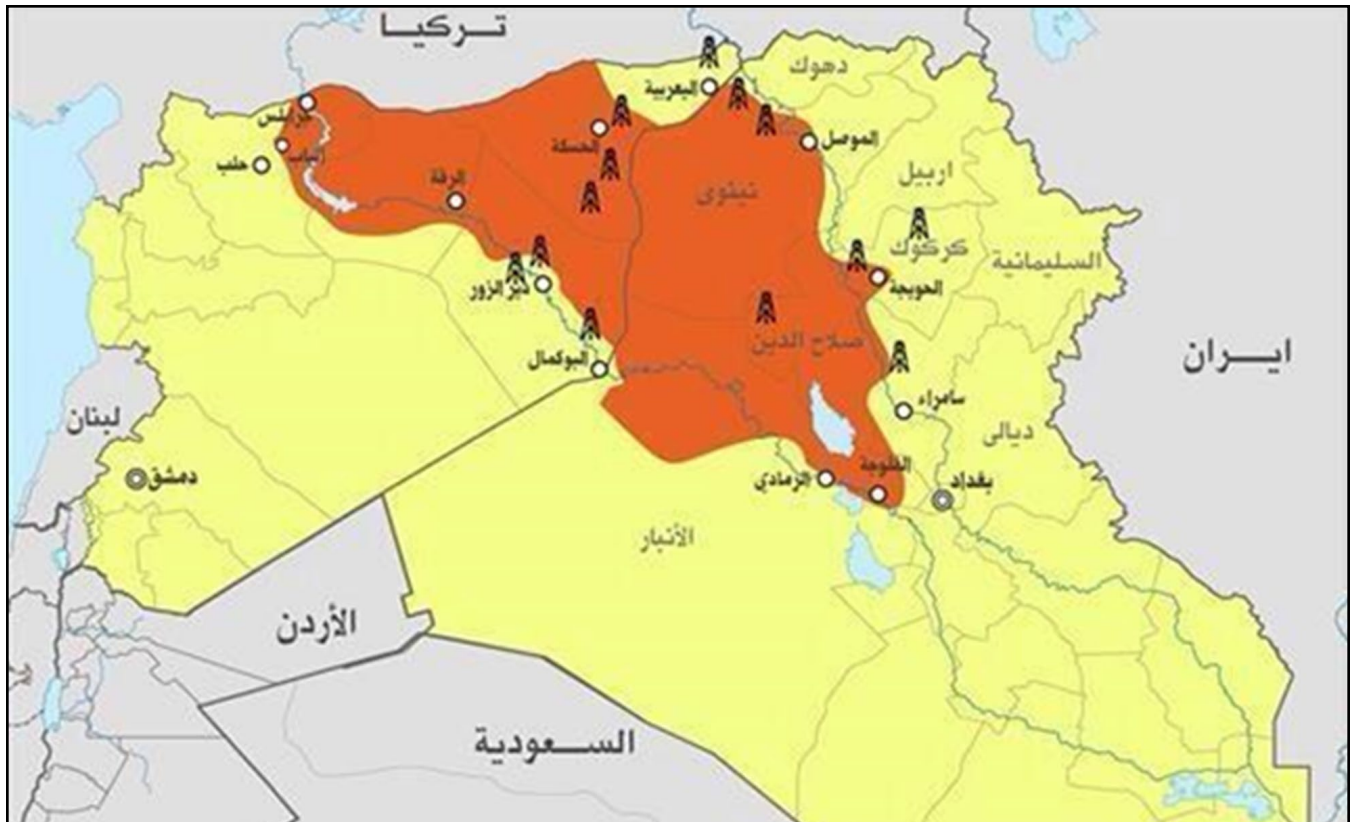
ISIL's online propaganda promotes the image of free-of-charge ISIL health care system patterned after the United Kingdom's state run system. Civilians living in ISIL-held territories know this to be a myth. In fact ISIL spends less than \$120 million annually on healthcare and education combined.

One result of this neglect is that medical staffs are underpaid. For example, in Deir al-Zour doctors and nurses are paid no more than \$300 a month.<sup>32</sup> Another result is a reduction in the quality of service for non-ISIL members. ISIL has made fighters the priority at the expense of civilians. This has developed a mistrust among the civilians who, like a woman from Mosul said are "scared going to ISIL hospital."<sup>33</sup> This situation is not limited to Mosul, but is widely reported by both Iraqis and Syrians trapped under ISIL rule.

## ISIL's Oil Trade

Historian Dr. Ibrahim al-Marashi likens ISIL's criminal oil exploitation to narco-terrorism. He refers to it as "petro-terrorism" and explains that both ISIL and drug cartels depend upon commodities sold on the black market. Both groups oversee illicit rentier economies, charging and extorting high rents on a resource that happens to exist within the territories they control. Finally, both groups rule through fear, terror and brutal violence.<sup>34</sup>

As early as 2006, ISIL leaders envisioned using petrodollars to fund the creation of an Islamic state by seizing the oil fields in northern Syria and Western Iraq as shown in Figure 3.1 below.<sup>35</sup> ISIL's Shura Council considers oil as critically important to the Caliphate and operates its oil industry like a national company.



**Figure 3.1. 2006 envisioned state of ISI's (ISIL's predecessor) oil development<sup>36</sup>**

The *Financial Times* observed, “Oil is the black gold that funds its black flag.”<sup>37</sup> By some estimates, ISIL oil production is around 80,000 barrels per day, which nets ISIL at least \$1 million and possibly up to \$3 million per day. ISIL uses this money to finance and expand its terror network.<sup>38</sup> ISIL also pragmatically prices its oil, exploiting differences in demand across its territories to maximize profitability.<sup>39</sup> The US Treasury estimates that, prior to the start of the US-led Coalition's bombing campaign targeting oil installations and tankers in October 2015, the oil and gas business provided as much as \$500 million, annually.<sup>40</sup>

ISIL controls at least thirty oil fields (nine large facilities) and four refineries. ISIL reportedly operates numerous small, modular or mobile refineries. ISIL's secret police oversee operations at the oil wells. They ensure proper revenue distribution to locations and punish any transgressors. Guards patrol the pumping stations and checkpoints, but smaller, individual oil wells are usually only protected by berms. ISIL has a captive market audience in Syria and Iraq.<sup>41</sup>

ISIL has a thriving domestic oil market in Syria and in those parts of Iraq it controls. The group exports

its oil through black market smuggling routes. The population in ISIL-controlled territory depends upon ISIL's gas and diesel to run their generators, vehicles, irrigation pumps, etc. Ironically, some Syrian rebel groups buy ISIL oil. One Syrian rebel commander plaintively observed, “It makes you laugh and cry. But is anyone else offering to give us fuel?”<sup>42</sup> The Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian governments also buy oil from ISIL.<sup>43,44</sup>

### ISIL's Munitions Trade

Lacking a munitions industry, ISIL has to rely on the black market for its ammunition. Often ISIL ends up buying ammunition from black marketers who are fighting against them. Because of the criticality of obtaining ammunition, ISIL has centralized munitions acquisitions at the highest levels of its military.<sup>45</sup> ISIL obtains most of its ammunition from its enemies. In Iraq, pro-government Iraqi militias sell to black marketers, who then sell to ISIL. In Syria ISIL buys munitions from all sides in the civil war.<sup>46</sup> Figure 3.2 provides a map showing how ISIL procures its ammunition.

ISIL is in constant need of ammunition. Its security

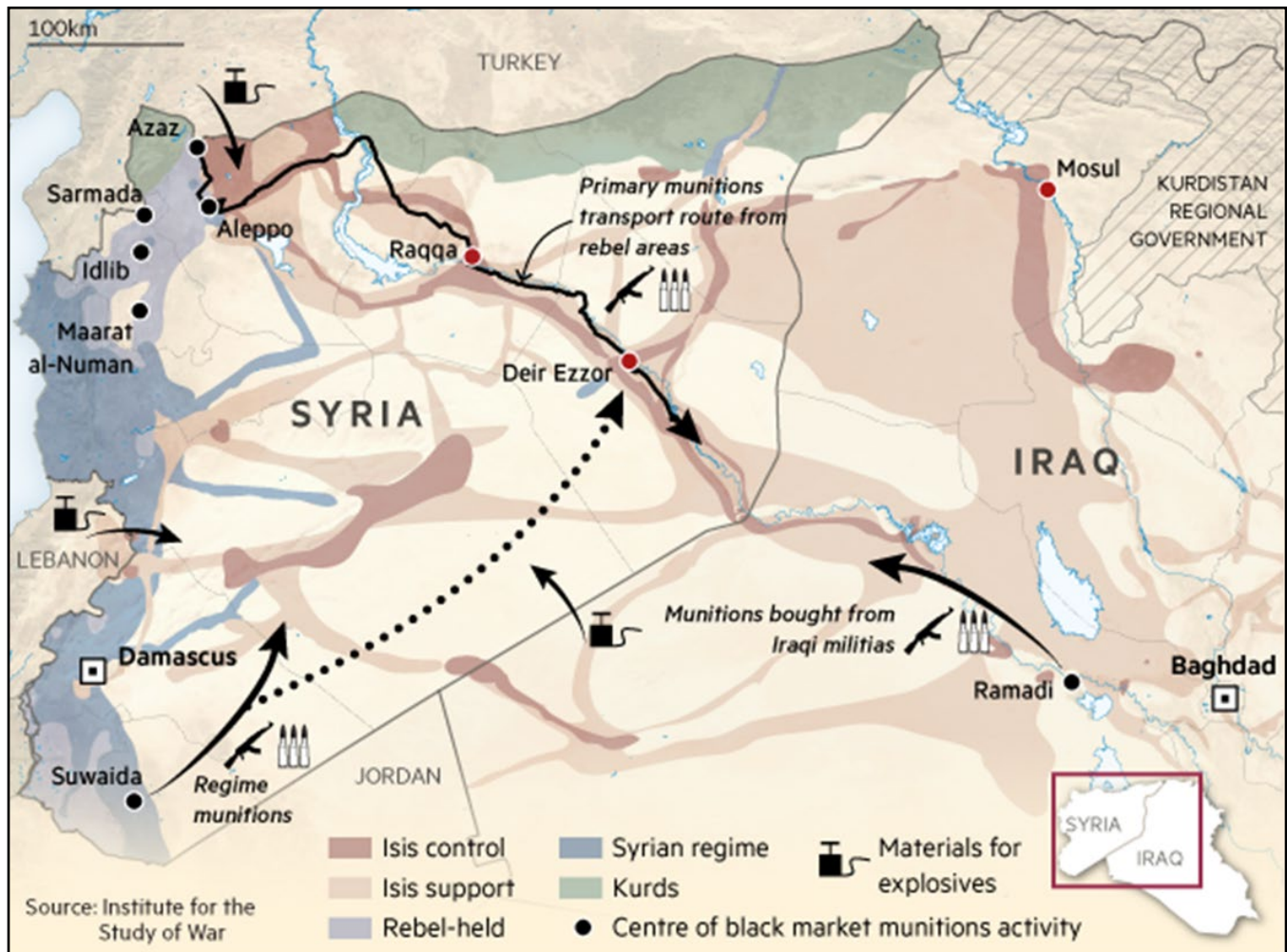


Figure 3.2. Map showing ISIL's munitions trade in the Levant<sup>47</sup>

forces have the highest demand for all classes of ammunitions.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to ascertain the exact amounts involved in ISIL's multimillion-dollar munitions trade. However, there are some clues as to its ammunition needs. According to interviews with dealers and fighters, ISIL used one million dollars worth of ammunition each month in skirmishes in the vicinity of Deir al-Zour, Syria. A week-long offensive on a nearby airport in December 2015 required another million dollars.<sup>49</sup>

ISIL manages its munitions requirements through a committee appointed by its military council. This committee keeps abreast of munitions requirements by frequent communications with representatives in each Governorate. These representatives send their requirements to the committee, who procures the ammunition and deliver it where it is needed.<sup>50</sup> ISIL's resupply system, which relies heavily on electronic communications (e.g., two-way radios and instant messaging platforms, like WhatsApp), is generally

considered extremely efficient.<sup>51</sup> ISIL opponents, such as the Peshmerga, have expressed astonishment at ISIL's rapid munitions delivery system and schedule. One Iraqi security official remarked, "Within 24 hours, the ammunition was sent to them by car."<sup>52</sup>

## Diminishing Revenue Streams

The international community efforts to disrupt ISIL's funding appears to have had some effect over the last year (March 2015 through March 2016), which saw ISIL's revenues drop 30 percent – from \$80 million/month to \$56 million/month.<sup>53</sup> The international community employed both kinetic and non-kinetic means to attack ISIL funding sources.

The international community's most visible initiative to reduce ISIL's revenue was its campaign against ISIL's oil industry. Before that campaign was fully underway, however, it was aided by a drop in the global price of



oil, which saw the price of oil drop from \$110/barrel in April 2014 to \$48/barrel in May 2016.<sup>54</sup> Coalition airstrikes against ISIL's oil infrastructure were perhaps the most publicized part of the effort to reduce ISIL funding.<sup>55</sup> Coalition airstrikes have disabled all major refineries. The international community also cajoled Turkey, who was at one time ISIL's largest oil customer, to do a better job enforcing the international economic sanctions against ISIL.<sup>56</sup> Finally, ISIL's lack of technical expertise has adversely affected its oil production. ISIL lacks technological expertise to maintain aging equipment and many Syrian oil wells are drying up. It is also having to pay more for spare parts and maintenance to keep its oil infrastructure operational, which reduces its net income from oil.

The international community has also focused on disrupting and degrading ISIL's finances. The Counter ISIL Finance Group (CIFG), which the US co-leads with Italy and Saudi Arabia, is an integrated part of the broader Coalition and made up of thirty members worldwide focused on disrupting ISIL financing. These efforts include targeting bulk cash storage sites and incinerating millions of dollars, implementing UN sanctions against brokers and middlemen who support the ISIL economy, and Iraqi banks and others in the global financial community isolating ISIL from the financial system by cutting off exchange houses and banks in ISIL-held territory.<sup>57</sup>

The fact that ISIL has not conquered new territory has also led to the reduction of a rather significant revenue stream. During ISIL's 2014 through 2015 military offensives, it seized vast amounts of money from Iraqi state-owned banks and other facilities. It also confiscated grain stockpiles and billions of dollars in property, which it resold. However, without seizing more territory, these revenue sources are no longer available.

A final, albeit comparatively small, revenue stream recently curtailed was the money ISIL received in taxes from the salaries of Iraqi government employees working in ISIL-controlled regions. Until August 2015 Iraq paid the salaries of its former employees living in ISIL-captured territory. These payments, which added up to about \$170 million per month, were part of a larger international effort to thwart ISIL finances.<sup>58</sup>

Some sources argue that targeting the economy of ISIL-controlled areas can make matters worse for civilians. In northern Iraq, the Coalition has allowed workers at

the Mosul Dam to keep channeling power to ISIL-held territories and has steered away from bombing oil wells directly. Locals depend on the petrol and diesel refined from ISIL-produced oil for generator fuel, vehicles, and medical equipment. Rebel fighters against the Syrian Assad Regime also depend on ISIL resources.<sup>59</sup> Iraqi officials have warned that choking off ISIL's economic routes might result in collateral damage. The unintended consequences of the air campaign are a serious concern, especially if ISIL is to be defeated strategically.<sup>60</sup>

## Effects of ISIL's Diminishing Revenue Streams

There are multiple indications that the drop in revenue is causing ISIL problems. Indeed, just the cost of maintaining its military and its operations on multiple fronts have sapped the group's resources.

Former fighters report that there were months-long periods when salaries were paid late or not at all. A Syrian rebel commander reported that sometimes when there was no money to pay fighters, ISIL commanders took funds from the *zakat* (i.e., form of alms-giving and religious tax paid by Muslims) or agricultural offices.<sup>61</sup> There are also reports of a 50% cut in fighters' pay throughout 2015.<sup>62</sup> One source reports that this is due to increasing pressure and reductions in ISIL's revenue streams.<sup>63</sup>

ISIL morale is also said to have fallen due to steep wage and benefit cuts and electricity rationing. Fighters are reported to be disaffected by reductions in their salaries and benefits. There is growing evidence that ISIL leaders are perpetrating more violence towards its fighters and supporters. Reports indicate fighters are being crucified or buried alive if they seek to defect.<sup>64,65</sup>

Sources report that ISIL has recently reduced, and in some cases stopped, paying its employees' salaries. Sources suggest that with diminishing revenue, ISIL, who can execute complaining workers, has no incentive to continue paying its civilians.<sup>66</sup> Yet, ISIL still requires skilled workers, such as petroleum engineers, information technology specialists, doctors, etc. and it is difficult to see how ISIL will attract the experts it needs without paying them.<sup>67</sup>

Cash-strapped ISIL is turning towards innovative sources, such as operating fish farms, selling cars,



investing in the stock market and selling human organs from executed ISIL fighters. The group is also earning revenue through price hikes on electricity and other basic services, salary cuts and the introduction of new agricultural taxes.<sup>68</sup>

## Analysis

Since its inception ISIL sought financial independence as a means to reduce its fiscal vulnerability. This goal drove ISIL's strategy, which included seizing the oil rich areas of northern Syria and Western Iraq as a basis for funding its war. That strategy has worked. Two years ago ISIL was declared the wealthiest terrorist organization in the world with an estimated net worth of \$2.25 billion and monthly revenues in the neighborhood of \$80 million/month.

Over the last year ISIL's financial situation has deteriorated. Between 2015 and 2016 ISIL revenues are estimated to have dropped by 30%. A significant drop in oil revenues was partially to blame for ISIL's revenue loss, but other factors also contributed. For example, ISIL lost tax revenue when the Iraqi government stopped paying its former employees in ISIL territory. Without new conquests, it had no new sources of plunder. Even as these revenue sources dried up, ISIL's financial situation was further degraded by escalating operational and maintenance costs. Moreover, as a rentier economy, it lacks the economic diversity to make up its losses in other sectors of the economy.

Over the past six months a general picture has emerged that ISIL is experiencing real economic hardship. It is clear that the group's revenue has been reduced and may indicate side effects from two phenomena: a drop in global oil prices and Coalition airstrikes.

Thus while ISIL continues to be a wealthy terrorist organization bringing in around \$56 million/month, it is experiencing financial pangs. If media reports are correct, ISIL has reacted to its reduction in revenue by reducing the pay and benefits to its fighters and social services to its people. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that these reductions have caused some dissention in the ISIL ranks and disgruntlement over ISIL policies. There is also anecdotal evidence that ISIL has reacted to the dissention and disgruntlement negatively. According to some sources, ISIL has gone so far as to execute dissenters. It is reported to be increasing the size and scope of its secret police, which

portends even more restrictions on the population.

On the other hand, the ISIL economy reaches deep into civilian life within its territories and beyond, forcing even its enemies to do business with it. The entrenched nature of ISIL in the regional economy makes it a challenge to combat. For example, ISIL deals with the Syrian Assad Regime to provide electricity and the Coalition allows electricity produced from the Mosul Dam to reach civilians under ISIL-controlled territories. Disruption of either of these two specific conditions, or any of the countless similar ones in the region, would have dire humanitarian consequences. An unpleasant reality is that ISIL knows this and is perfectly willing to use them to its advantage. It is difficult for Western forces to target ISIL's economy without damaging civilian infrastructure and inflicting further hardship on noncombatants.

In summary, although ISIL revenues have dropped, it is by no means bankrupt, nor even close to going bankrupt. Even at its reduced income levels ISIL has sufficient funds to maintain, or even expand, its security forces. As long as its security forces are effective and in the absence of outside assistance, ISIL will continue to control its current territory. ISIL has shown it understands this when it prioritized funding of its security forces over funding social services and other population related programs. At its current funding rate ISIL can fight a holding action in the Levant while it continues its attempts to destabilize the rest of the world by forcing an exodus of epic proportions and by exporting terrorism through its affiliates and agents.

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## 4. POPULATION



The population of ISIL-controlled territories is estimated at between six and eight million people. It is also estimated that between ten and twelve million people have fled from ISIL territory and adjacent regions affected by the Syrian Civil War. Even when the often reported influx of foreign fighters (estimated at between 20,000 and 27,000)<sup>1</sup> is considered, those fleeing the area dwarfs those staying or arriving.

ISIL-controlled territories are concentrated in urban centers where ISIL fighters are less vulnerable to airstrikes and that afford more lucrative tax opportunities (i.e., Mosul, Raqqa, Fallujah, and previously Ramadi). They include key Sunni and neo-Baathist regions where ISIL began and that serve as

ISIL's base of support. ISIL's presence in rural areas appears determined by an area's potential as a source of revenue such as the Tigris and Euphrates River basins, oil fields, dams with hydroelectric power, and World Heritage Sites exploited for black market antiquities.

The conflict in the region has been devastating to the population, which is suffering excessive unemployment, food scarcity, economic paralyzes, and generalized poverty.<sup>2</sup> The large number of displaced persons is straining Iraqi and international humanitarian relief efforts.<sup>3</sup> The situation has virtually destroyed healthcare and education in the affected areas and the average life-span has dropped by 15.49 years.<sup>4</sup>

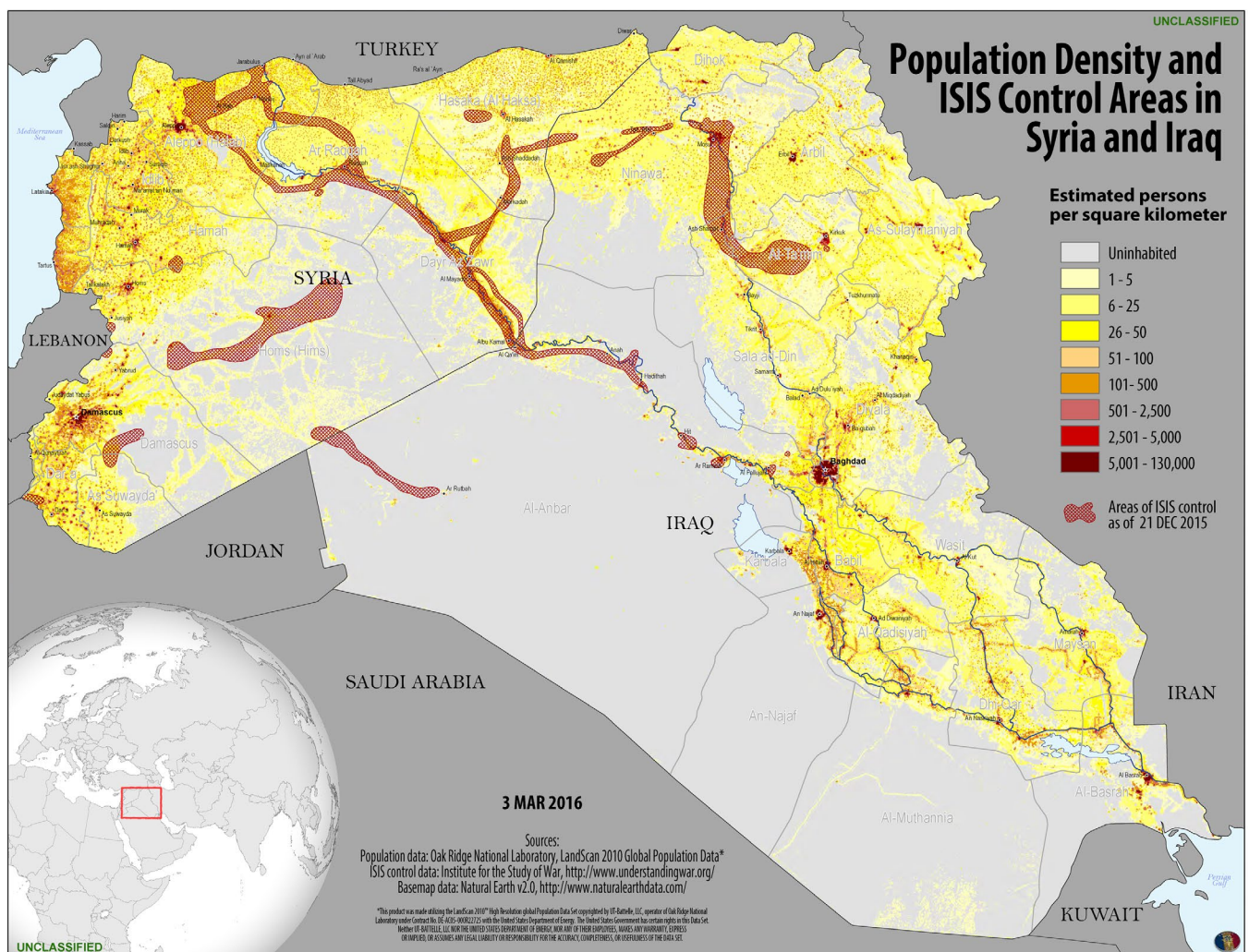


Figure 4.1. Population Density in ISIL-controlled Areas.

## Estimated Population within ISIL Territories

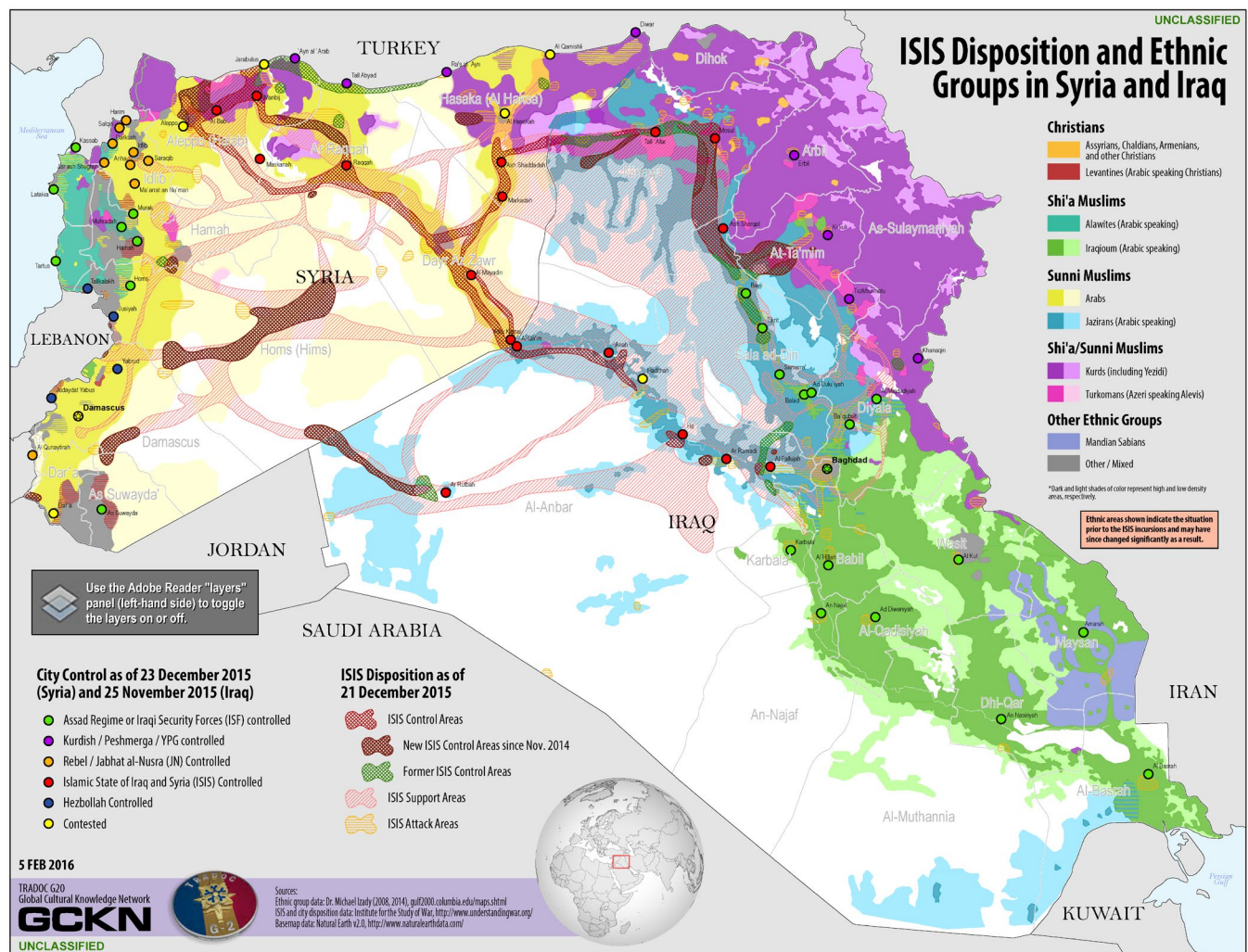
Estimates suggest the population for ISIL dominated territories in Iraq and Syria is between six and eight-million people.<sup>5,6</sup> Because ISIL overlaps parts of two different nation states, each with dated and corrupted demographic data, the six to eight million figure should be regarded as an estimate. Syria and Iraq both minimized their Kurdish population estimates in efforts to politically marginalize the Kurds as a group.<sup>7,8</sup>

As can be seen in Figure 4.1, a majority of the population in ISIL territory lives along the Euphrates and Tigris River Basins north of Ramadi and Tikrit. There are also low density population areas from Rutbah in Anbar Governorate stretching to the Syrian border and moderate density pockets in the vicinity

of Damascus and along the Lebanese and Jordanian borders. Mosul, with an estimated population of 2.5 million<sup>9,10,11</sup> and Fallujah, with an estimated 326,000,<sup>12</sup> are the major ISIL population centers in Iraq. Raqqa, with an estimated population of 220,000, is the major ISIL population center in Syria.<sup>13</sup> These regions initially afforded ISIL concentrated Sunni and neo-Baathist support.

## Population Growth Rate

The population growth rate in Iraq from 1997-2009 was estimated to be between 2.3% and 3% per year.<sup>14</sup> The total population in 2009 was estimated to be between 31.6 and 33 million.<sup>15,16</sup> The population growth rate in Syria was calculated at 2.93% per year in 2015.<sup>17</sup> The Syrian population was estimated to be approximately 23 million in 2011, but decreased to 17.9 million by 2014, due to the continued exodus of





refugees created by the Syrian Civil War and the rise of ISIL.<sup>18</sup> Approximately ten percent of the drop occurred during the past year. More current estimates are precluded by civil unrest.

### Life Expectancy: Average and Gender Differential

The average life expectancy for a Syrian was 71.19 years, and for an Iraqi was 68 years with an approximate three year differential respectively for males and females in both countries, with females living longer. However, since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, the average life-span has been reduced to 55.7 years (a reduction of 15.49 years).<sup>19</sup>

### Ethnic-Sectarian Demographics

The map in Figure 4.2 shows ISIL-controlled areas in a red crosshatch. The map shows that for most of Syria and Iraq, ISIL-controlled areas overlay areas populated by Sunni Arabs (Jazirans are an Arab sect). This observation holds true except in the northeast

where ISIL-controlled areas overlay areas that are predominately Kurdish or Turkoman.

### Foreign Fighters

The data surrounding the number and country of origin of foreign fighters differs in specifics, but generally agrees that a majority of foreign fighters are from Arab countries. Figure 4.3 shows CNN's estimate of the number and country of origin of foreign fighters since 2014.

However, more recent reporting indicates a ninety-percent drop in ISIL's recruitment rates for foreign fighters from an estimated 2,000 per month to 200 per month. The drop is attributed to heightened restrictions on ISIL's media platforms, improvements in security along Turkish border crossings, effective attrition, and losses of territory and finances. These losses mitigate its appeal. Based on historical trends and current anecdotal reporting, foreign fighter recruitment will continue to focus on Arab countries.

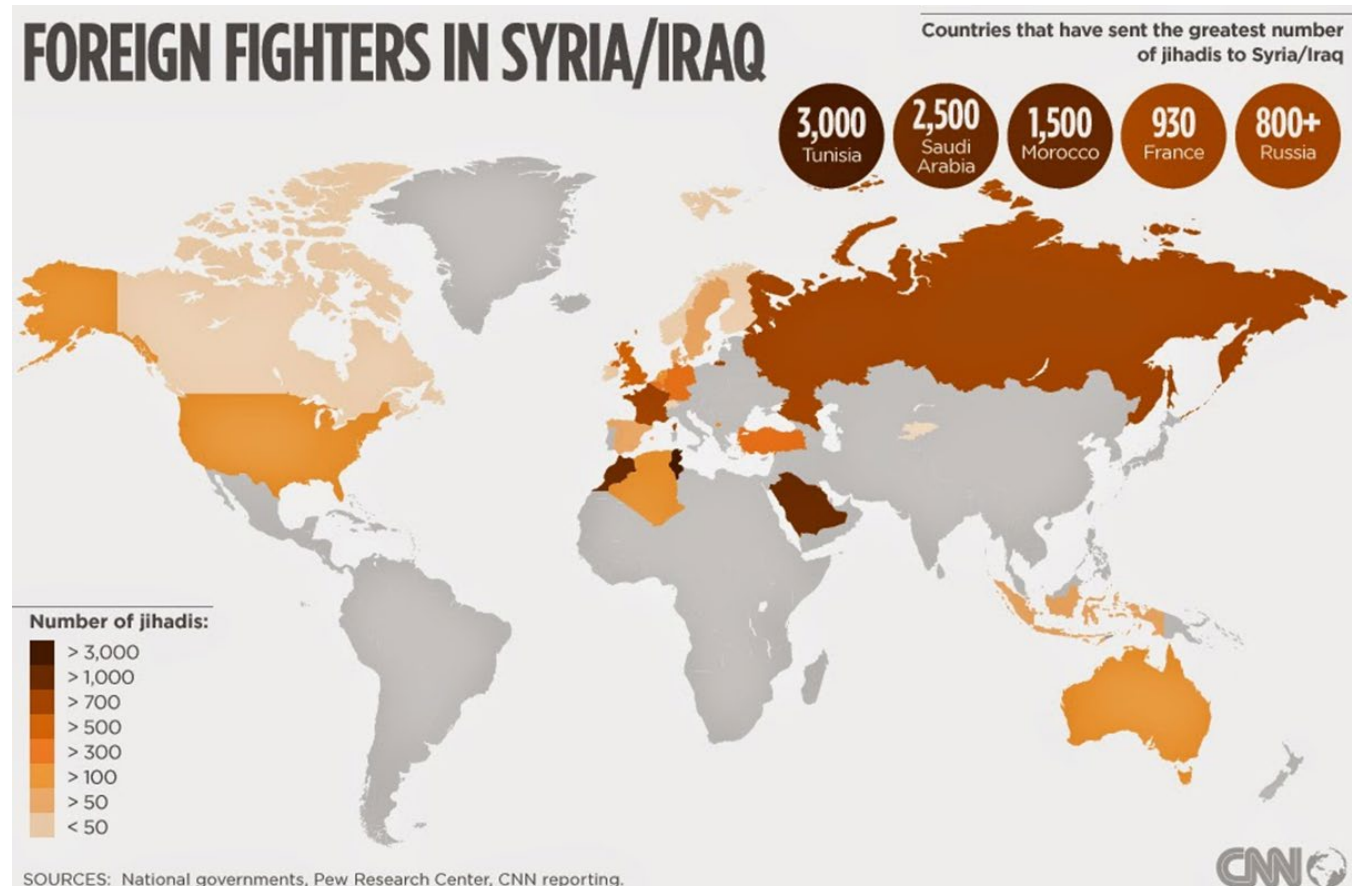


Figure 4.3. Foreign fighters by country of origin. Source: CNN

## Urban-Rural Demographic Dynamic

There is a lack of data regarding the rural-urban population split in ISIL-controlled areas. The urban population of Iraq is estimated to comprise 66.5%, or roughly two-thirds, of its total population, with a 3.5% rate of change towards urbanization,<sup>20</sup> which is on pace with, or slightly exceeds (by 0.5%), its general population growth rate. In Syria, the urban population comprises 56% of the total population (2010), with a 2.5 % annual rate of change towards urbanization.<sup>21</sup>

ISIL's forces are concentrated in urban centers and their surrounds, where they are less open to air-strikes and are afforded more lucrative opportunities for taxation due to population concentrations (i.e., Mosul, Raqqa, Fallujah, and previously Ramadi). Rural presence appears to be determined by key terrain features providing revenue streams (i.e., oil fields, dams with hydroelectric power, World Heritage Sites exploited for black market antiquities; grain stockpiles); or alternative forms of protection from air strikes due to the co-location of critical infrastructures (i.e., dams). Although ISIL previously controlled a major rural corridor facilitating transit between Raqqa and Mosul, Kurdish Peshmerga forces operating with Coalition air support have seized control of this route.

## Military Age Males

There are no specific data regarding the military age males in ISIL-controlled areas. Fifty-nine percent of the population of Iraq are between the ages of 15 and 64, of which 9.3 million are military. The median age for the total population is 21.3 years old, and 21.2 for males. In Syria, 61% of the population falls between 15 and 64, with a total of 6.9 million males

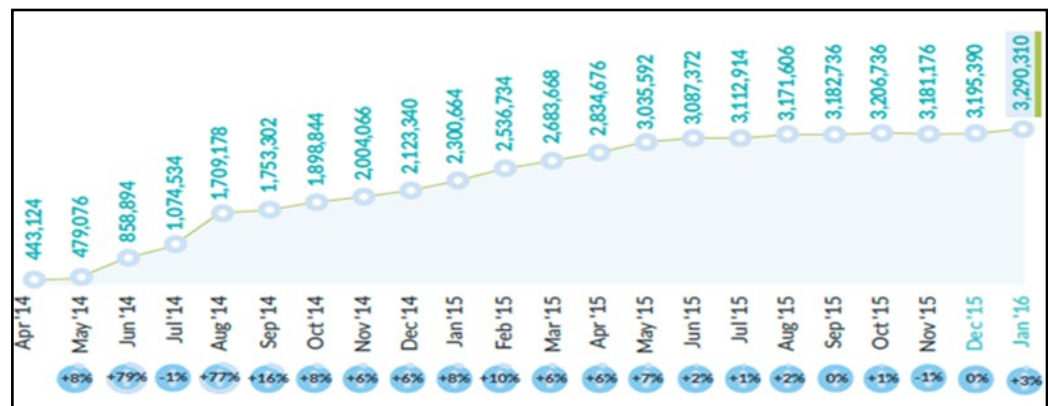
represented within this age parameter. The median age male in Syria is 23.2.<sup>22</sup> The median age male for the total population of the two countries when averaged is 22.2 years old which is likely the best estimate for the median age male in ISIL-controlled territories.

## Education

Childhood education within ISIL-controlled territories is limited.<sup>23</sup> First, due to the devalued status of females in Salafism and ISIL's religious worldview, girls receive no formal education. Males are only educated until puberty, at which point they are considered to be of military age. Prior to puberty, education focuses singularly on religious education, with more secular-oriented and modernist subject matter (i.e., sciences), intentionally largely excluded on religious ideological grounds. Once of military age all of their education is military oriented and includes a highly defined indoctrination process.

## Population Movement: Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and Refugees

ISIL's territorial gains in Iraq have resulted in an estimated three-million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).<sup>24</sup> Approximately half, 1.6 million, of the IDPs in Iraq are children.<sup>25</sup> Based on the current situation, the United Nations (UN) estimates the number of IDPs will increase by 500,000 or more.<sup>26</sup> The UN has been tracking the increase in IDPs within Iraq. The sharpest increase, as shown in Figure 4.4, coincides with the ISIL offensives during the summer months of 2014.



**Figure 4.4. IDPs in Iraq by month, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq Mission, Displacement Tracking Matrix<sup>27</sup>**

The Human Rights First Organization (2016) assessment report estimates that eleven-million people have been displaced as a result of the Syrian conflict. How many of the displaced Syrians were from ISIL-controlled territory is unknown. Figure 4.5 illustrates where the displaced Syrians are located.<sup>28</sup>



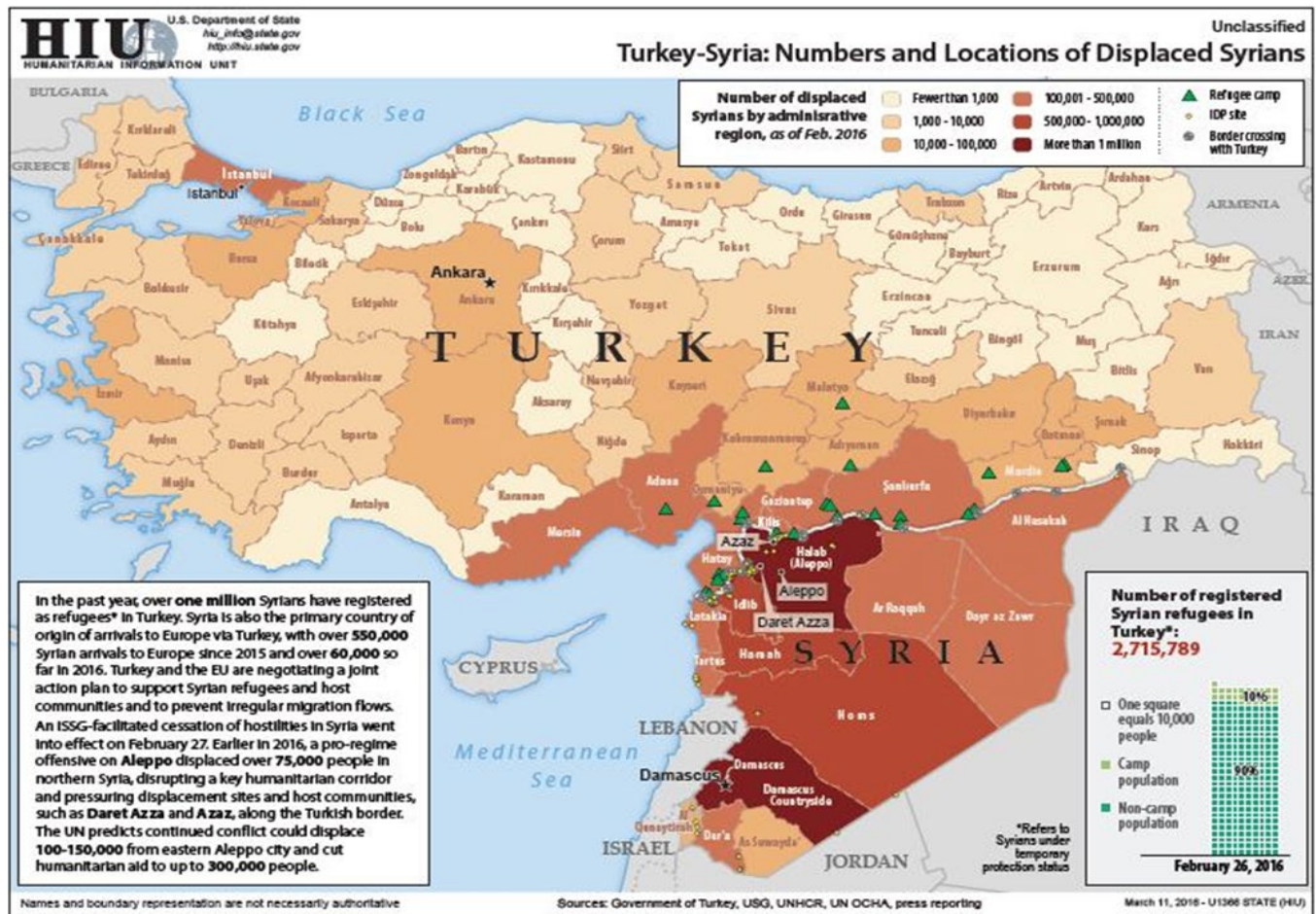


Figure 4.5. Numbers and locations of displaced Syrians<sup>29</sup>

In addition, during 2015 alone, Europe has received approximately one million refugees, nearly half (49%) of whom were Syrian refugees.<sup>30</sup> These trends have continued into 2016, with reports for January-February totaling 13,500 weekly. Eighty thousand refugees arrived by boat.<sup>31</sup>

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Iraq Humanitarian Snapshot Report (2016) indicates the humanitarian crises perpetrated by ISIL "touches nearly one-third of the population—10 million people."<sup>32</sup> The deteriorating security situation has displaced large segments of the population disrupting everyday patterns of life (familial, occupational, and educational).<sup>33</sup> People in the region have also suffered a constriction in their freedom of movement, a reduction of commerce, and a decrease in agricultural production that have spawned second order effects such as unemployment, food scarcity, economic paralyzes, and generalized poverty. The population displacement is straining Iraqi and international humanitarian relief efforts. For example, the cost for humanitarian aid in 2016 to the US alone has been estimated at \$861 million.<sup>34</sup>

## Medical

### Health Care and Healthcare Centers

There is limited information on the medical conditions within ISIL-controlled areas. There are reports that many physicians and healthcare professionals left these areas when they were able to. Some of those who stayed behind, or did not get out in time, have been coopted by ISIL for harvesting organs to sell on the black market, with refusal resulting in death.<sup>35,36</sup>

Much of the medical infrastructure within ISIL's domain has been destroyed or looted, and there is no reporting of emergency medical services as you see with its police services. There are also vague reports of "medication" and "blood supply" looting for the military; denial of "medicine" and "blood" services for the civilian population; loss of physician autonomy for making "need based" ethical decisions about such matters which has been usurped by ISIL leadership; reports of ISIL executing groups of physicians for refusing to treat, or prioritize, ISIL fighters; and complications arising from Islamic rules which

preclude male and female healthcare workers from touching, hence treating, members of the opposite gender.<sup>37,38,39</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that in Syria, in general:

- 60% of its hospitals have been destroyed
- 90% of the pharmaceutical distribution system has been destroyed
- 90% of physicians in some Governorates have either left or been killed
- 70% of the remaining health care workers cannot access their base facilities due to insecurity along the routes
- 78% of the ambulances are not functioning
- the doctor-to-patient ratio in Aleppo, for example, is estimated to be 1:500,000.<sup>40</sup>

## Drug Use

Reporting indicates that many ISIL fighters are psychopharmacologically under the influence, or addicted to amphetamines, Captagon in particular, to heighten their focus, enhance their feelings of grandiosity, and keep them dependent upon their leadership who supply them.<sup>41,42</sup> At least one of the perpetrators of the ISIL-inspired and planned Paris assaults was identified as possessing Captagon.<sup>43</sup> Its use is reported by ISIL defectors.<sup>44,45</sup> It is one of the major drugs of choice in the Middle East<sup>46</sup> and is manufactured in Syria.<sup>47</sup>

## Analysis

The combination of the Syrian Civil War and ISIL's expansion have created a humanitarian disaster of epic proportions. While ISIL is not responsible for the entire refugee situation, as mentioned earlier, the mass migration of people out of ISIL territory meshes with ISIL's grand strategy. The crises has become so severe for NATO, that NATO General Philip Breedlove recently warned US lawmakers that the combined effects of ISIL, and the Syrian Civil War created by the Assad regime with Russian collaboration is, in essence, "weaponizing" refugees. The tide of the humanitarian exodus is intended to flood Europe and disrupt its stability.<sup>48</sup> In addition, ISIL is able to infiltrate the exodus with terrorist cells supporting terrorism in Europe, and with antiquities smugglers. Finally, by cross-pollinating Europe with Muslims, Salafism fulfills its own version of manifest destiny. Its doctrine promulgates religious imperialism, obligating its

practitioners to carry out jihadist-expansionist efforts to spread Islam throughout the world.

In addition, regionally, the effects of the displacement of eleven million people has the potential to destabilize neighboring countries, Lebanon and Jordan in particular. ISIL would undoubtedly see advantage in destabilizing these countries which it perceives are supporting Shia hegemony, or the "crusaders" of the West.

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## 5. SOCIETY



ISIL is an autocracy superimposed on top of tribal society, which by its nature is the antithesis of an autocracy. In order to control the beliefs, attitudes, and social behavior of people within its territories ISIL employs all six of the derivative forms of social power: legitimate, referent, expert, reward, coercive, and information. It accomplishes this by coordinating its religious, political, security, and media institutions to enforce its interpretation of the social behavior required by Sharia law.

Social identity in ISIL-controlled areas is derived from three identity parameters (Arab, Muslim, Sunni) shared by the general population and by 90% of ISIL members. Gender identities are consistent with the region and religion, with the exception of females being employed for female policing functions which appears to be the result of Islamic doctrinal constraints on male-female contact.

Historically, tribal affiliation has been the primary determinant of social status in both Syria and Iraq. ISIL has overlaid a statist organization atop the tribal foundations of both societies. In the process it has altered the social order and laid the ground work for at least four potential fault lines: secular Baathist versus religious Salafist; foreign fighters versus local fighters; foreign nationals versus local nationals; and Muslims versus non-Muslims.

### Social Power

Social power refers to the ability to influence or control the “belief, attitude, or social behavior” of people within a given society.<sup>1</sup> In their seminal work, *The Bases of Social Power*, French and Raven identified five foundations for social power: legitimate, referent, expert, reward, and coercive.<sup>2</sup> Raven later added a sixth foundation: information.<sup>3</sup> ISIL leadership exhibits all six bases for social power, but in varying degrees.

ISIL leaders display legitimate power in their roles as the administrators of the Caliphate and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in his role as Caliph.<sup>4</sup> They demonstrate referent power through their vision evoking an idealized Islamic society and the successes to date in achieving it.<sup>5,6</sup> Al-Baghdadi in particular exhibits expert

power with his doctorate in Islamic studies<sup>7</sup> and claim of a patrilineal linkage with the Prophet. The larger organization demonstrates its expert power through its monopoly religious interpretation.<sup>8</sup> ISIL makes frequent use of reward power by providing adherents with pay, residences, sex-slaves, and promises of an after-life in paradise. ISIL employs coercive power based on a strict interpretation of Sharia law and enforced through draconian punishments for non-compliance.<sup>9,10</sup> ISIL exploits the informational basis with what Western media analysts consider a highly professional and effective marketing campaign.<sup>11</sup>

ISIL has usurped social power from the tribes and concentrated it within the state’s security apparatus. Indications are that some ISIL constituents respond more favorably to a particular basis of social power than others. For example, foreign fighters are drawn by reverent or reward power. On the other hand, ISIL relies on coercive power to maximize social compliance in most of the population. ISIL employs actions to induce a “culture of terror” through the institutionalized use of public “spectacles of primordial violence.” ISIL’s gruesome exhibitions create a form of “intimate terrorism,” which provokes visceral terror, emotional fear, and social paranoia, effectively paralyzing the will of resisters as a means of social control.<sup>12,13</sup>

### Institutions

In an Islamic Caliphate all forms of power, including social power, reside with the Caliph. The Caliph, however, does not make new laws, but strives to understand existing law, Sharia, from the *Quran*, *Sunnah*, *Ulma* (laws established by community consensus), and *Qiyas* (laws based on analogical reasoning).<sup>14,15,16,17</sup> ISIL’s social philosophy is based on its radical Salafist interpretation of Sharia law. The Caliph exercises social power through ISIL’s religious, political, security, and media institutions that interpret and enforce Sharia law.

ISIL’s *Sharia Council* is a political-religious leadership body that has primary responsibility for implementing Sharia law throughout the Caliphate.<sup>18</sup> Within the Sharia Council is a three person panel of self-proclaimed Islamic experts named the *Shariat Troika*



that interprets the sacred texts and sets religious policy. ISIL's morality police, including the *Hisbah* Brigades and all-female *Al-Khansaa* Brigades, enforce Sharia law.<sup>19</sup> ISIL's Sharia courts adjudicate social and criminal cases. The Sharia courts pronounce sentences that include forms of punishment seen as barbaric by the external world. Those punishments, however, are not mere sadism, but are a social control device intended to instill fear in the populace. ISIL's media then magnifies the fear effect by ensuring the widest possible dissemination of punishment, not only in order to deter a recurrence of a particular crime, but to maximize social compliance through the rest of the population.<sup>20,21,22,23,24,25</sup>

## Social Identity

Social identity is derived from interpersonal relationships and group membership(s). It is a source for a sense of "belonging" within the social order. Group members derive a sense of a "shared world view" and "common fate."<sup>26</sup> They also differentiate between their group(s) (in-groups) and other group(s) (out-groups).

Overwhelming majorities of the ISIL fighters and the general population in ISIL-controlled territories share three identity parameters: Arab, Muslim, and Sunni. Eighty percent of ISIL members in the Levant are (Syrian or Iraqi) Arab, Muslim, and Sunni. The remaining 20% of ISIL members are foreign fighters. Although sources differ regarding the exact numbers, they generally agree that most of foreign fighters' identity parameters closely match those of the local fighters: Arab, Muslim, and Sunni.<sup>27,28</sup> The non-Arab foreign fighters share two identity parameters (Muslim and Sunni) with the rest of ISIL and the general population.

An exact ethno-religious breakdown of ISIL territory is not available. Existing data from before the Syrian civil war and from before ISIL's annexation of Western Iraq suggest that an overwhelming majority of the civilian population within ISIL's Syrian territory share three identity parameters: Arab, Muslim, and Sunni. Prior to the Syrian civil war 90% of Syrians were Arab. The remaining 10% of Syrians self-identified ethnically as Kurds and Armenians. Similarly, before the war, 74% of Syrians self-identified religiously as Sunni Muslim. The remaining 26% self-identified religiously as Shia Muslims (13%), Christians (10%), and Druse (3%).

Existing data for the ISIL territory in Iraq suggest that the population there also shares the Arab, Muslim, and Sunni identity parameters. Specifically, 99% of the Iraqi population self-identifies as Muslim and the section of the country ISIL has annexed is overwhelmingly Sunni.<sup>29</sup>

Taken together these numbers indicate a fairly homogeneous population from the ethno-religious perspective. The data also indicate that the overwhelming majority of ISIL fighters (nearly 90%) share the three identity parameters of Arab, Muslim, and Sunni with the general population.

## Gender

Family members' duties follow the norms of "traditional" oriented societies. Men maintain the security of the group in relation to the external world and conduct business with the world beyond the family unit. Women care for/raise children, manage the household, and maintain the internal security of the family.

One ISIL initiative that runs counter to the traditional gender roles is its use of women in its morality police. Its *Al-Khansaa* Brigade and *Ume Rayhan* Brigades are all-female religious police units comprised of women primarily from Western European countries. They conduct rear-area security actions, run ISIL female slaving centers and brothels, and participate in internal security operations.<sup>30,31</sup> Some have suggested ISIL formed these brigades to make itself more appealing to women from Western countries. Others have suggested ISIL formed these units because unrelated men may not police women under Islamic law. Whatever ISIL's motivation for establishing the units, they represent a departure from the norm.

## Kinship

Although both Iraq and Syria experienced fifty years of secular Baathist rule, both countries remain fundamentally tribal societies in which kin relationships form the basis of the social order.<sup>32,33</sup> In these societies:

- The in-group is defined first by kin loyalties, which extend outward from the nuclear family to clan, tribe, and ethnic group. The out-group includes members of other clans, tribes, sects, ethnic groups, or nationalities.

- Power is diffused. Leaders (sheiks) are chosen by group consensus and viewed as “first among equals.”

Even though ISIL invoked tribal loyalties to mobilize Sunnis against the Shia-dominated Iraqi government during its conquest of Western Iraq, ISIL is not a traditional kin-based organization. Indeed, on the surface ISIL appears to share characteristics of a tribal system. For example, ISIL leaders share the Arab, Muslim, and Sunni identity parameters common to the in-group within ISIL-controlled territory. Also, ISIL leader, al-Baghdadi was chosen for his position by a council of his peers. Neither al-Baghdadi nor ISIL, however, rule as the first among equals. Instead, they govern through a unidirectional, top-down, totalitarian approach that emphasizes the threat and/or use of force.<sup>34</sup> Similar to the earlier Baathist regimes in Syria and Iraq, ISIL is a fascist organization superimposed over a tribal society.

## Religion

Sunni Islam predominates in ISIL-controlled territory. Doctrinally, Sunni Islam differs from Shia Islam over the concept of continuation of authoritative revelation. Sunnis believe that authoritative revelation ended with Mohammed.<sup>35</sup> This belief leads Sunnis to emphasize strict adherence to Sharia law as passed down in the Quran and *Hadith*. In the Sunni interpretation of Islam, Muslims do not make laws, but strive to interpret how Sharia applies to a specific situation.<sup>36,37,38,39</sup> ISIL purports to embrace a Salafist, or ultraconservative, version of Sunni Islam that advocates an exceptionally strict interpretation of Sharia.<sup>40</sup>

There were two religious minorities in the Syrian territory ISIL now controls: Yazidis and Christians. ISIL's attempt to exterminate the Yazidis has been well publicized, as is its animosity towards Christians. It is unknown how many Yazidis and Christians remain in ISIL-controlled territory.

## Social Stratification

As a tribal society kin or lineage networks are the primary social strata in both Syria and Iraq. Tribal affiliation permeates all levels of society and affects all aspects of daily life. It is the basis for economic and political power in Syrian and Iraqi society.

Historically, both Syrian and Iraqi societies have been stratified along urban-rural lines.<sup>41,42</sup> In both societies, people living in rural areas tend to hold onto traditional tribal values, are often economically poorer, and less formally educated than their more modern, economically-advantaged, and educated urban dwelling counterparts.<sup>43,44</sup>

When the Baathist regimes ruled Syria and Iraq, the societies were further stratified along party-nonparty lines. Baathists in both countries were generally part of the urban elite and formed the highest social level.<sup>45,46</sup>

Social stratification can also be seen within ISIL. This should not be surprising given that a number of ISIL leaders are former Baathists and al-Baghdadi had Baathist family ties.<sup>47</sup> As with Baathist party membership, ISIL membership increases one's social and economic status. ISIL provides its male adherents material benefits such as the best apartments, above average wages, and wives and/or sex slaves.

ISIL appears to have created two additional strata in the territory it controls. ISIL rewards its foreign fighters with an elevated social status. ISIL pays foreign fighters more and provides them with more perks than local fighters. It also assigns them to elite units.<sup>48</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, ISIL has enslaved the Yazidi women and, for all practical purposes, their children, which places them at the very bottom social strata.

## Analysis

Tribalism remains the basis for social power in the Sunni Arab world from which ISIL emerged. By its nature, tribalism resists external authority. The Assad and Hussein Baathist regimes in Syria and Iraq provide examples of how a strong central authority may suppress tribalism for what, from a historical perspective, are comparatively short periods of time. Conversely, the current situations in Syria and Iraq provide examples of how tribalism reemerges as the power of the central government dissipates. At such times, there is a regression to ancient, pre-Islamic, decentralized tribal systems of rule, protection, informal governance, and militant assertion of group interests.

ISIL is an Islamic statist (fascist) organization whose governance runs contrary to the norms of Arab tribal societies. Whereas leadership in Arab tribal

society is pluralistic, ISIL's leadership is autocratic. Whereas social power in Arab tribal society is based on family lineage, ISIL has superimposed a new social system in the areas it controls that elevates its members—including many foreigners—to higher social status. Whereas economic power in Arab tribal society emanates from kin-based relationships, ISIL has centralized control of the economic means of production and distribution, thereby marginalizing Sunni tribes.

As an autocratic system imposed on top of tribal society, which by its nature is the antithesis of an autocracy, ISIL faces a significant legitimacy and control issues. To overcome the legitimacy issues, ISIL has cloaked itself in religion. By establishing itself as **THE** Caliphate, ISIL has basically proclaimed itself **THE** Islamic authority on earth. As **THE** Islamic authority, ISIL's interpretations and rulings are infallible. Because ISIL's ruling are infallible, they are indisputable. This situation presents people with two choices: submit or be labeled apostate or infidel and suffer the consequences.

To overcome the control issues, ISIL employs all six bases for social control. While this analysis will not repeat the examples cited earlier of how ISIL employs each of the six bases, there are three phenomena related to ISIL's employment of the bases that merit further comment.

First, while it is unknown if ISIL leadership has studied French and Raven's social control theories, ISIL nevertheless uses of all six bases. Furthermore, ISIL's employment of the six is not accidental, but designed, which demonstrates a high degree of organizational sophistication. Analysis of how ISIL uses the six bases indicates that each of the bases targets a specific constituency and collectively they link together into a comprehensive approach to social control. For example, ISIL employs referent power by promulgating a vision of an idealized Islamic society. This in turn attracts foreign fighters who are not dependent upon localized or regional tribal dynamics. The foreign fighters provide ISIL a basis of coercive power outside the tribal system, which ISIL uses in its security police to enforce its prescribed social order.

Second, ISIL appears to be applying the reward and coercive bases disproportionately. Evidence of this is ISIL's tendency to pay foreign fighters more and to

give them more perks than local fighters. According to reports ISIL also staffs much of its security police with foreigners, who in turn enforce ISIL's edicts on the population. This leads to two deleterious effects for ISIL. Primarily, it puts a foreign face on ISIL's social conformity efforts. From a local perspective, the foreigners are the modern equivalent of foreign tribes and as such are perceived as a threat to indigenous tribal groups. ISIL's use of foreigners has also reordered the traditional social structure by elevating foreigners to a higher strata, which also threatens the traditional leaders of the underlying tribal society. This threat to their social power is not mitigated by their shared identity as Muslims.

Third, ISIL's reliance on foreign fighters may be a mistake. For the native population in ISIL-controlled territories, local and regional tribalism is their source of social power and economic means. Any degradation of the tribal networks' power by an external central authority is perceived as a threat. This remains true whether that central authority is a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian, or nationalistic-secularist power-sharing Iraqi government, or an autocratic government conceived by a self-anointed Caliph and his Caliphate. It is likely that people native to the region perceive the imposition of another totalitarian regime policed by foreigners, even one claiming divine auspices, as a betrayal.

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## 6. CULTURE



Culture is “a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another.”<sup>1</sup> Culture is learned and passed generation to generation. ISIL’s culture “...has become synonymous with viciousness – beheadings, crucifixions, stonings, massacres, burying victims alive and religious and ethnic cleansing.”<sup>2</sup> While such savagery might seem senseless to the vast majority of civilized human beings, for ISIL it is a choice. It is a conscious decision to terrorize enemies and impress and co-opt new recruits. This excessive and publicly broadcasted violence underscores the culture of ISIL.<sup>3</sup>

### History of ISIL and Significant Events

ISIL is an evolving militant jihadist group that has changed its name to reflect its increasing territorial ambitions.<sup>4</sup> Abu Musab al-Zarqawi founded the organization now known as ISIL in Iraq in October 2004 when he swore loyalty to then al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Zarqawi subsequently changed this group’s name to *Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn*, but was better known as *al-Qaeda in Iraq* (AQI). After Zarqawi was killed in 2006, AQI underwent several name changes, the most durable of which, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), lasted from 2006 until 2013.

At the time Zarqawi was killed in 2006, AQI had built a powerful organization that controlled much of Anbar and Diyala Governorates.<sup>5</sup> After Zarqawi’s death AQI’s (hereafter referred to as ISI) administration of the two Governorates was so oppressive that it spawned the “Anbar Awakening”, which saw the Sunni tribes in Anbar unite against ISI. The question as to whether or not the Sunni tribes would have been able to throw off the ISI yoke by themselves was rendered moot by the US “Surge” in 2007. The combination of the Awakening and the Surge reversed ISI’s gains in western Iraq to the point that by 2008, US forces had driven ISI from the major population centers in Diyala and Mosul.<sup>6</sup>

From 2008 to 2010, the US had ISI on the defensive. During that period, the US killed or captured most of ISI’s top leaders. In May 2010, after its two previous

leaders were eliminated by the US, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became ISI’s new leader. Al-Baghdadi brought many former officers from Saddam Hussein’s armed forces and Baathist Party into ISI.<sup>7</sup> Al-Baghdadi and ISI’s new leadership continued to struggle through 2011 until two events, unrest in Syria and Iraq associated with the Arab Spring and the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, combined to breathe new life into ISI.

ISI took advantage of the turmoil in Syria to begin creating anti-Assad cells there as early as 2011. By early 2012, ISI had established the Jabhat al-Nusra Front (NF) in Syria.<sup>8</sup> NF and ISI would eventually split into two groups, but ISI’s move into Syria through its NF initiative allowed ISI to shift its base from western Iraq where it was being pummeled by US forces to the relative safety of Syria. Once established in Syria, ISI seized control of large tracts of territory and established its capital at Raqqa.

In the second event, the US withdrawal gave Iraq’s new Prime Minister Nouri Kamil Mohammed Hasan al-Maliki free reign. Almost immediately Maliki began a series of political maneuvers that alienated the Sunni tribes that had partnered with the US during the Awakening. As a result of Maliki’s abuses, many of the Sunni tribes in Iraq broke with the government of Iraq, thereby creating the conditions for ISI’s return to power in Anbar and Diyala Governorates.<sup>9</sup>

In 2013, ISI changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and the derivative form often used interchangeably, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). ISIL split with AQI in early 2014 due to conflicts over strategy and methods. In January 2014 ISIL expanded its domain with the capture of Ramadi and Fallujah in Anbar Governorate, Iraq.<sup>10</sup> In June 2014 ISIS leader al-Baghdadi declared ISIS a Caliphate and the group renamed itself the Islamic State (IS), though it is still commonly referred to as ISIS or ISIL. At the time al-Baghdadi declared a Caliphate, ISIL’s territory extended from Aleppo, Syria in the west to Diyala, Iraq in the east.

With the help of Sunni insurgent groups ISIL captured Iraq’s second largest city, Mosul, in June 2014. After Mosul, ISIL continued its advance south, taking

Salah al-Din and Diyala Governorates and areas around Baghdad. ISIL's success in Western Iraq and crimes against humanity prompted an international response. The US formed a Coalition to destroy ISIL in September 2014. Since then the Coalition has conducted thousands of airstrikes. In the past few months ISIL has seen its territory reduced by 10-20% in Syria and by 40% in Iraq; recruitment of foreign fighters drop by 90% (from 2,000/month to 200/month); and its revenue drop by 30%.<sup>11,12,13</sup>

## Socio-cultural Trends

ISIL has instigated two phenomena that, while it is too early to describe them as socio-cultural trends, are certainly worthy of mention because they represent significant departures from the traditional role of women in Muslim society. The first of these involves the evolution of women's roles into non-traditional spheres in ISIL-controlled territory.<sup>14</sup> While a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam forbids women to hold roles outside the home and family sphere, ISIL employs women in Iraq and Syria in police and intelligence units. This causes them to be physically adjacent to men, which is a contradiction of Islamic law that forbids regular contact between women and non-related men.

ISIL also uses women to recruit other women by conveying the myth that women have "vital support roles, devout jihadi husbands, a home in a true Islamic state and the opportunity to devote their lives to their religion and their god."<sup>15</sup> ISIL's departure from tradition is even greater in Libya where it is reported women are training to become combat fighters.<sup>16</sup>

The second, and perhaps more radical socio-cultural change ISIL is imposing involves altering the traditional sexual norms within Islam. "Sexual jihad" (*jihad al-nikah*) provides for unmarried women to offer sex to the ISIL fighters, either as volunteers or prisoners. This practice is a recruiting tool for new fighters to the cause.<sup>17</sup> It allows and encourages pre-marital sex, forcing captured women to act as "comfort women," or sex-slaves for its fighters, without the blessing of marriage.<sup>18</sup> ISIL has effectively weaponized rape using brutal sex crimes as a means to punish and instill terror. Although there has been considerable backlash in the form of righteous indignation in the Western media, there are no reports of backlash within ISIL-controlled territories.<sup>19</sup>

## Beliefs (Folklore, Religion, Worldview)

The defining feature of ISIL's culture is religion. Many analysts describe ISIL's application of its beliefs as "weaponizing religion" and term its version of Islam "radical Islam," "Islamic fascism,"<sup>20</sup> or "Islamic extremism."<sup>21</sup> ISIL's central ideological belief system is *Neo-Salafist rite Sunni Islam*, an extremely militant and conservative branch within Sunni Islam. *Salafism* is a Sunni Islamic sect that adheres to a literal interpretation of the Quran and Sharia Law.<sup>22</sup> It idealizes the life and times of Mohammed while rejecting modernity. ISIL follows a jihadist version of this sect.

ISIL's worldview is based on the Salafist Sunni branch of Islam. It is an interpretive form, essentially meaning that anyone who does not "submit" to Islamic Sharia law is either a *kafir* (infidel) or a *murtad* (apostate) and subject to Islamic Sharia justice. Within Salafist Islam use of violence to spread the faith is permissible and encouraged.<sup>23</sup>

ISIL's fundamentalist worldview sees all people as either "one of us" or a "disbeliever/enemy." It is a dichotomous worldview in which only those Sunni Muslims adhering to ISIL's interpretation of the Quran and the Hadiths are true Muslims. This creates an "in-group" composed of ISIL members and an "out-group" of everyone else.

ISIL folklore harkens to a 7th century "Golden Age" when the pure, holy Islamic Caliphate ruled the Arabian Peninsula and much of the Levant. ISIL's goal is to reestablish the Caliphate. Its narratives support this ambition describing life in the first Caliphate in terms of an Islamic Eden unspoiled by infidels or apostates. The narratives also describe a final apocalypse in which the forces of Islam triumph over the non-believers ushering in the new, worldwide Caliphate.<sup>24</sup> According to Islamic scholar Will McCants, ISIL leaders have combined two of the most powerful yet contradictory ideas in Islam – the return of the Islamic Empire and the end of the world – into a mission and a narrative that shapes its strategy and inspires its army of zealous fighters and converts.<sup>25</sup>

## Values

The Joint Staff defines a value as "...an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct is preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct."<sup>26</sup> ISIL's leaders believe that their actions are guided by God's will as revealed in the Quran and Hadith.<sup>27,28</sup> As true Muslims, they value all things they define as Islamic, because those things are from God. Conversely, they reject all things they define as non-Islamic, because those things are not from God. It is their enduring belief that they are implementing the will of God that serves as the impetus and moral justification for ISIL's leaders to follow the particularly brutal mode of conduct they have chosen to employ.

As mentioned earlier, ISIL's leaders' convictions that they are the sole arbitrators of God's will establishes a dichotomous relationship with the rest of the world. Co-religionists who subscribe to ISIL's vision of a worldwide Caliphate are readily accepted into the *umma* (Muslim community) regardless of ethnicity, national origin, or even tribal affiliation. Those not accepting ISIL's vision are infidels or apostates and are, therefore, not eligible for the benefits of membership. There is no in-between. One either submits to ISIL, and is rewarded with ISIL's largesse and protection or one rejects ISIL, is labeled apostate/infidel, and suffers the consequences.

## Behavior

ISIL employs a classic carrot and stick behavioral approach. ISIL provides its male adherents material carrots such as the best apartments, above average wages, and wives and/or sex slaves. It also provides its male adherents non-material carrots in the form of religious edification, adventure, and a sense of belonging. ISIL also provides its female members material and non-material carrots, albeit at a reduced scale, such as husbands, prestigious positions in the morality police, and nicer residences than they might have otherwise had.

ISIL employs *jihad* as its stick to protect and expand its notion of an idealized Islamic society. Indeed, ISIL employs a particularly brutal form of jihad that includes many actions deemed barbaric by the world community. For example, ISIL has legitimized and normalized rape of non-adherents as part of its accepted code of ethical behavior, including codifying

slavery guidelines issued by the Islamic State Research and Fatwa Department (July, 2015).<sup>29</sup> The systematic rape of women and girls from the Yazidi religious minority and other "pagans" has become deeply enmeshed in the organization and ISIL's cultural theology.<sup>30</sup> ISIL maintains that slavery is a custom enshrined in ancient Sharia Law.

Similar to its abuse of nonconforming women, ISIL's behavior towards male nonconformists and enemies is equally draconian. In the territory it controls, ISIL amputates hands of thieves and throws homosexuals from the top of buildings. When ISIL conquers new territory, it routinely executes prisoners of war, most of whom are fellow Muslims. While most prisoners are simply shot, ISIL has also burned prisoners alive, tied them to chairs and drowned them in a swimming pool, and crucified them.

ISIL's failure to value anything it deems non-Islamic also provides its moral justification for destroying and/or looting World Heritage sites, such as the one in Palmyra, Syria. ISIL's selling of antiquities on the black market, however, offers evidence of a possible mercenary motive behind ISIL's destruction of historic sites. Conservative estimates suggest that the mere plunder derived from asset seizures – not including taxes, oil revenue and other revenue sources – has a total value exceeding billions of dollars.<sup>31</sup>

## Acculturation and Indoctrination

Acculturation refers to the two-way interactional effects occurring between members of different cultures as they go through a process of mutual assimilation, and accommodation to, one another.<sup>32,33</sup>

ISIL inculcates adult recruits and kidnapped children with its worldview through a systematic process to effect "mass mind control."<sup>34</sup> ISIL's first step in its acculturation process is to provide its inductees with new identities. ISIL accomplishes this by giving inductees new, Islamic names and separating inductees from their home environments. This cuts them off from any support/social networks forces they may have had and compels them to form support networks within ISIL. Once recruits are renamed and isolated, ISIL starts a religious indoctrination process in which all recruits are taught ISIL's particular interpretation of Islam. It has even been reported that as part of a rite of passage ISIL recruits have to behead a prisoner.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the indoctrination process,

ISIL manipulates recruits through a combination of enticements (i.e., sex slaves, money, and housing) and punishments.

In addition to the formal process it uses to indoctrinate its fighters, ISIL employs two methods to acculturate the general population in its domain. First it employs a Morality Police, the *Hisbah*, to enforce its values at every level of society. The *Hisbah* is composed of male and female units, who have been indoctrinated and then impose ISIL's Sharia Law rules and punishments on the people in ISIL-held territories. Second, ISIL uses public displays of violence to inculcate its values on the population. Whether people view ISIL's brutality live or through its media, ISIL is clearly using brutality to send a message regarding what is and is not acceptable conduct.

## Taboos

The only prohibition or taboo seems to be that an ISIL sex slave may not have sexual contact if she is pregnant.<sup>36</sup>

## Analysis

ISIL is best understood as the product of both design and coincidence. It is a product of design because its founder, al-Zarqawi of al-Qaeda, envisioned establishing an Islamic state governed in accordance with his interpretation of Islamic teaching in the general area ISIL now controls. It is also a product of coincidence. Had any of a significant number of independent actors chosen different courses of action, the conditions that allowed al-Zarqawi and his successors to exploit the chaos in Iraq and Syria might not have occurred.

Given ISIL's conservative interpretation of Islamic principles, it is unlikely that the two changes in social norms it has initiated regarding women are intended as emancipating measures. They are more likely pragmatic measures taken to further political goals. By creating a women's police force, ISIL is solving a problem inherent in Muslim societies. Specifically, under certain interpretations of Islamic law, males may not police females. So a female police force furthers ISIL's population control efforts by creating a means to police women. It also has a secondary benefit of creating the illusion for potential female recruits from western countries that ISIL is more progressive

than it really is. As for the change in policy regarding premarital sex, this is probably more an incentive for the men than it is for women.

Any religious culture or state's ideology exerts a powerful influence because it imbues a regime's actions with spiritual or existential authority in addition to secular authority. ISIL is a religious ideologue in practice and spirit. Its leaders, fighters and supporters make themselves over in the image of the ideology, creating no space for dissent from other, more mainstream Sunni Islamic ideological norms. The process is designed to penetrate individual consciousness and alter perception. A situation where the ideology does not reign supreme is unimaginable to ISIL adherents. ISIL subscribes to its fundamental dynamic of belief in ideological supremacy. The heirs to ISIL will not concede ideological defeat along with military defeat, which is what makes radical jihadism intractable.

ISIL's dichotomous worldview provides the moral justification for its savagery. In ISIL's "you are with me or against me" worldview, apostates and infidels deserve no quarter. Because ISIL is implementing its interpretation of the will of God, any and all breaches in traditional behavior are impermissible.

At its core ISIL is a fascist organization. To be sure it is Islamic, but it is also fascist from the perspective that the Islamic State is everything and there is nothing outside the Islamic State. ISIL's fascist nature animates its actions. Its brutality, deviation from traditional Islamic values regarding women, etc. are all justified as service to the Islamic State. Additionally, because the State is everything, it follows that survival of the State is paramount. This begs the question: What will happen if the State is threatened with extermination in the Levant? Based on ISI's actions when threatened with defeat in Iraq, if the situation in the Levant becomes untenable, ISIL will relocate. ISIL's actions in Libya maybe a precursor to such a move.

ISIL's acculturation process reinforces its emphasis on the criticality of the State. Its indoctrination program imbues recruits with its values, which can only be expected to perpetuate the barbarity it employs.

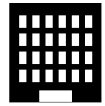
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## 7. INFRASTRUCTURE



ISIL has acquired the pre-existing infrastructure that has survived the wars in both Iraq and Syria as well as its own battles for the areas it has occupied. While the condition of this infrastructure varies from place to place and from type to type, incompetence, neglect, Coalition airstrikes, and attacks by local adversary militias continue to batter it. ISIL has official programs in place to maintain and improve portions of this infrastructure, but it is unclear just how comprehensive these are, or if they are able to keep pace with the destruction continuing to be inflicted in combat. This chapter will briefly discuss the public, private, and government structures in ISIL territory, as well as utility and transportation infrastructures that are under its control.

### Military Structures

ISIL has for the most part reused, repurposed or destroyed existing military infrastructure based on its own needs (or lack thereof). A number of military

facilities—along with equipment, munitions, and vehicles—have been seized by ISIL in both Syria and Iraq since the start of its campaign.<sup>1,2</sup> ISIL has also established a network of jihadist training camps, which dot the landscape throughout its territory in Syria and Iraq. The map in Figure 7.1 highlights the approximate distribution of these camps and their statuses (as of April 2016) based on reporting by the Long War Journal.<sup>3</sup>

ISIL also operates a number of staging areas, checkpoints, tunnel systems, and tactical units, many of which have been targeted and hit by Coalition airstrikes as shown in Figure 7.2.<sup>4,5</sup>

### Law Enforcement Structures

In addition to reusing facilities left behind by previous law enforcement entities, ISIL repurposes existing structures to fit whatever roles it deems necessary. For example, basements and former office spaces in seized

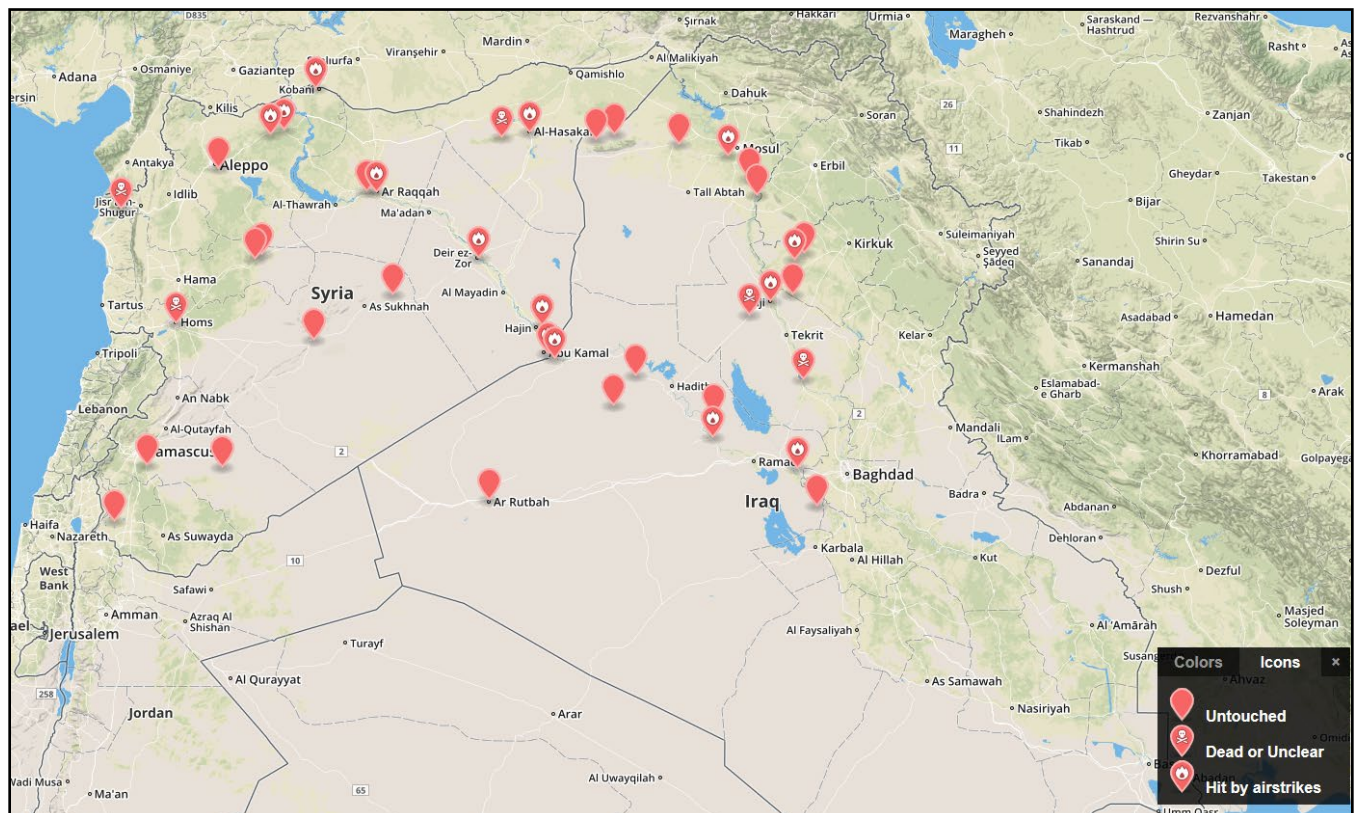


Figure 7.1. Map showing location and status of ISIL jihadist training camps. Source: the Long War Journal.



governmental buildings have been in some cases converted to makeshift prisons.<sup>6,7</sup> In a more extreme example, alleged ISIL prisons have even consisted of networks of holes in the ground, covered with metal panels.<sup>8</sup> Checkpoints set up to facilitate ISIL's strict enforcement of its interpretation of Sharia law are ubiquitous in its controlled areas.<sup>9</sup>

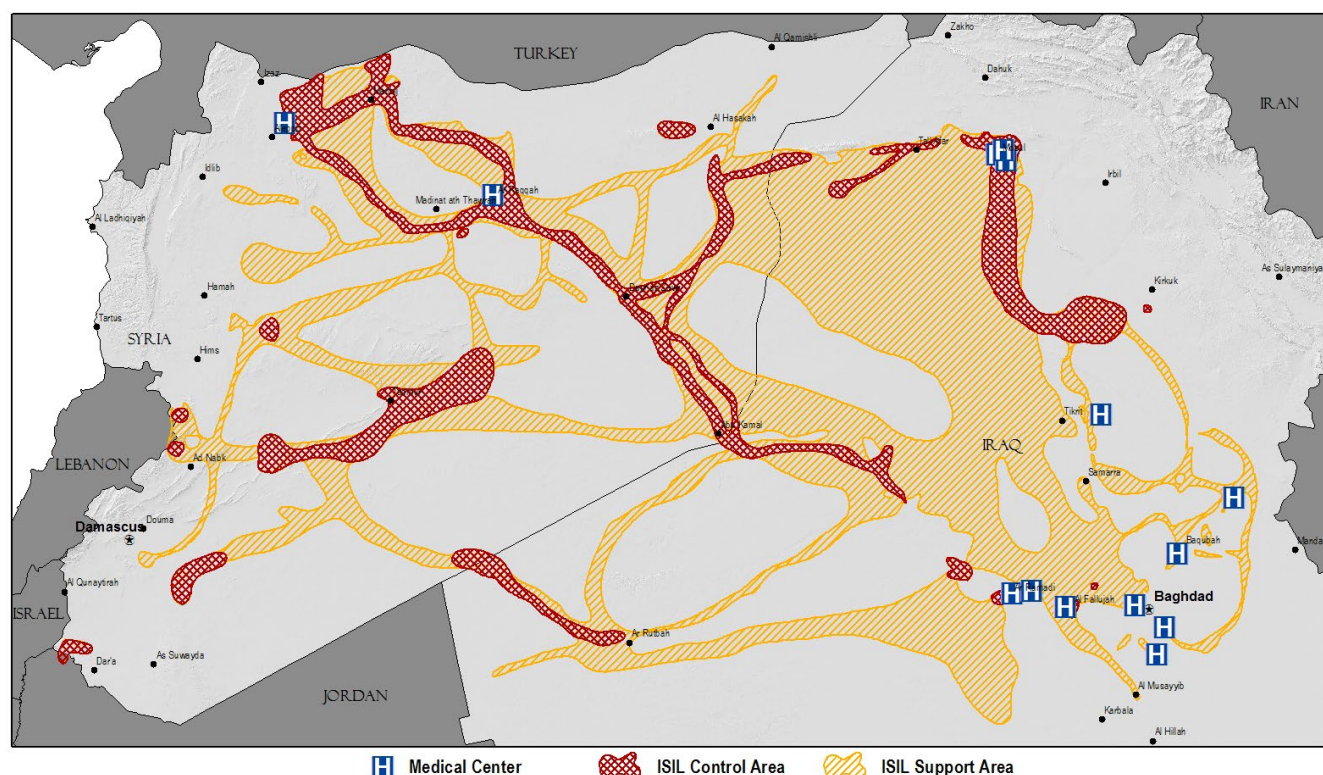
## Medical Infrastructure

Much like other structures in ISIL-controlled territory, ISIL has acquired pre-existing medical facilities which in many cases have retained the pre-existing medical staff. ISIL reporting indicates that hospitals in Raqqa and Deir al-Zour on the Syrian side are fully staffed, and early on, both Damascus and Baghdad continued to pay the salaries of doctors and support staff in ISIL-controlled areas.<sup>10,11</sup> However, Baghdad has since ceased sending out paychecks to employees in ISIL areas, and a *Financial Times* report indicates that hospitals in Deir al-Zour are staffed with fewer than 50 doctors and nurses each.<sup>12,13</sup> In other cases, where medical staff have fled ISIL-controlled areas, threats of property seizure—amongst other things—have been implemented in an effort to force



**Figure 7.2. ISIL infrastructure damaged or destroyed as of 17 March 2016. Source: CENTCOM CCCI.**

staff to return to their duties.<sup>14</sup> ISIL official media paints the picture of renovated, cleaned, and fully staffed facilities, although the actual state of affairs likely varies from place to place and as a whole is uncertain.<sup>15</sup> The map in Figure 7.3 indicates the location of some of the pre-existing medical facilities inside ISIL support territory (as determined by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency), but is not



**Figure 7.3. Medical Centers in ISIL support territory. Data sources: National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency GeoNames, Institute for the Study of War, Natural Earth v2.0.**



exhaustive.<sup>16</sup> ISIL claims to provide a free health care system patterned after the United Kingdom's system. Evidence indicates, however, that this is little more than propaganda. In reality, ISIL is short of doctors and nurses.<sup>17</sup> Also, ISIL prioritizes medical care for its fighters at the expense of civilians, which has engendered mistrust among the civilian populace.<sup>18</sup>

## Educational Infrastructure

Many schools in ISIL-controlled territory have either been destroyed, closed, or repurposed. Those that remain open have had radical changes implemented to the curriculum, the length of education, and the student population.<sup>19</sup> Changes in the curriculum include eliminating topics of study such as national history, literature, geography and art in favor of content that intends to indoctrinate the male youth.<sup>20,21</sup> Sources differ on whether courses in the hard sciences are permitted to be taught. A Middle East correspondent for the *Telegraph* reports that courses in the hard sciences are permitted in order to "fulfill the needs of the ministries," and that ISIL is actively seeking engineers to keep the infrastructure working.<sup>22</sup> However, an Institute for the Study of War report indicates that there is no evidence of any secular instruction of any kind, hard sciences or otherwise; rather, the curriculum is solely characterized by religious study and formal schooling ends at the elementary level.<sup>23</sup> Only boys receive formal education

and then only for six years.

## Economic Infrastructure

Banks and financial institutions are of tremendous importance to ISIL, as the financial activities of any governmental entity cannot be carried out practically without electronic banking. ISIL has seized large amounts of cash by simply looting banks in areas it occupies; however, the cash itself amounts to only a fraction of what ISIL has in its coffers.<sup>24,25</sup> While considerable efforts have been undertaken to detach banks under ISIL control from the international banking system, ISIL has overcome this by conducting transactions in banks just outside its realm of control.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Assad regime makes little effort to detach ISIL's seized banks on the Syria side due to its desire to continue its mutually beneficial relationship and maintain its own banking interests with ISIL.<sup>27,28</sup> The importance of the availability of electronic banking is underscored by the ongoing attacks by Coalition forces on ISIL cash depots. It is estimated that upward of \$800 million in cash has been destroyed as of April 2016.<sup>29,30</sup>

## Religious Structures

ISIL has systematically destroyed or repurposed any and all religious structures in its territory that are not specifically Sunni Muslim mosques practicing its specific ideology. The destruction of religious and



Figure 7.4. ISIL's destruction of Nimrud. Imagery from DigitalGlobe EV WebHosting.



historical sites serves three purposes. First, it fulfills requirements of its ideology to destroy anything connected to idolatry, polytheism, or apostates.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, it attracts the attention of the media, thereby increasing the potential to enlist new recruits—Palmyra and Nimrud (shown in Figure 7.4) are two high-profile examples of ancient archaeological site destruction that were well-covered in the international media.<sup>32</sup> Finally, it generates enormous amounts of revenue in the sale of looted artifacts plundered from the sites.<sup>33</sup> While there has been considerable backlash to this plundering of antiquities from the international community, there is no evidence of any from within ISIL-controlled territories.

## Civic Infrastructure

Several programs have been enacted by ISIL with the express function of maintaining the civic infrastructure. In addition to helping build new businesses and encouraging workers to resume their jobs, ISIL has programs in place to keep these businesses running properly and keeping the populace safe. For example, ISIL has a “health and safety” department that inspects food being sold in marketplaces as well as ensuring that customers are not being price gouged.<sup>34</sup> There is no evidence as to whether or not these procedures are working or how they are received by the general public.

On the other end of the spectrum, it is important to note the state of civic infrastructure in areas that ISIL formerly occupied and has been driven from. The town of Sinjar in northern Iraq was “decimated, leveled to the ground” according to a local attempting to return to the town.<sup>35</sup> The images in Figure 7.5 show the condition of one part of the town before and after

the ISIL occupation. This appears to be a standard practice for ISIL, employing its “scorched-earth” policy in territories it has had to abandon.<sup>36</sup>

## Oil Industry

The single largest revenue generator for ISIL other than taxation and theft is the oil industry, at one time accounting for estimated revenues of up to 1.5 million USD per day.<sup>37</sup> While the lack of expertise to maintain and operate the oil extraction and refinement facilities has resulted in lower outputs, ISIL is still able to produce and sell tens of thousands of barrels per day.<sup>38</sup> The main oil-producing region under ISIL’s control is in the eastern Syrian Governorate of Deir al-Zour, which is home to the largest concentration of oilfields and refineries in ISIL territory.<sup>39</sup> The map in Figure 7.6 gives a snapshot of ISIL’s oil industry, including the extraction sites, the refineries, and the routes by which oil is moved and smuggled out of its areas of control.<sup>40</sup>

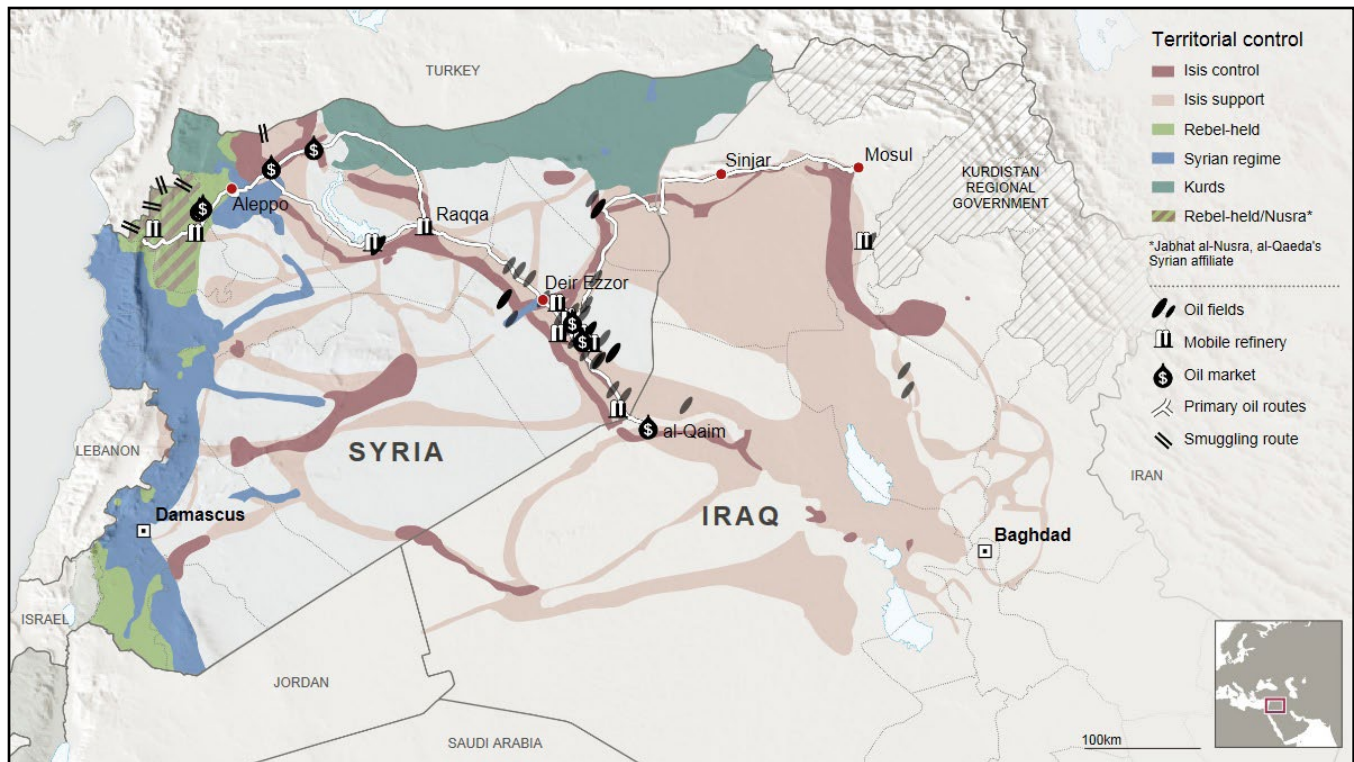
Hampering ISIL’s oil industry effort are the ongoing airstrikes carried out by Coalition forces on both refineries and extraction sites. However, these strikes have the unintended side effect of demoralizing locals, as they see this infrastructure as crucial to their livelihoods.<sup>41</sup>

Another important industry in ISIL territory is agriculture, in particular wheat and barley. Theft and reselling of these crops is yet another source of revenue for ISIL militants.<sup>42</sup> However, much as with the civic infrastructure, ISIL has implemented a “scorched-earth” policy in the agricultural areas it has been forced to retreat from. Farm equipment has been looted, irrigation systems have been dismantled and cannibalized, and booby traps have been placed, for all



Figure 7.5. Destruction of Sinjar, Iraq. Imagery from DigitalGlobe EV WebHosting.



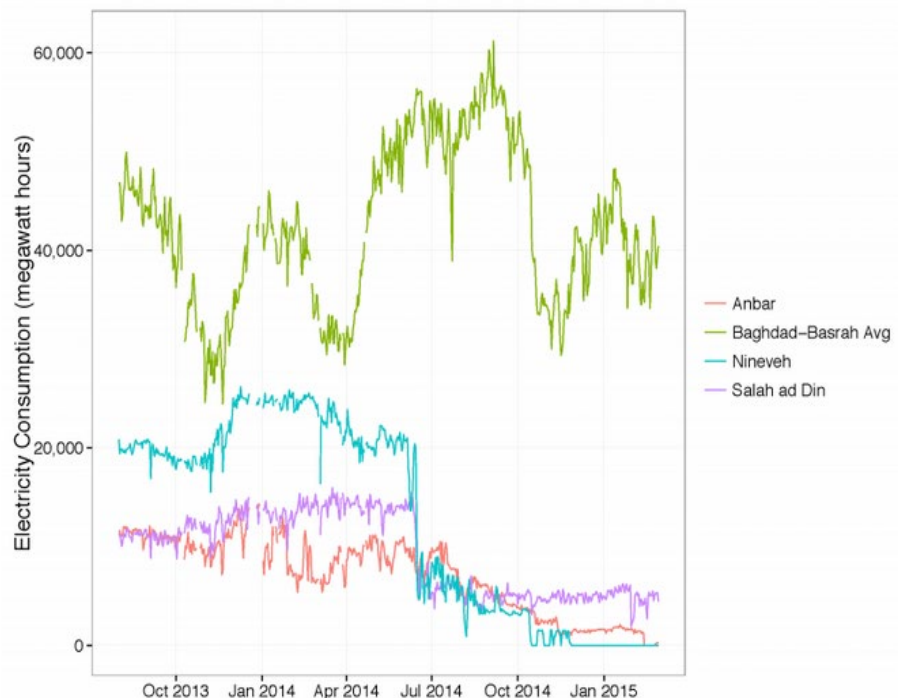


**Figure 7.6. ISIL's oil industry.** Source: *Financial Times*

practical purposes destroying portions of formerly arable land.<sup>43</sup> Another industry in ISIL territories is the extraction and processing of phosphates, sulfur, and other chemicals.<sup>44</sup> More recently, ISIL has taken to operating fish farms and car dealerships to offset revenue lost by the bombardment of the oil infrastructure.<sup>45</sup>

### Private Dwellings

Refugees fleeing from ISIL-controlled areas have left many private dwellings empty, yet ISIL has in some cases driven residents out of their homes to make room for fighters and their families.<sup>46</sup> In more brutal cases, ISIL has destroyed homes completely, particularly those of known Christians.<sup>47</sup> ISIL may also destroy homes in areas that they are driven from, as is suggested by the images in Figure 7.5 above.



**Figure 7.7. Electricity consumption over time in Iraq.** Source: *Foreign Affairs*

## Power Grid

As is the case with other infrastructure in its territory, ISIL has acquired the pre-existing power grid and has taken firm control of it as yet another angle of leverage over the population. On the Iraq side, ISIL's seizure of the power grid has resulted in striking changes in the level of electricity provided to the people; in some cases being cut off completely.<sup>48</sup> The graph in Figure 7.7 demonstrates the changes in electricity consumption before and after the ISIL invasion, compared with the power consumption in Baghdad and Basra, two areas uncompromised by ISIL.<sup>49</sup>

## Local Experts

Brain drain is a clear problem for ISIL. The mass exodus of skilled workers from ISIL territories has left public establishments such as hospitals and schools severely understaffed.<sup>50</sup> In some cases, positions are filled by people clearly underqualified for the jobs or who have backgrounds in entirely different areas of expertise.<sup>51</sup> One mitigating factor during the early months of ISIL occupation was that the public employees working in ISIL-controlled areas still received pay from the Syrian and Iraqi governments, potentially encouraging them to continue their

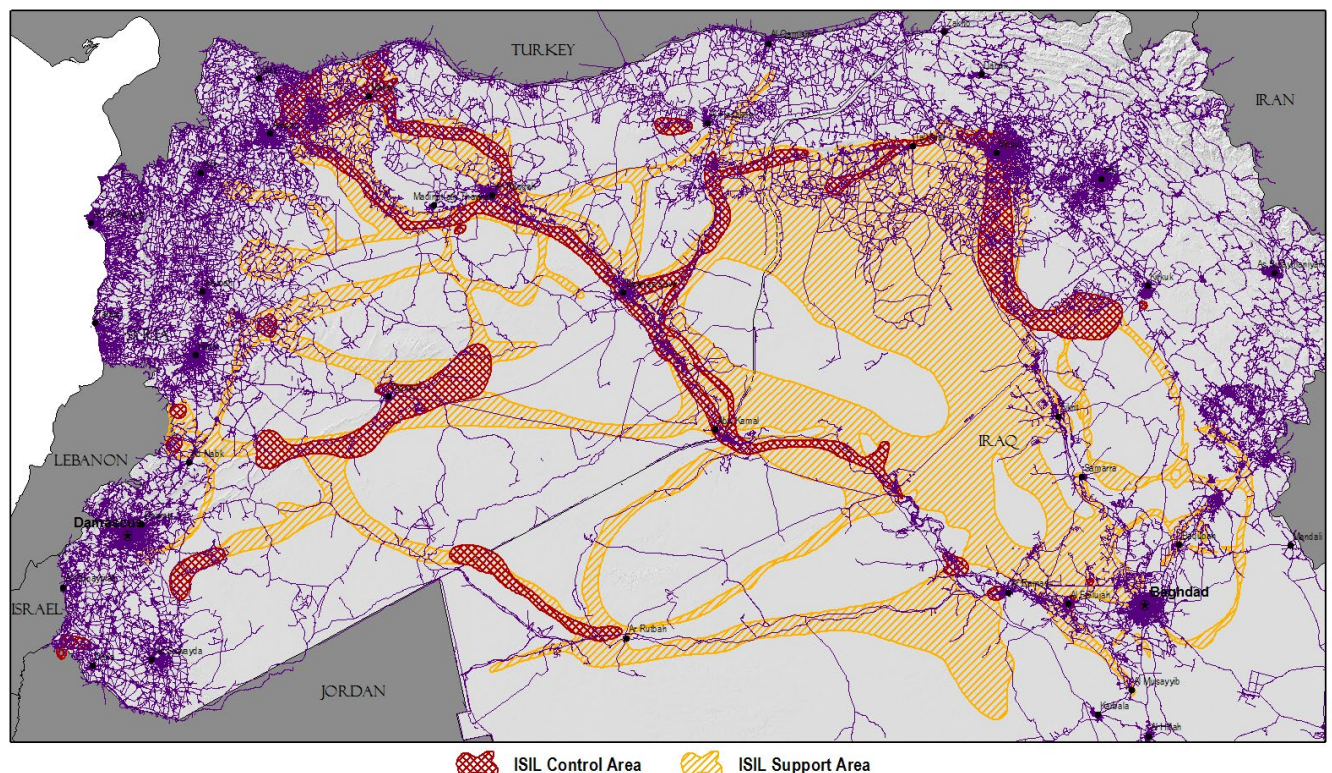
work.<sup>52,53</sup> However, Baghdad has since stopped paying these workers, and it is unclear what the longer-term repercussions of this will be.<sup>54</sup>

## Air Transportation

There is little to no information about domestic or international non-military air travel within ISIL-controlled areas. As ISIL has destroyed the runway at Mosul International Airport, arguably the largest commercial airport in its territory, it is unlikely that there are any major flights in, out, or within ISIL-controlled areas.<sup>55</sup>

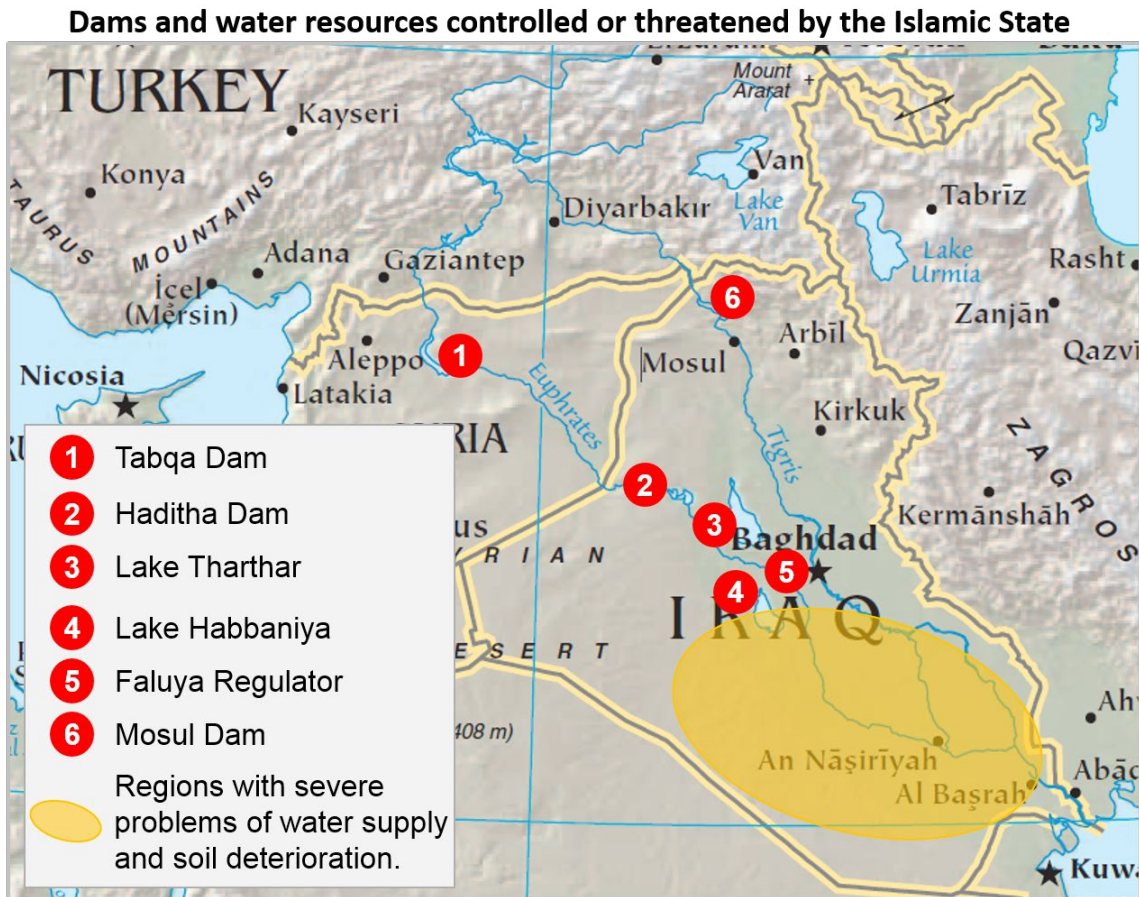
## Surface Transportation

As with most of the other infrastructure, ISIL has acquired the road network that existed prior to its occupation, and has been reported to perform standard maintenance such as fixing potholes, repairing medians, and painting dividing lines.<sup>56</sup> It has also enacted transit programs to transport people by bus between ISIL-controlled territories.<sup>57</sup> A map of roads in and around ISIL-support territories is shown in Figure 7.8.



**Figure 7.8. Road network in and around ISIL territory. Data sources: Natural Earth v2.0, Institute for the Study of War, OpenStreetMap.**





**Figure 7.9. Dams and water resources controlled by ISIL. Source: *The International Policy***

## Water Infrastructure

Control of the water infrastructure is key to ISIL's plan for the Caliphate. By providing running water to the population, ISIL helps legitimize itself as a functioning government while simultaneously enjoying the leverage provided by controlling resources essential for the population's survival.<sup>58</sup> ISIL has already demonstrated its willingness to utilize that leverage by both flooding areas and depriving areas of water in an effort demonstrate its strength and bend the will of the populace.<sup>59</sup> ISIL maintains control of several dams in its territory, mostly along the Euphrates River. Figure 7.9 shows the location of some of these dams, although the Mosul Dam has been reclaimed by Kurdish Peshmerga forces since the publication of this map.<sup>60</sup>

As with other elements of the infrastructure, ISIL uses local expertise as well as international recruits to handle maintenance and upkeep.<sup>61</sup>

## Analysis

Maintaining a viable infrastructure requires individuals with knowledge of the underlying systems and architecture. At present, it appears ISIL has—or at least claims to have—programs and experts in place to maintain at least portions of the infrastructure. However, the oft-reported increase in focus on religious education in lieu of the hard sciences along with the dwindling number of individuals qualified to manage the infrastructure and educate others to do so seem to foreshadow an inevitable collapse. Despite this unsustainability, it is unclear whether or not maintaining this infrastructure in the long term is actually of any real importance or of strategic benefit to ISIL. Its “scorched-earth” policy along with its declarations that the apocalypse is imminent support the notion that thinking about the future is not an ISIL priority.

While “brain drain” is certainly a problem ISIL faces, much of the physical infrastructure already lies



tattered due to years of war and neglect. In addition, ISIL has done its own part in the dismantling of the infrastructure via looting and repurposing portions of it for its own needs. Finally, the continuing bombardment by Coalition forces will certainly do nothing to improve the situation, and in some ways may act to alienate the very people they are attempting to liberate by destroying an infrastructure that they may need to rely on in the future once ISIL is no longer a threat.

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## 8. COMMUNICATIONS



The purpose of ISIL's communications network is to support the reestablishment of a Caliphate.<sup>1</sup> ISIL intends its communication operations to assist in stimulating recruitment, securing its population base, expanding its territory, intimidating and demoralizing local and global audiences, and assisting in creating an anti-Western consensus among the world's Muslims. Brendan Koerner spoke to this in his April 2016 *Wired* article when he wrote, "ISIL's propaganda was crafted not just to stir the hearts of potential recruits but also to boost the organization's ghastly brand—to reinforce Westerners' perception of the Islamic State and its devotees as ruthless beyond comprehension."<sup>2</sup>

### Language

#### Verbal

ISIL holds to a consistent verbal message, establishing a Caliphate should be the goal of all Muslims, and enemies of the Caliphate (apostates/infidels) must convert or die. Integral to its message is the theme that martyrdom is normal and death should be sought and celebrated.<sup>3</sup>

Most of ISIL's online material is in Arabic, but it also uses English and other languages. ISIL's use of multiple languages is a public relations coup in that it projects the image of ISIL as a global organization. For example, former English-speaking ISIL spokesman, Mohammed Emwazi, who was dubbed by the English-speaking media "Jihadi John", created a sensation when the first videos of him beheading a prisoner surfaced across the Internet.<sup>4</sup>

Various sources have compared ISIL's branding and messaging activities to a western media conglomerate.<sup>5,6</sup> Dr. Shiraz Maher of London-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), said that, "Isis (sic) are the coolest, most attractive outfit right now to young people."<sup>7</sup> ISIL's blending of Islamic terms with street language in its messaging has contributed to a new dialect termed "Jihadi cool,"<sup>8</sup> which continues to evolve among the English-language ISIL fraternity on social media platforms.

#### Non-verbal Language

ISIL created distinctive symbolic repertoires by producing its own flag, banners, currency, gesture, signs, symbols, brand logo, and clothing.<sup>9,10</sup> ISIL also has an official slogan, "*Baqiya wa Tatamaddad*" (Remaining and Expanding).<sup>11</sup> ISIL's most recognized non-verbal symbol is its black flag. Other common non-verbal symbols are its brand logo (the ISIL stamp); the orange jumpsuits on western prisoners; and the black clothes, bandannas and facemasks worn by its soldiers, and has its own salute, the index finger of the right hand pointing heavenward.<sup>12</sup>

ISIL symbols have been adopted by other parts of the Muslim world. For example, entrepreneurs from Indonesia have developed a clothing line with the ISIL brand on t-shirts, bandannas, military-style cargo pants and women's all-black coverage clothing. The pictures in Figure 8.1 of *Islami Giyim* store in Turkey show examples of an ISIL-inspired clothing line.

ISIL is also aware of the importance certain symbols have towards its legitimacy as a nation state. For example, nation states coin their own money. Starting in October 2014, ISIL began minting its own coinage. ISIL was not content with merely minting its own coinage, however. Showing its appreciation of symbolism, ISIL revived the silver and golden dinars of the First Caliphate as the official currency of the State, which of course meant to show the link between it and that first Caliphate. Another symbol of state legitimacy was ISIL opening its own bank in Mosul in January 2015 to offer Islamic loans and facilitate currency exchange. ISIL also licenses vehicles within its territory and issues license plates, which is a legitimate function of government. Even ISIL's police force, the *Hisbah*, with its black and white police cars with affixed ISIL logo, its uniforms, and its distinctive flag are symbols of ISIL's legitimacy.

#### Methods

ISIL disseminates its message via the Internet, print media, media outlets, instant messaging, smart phones, radio, and television. ISIL employs mainstream techniques for boosting user engagement across its social platforms. In fact, ISIL's media juggernaut is





Figure 8.1. *Islami Giyim* Storefront and ISIL products in Ankara, Turkey.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 8.2. ISIL Currency, brand logo and ubiquitous flag.<sup>14</sup>

considered just as modern and adept as the West's.<sup>15</sup> ISIL has exhibited media savviness by crowdsourcing its social media activity, which often includes graphic violence. It does so openly, not in the shadows or on the Dark Web.

Only a small fraction of ISIL's online output depicts the kind of brutality for which it is now famous. Most of its content presents what ISIL deems positive aspects of life within its territory, such as successful economic development projects and military operations. ISIL often targets specific Muslim enclaves with its videos.<sup>16</sup> This content is meant to persuade prospective recruits that the ISIL Empire is both stable and growing.<sup>17</sup>

## Media Leaders and Outlets

### ISIL Media Leaders

Although ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi relies primarily on former Baathist Party Iraqi loyalists to lead the political and security cabinets, he staffs

recruitment, media production, and religious guidance departments with foreigners. Sources believe he does this to make ISIL appear "globalized" and appeal to international jihadists.<sup>18</sup> Below are the three primary members of ISIL's Media Council. The Council answers directly to al-Baghdadi. They oversee basic provisions for all ISIL media operations, propaganda production, and dissemination to the widest audience possible, and the equivalent of a digital mosque.<sup>19</sup>

**Abu al-Athir Amr al-Absi** is a Shura Council Member and Head of ISIL's Media Council. He is referred to as "the propagandist to Allah"<sup>20</sup> A Syrian national, he was born in 1979 in Saudi Arabia. He is considered one of the top five ISIL leaders, and a possible successor to al-Baghdadi in the event of a leadership decapitation. He is credited with creating ISIL's social media and recruitment campaigns, building the first electronic age digital Caliphate, launching the on-line magazine *Dabiq*, and recruiting Omar Shishani and his Chechen fighters.

**Ahmed Abousamra** is a Syrian national born in France (1981), but brought up in Massachusetts where his father is a well-known endocrinologist. He oversees all of ISIL's global media organizations (outlets) which are regional media offices (e.g., subsumed under the al-Hayat Media Center, such as the Aleppo Governorate Media Office), radio station (i.e., al-Bayan Radio) and propaganda production foundations (i.e., al-Furqan Foundation and al-I'tisam Foundation).<sup>21</sup> He obtained a degree in information technology (IT) and worked in telecommunications before becoming self-radicalized. He held dual Syrian-American nationality.

**Taha Sobhi Falaha** is the spokesperson for ISIL. He is said to have met al-Baghdadi when they were both prisoners at the US Army Detention Center, Camp Bucca.<sup>22,23</sup> He was allegedly imprisoned for five years (2005-2010) under the name Yasser Khalaf Hussein Nazal al-Rawi.<sup>24</sup> His most important contribution to ISIL is his role in social media crowdsourcing and running the digitized Caliphate.<sup>25</sup> As ISIL's spokesperson, it was his voice that announced the creation of the Caliphate.

## ISIL Media Outlets

ISIL's propaganda-producing media organizational network is the vast official and formal mouthpiece for ISIL. This network focuses on disseminating "high

production value" and "high definition" content directed towards a wide-ranging audience.<sup>26</sup> All offices and centers within ISIL's media organization are operated by ISIL staffers and overseen by the top leadership's Media Council. These offices are used to recruit new members and export its brand, narrative, and worldview. The official and state-sanctioned outlets are different than the thousands of unofficial or informal, anonymous "fanboys" or ISIL-supporters who post essays, blogs, poems, videos, tweets, etc. across the Internet—anything to further spread ISIL's narrative. Figure 8.3 depicts the media outlets for the Islamic State's propaganda operation.

**Al-Hayat** (May 2014): This propaganda unit bases operations and offices in Syria. Al-Hayat releases short, snappy films called MujaTweets that show daily life scenes of the *Mujahedeen*.<sup>27</sup> This outlet has global coverage.

**Al-Furqan** (2006): Al-Furqan was the original media mouthpiece of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). It is the outlet used primarily to boast about military operations and post speeches. It has produced entire television series glorifying ISIL's deeds, including "Messages from the Land of Epic Battles," and "Flames of War." These reality TV specials feature ISIL fighters engaged in fierce fighting.<sup>28</sup>

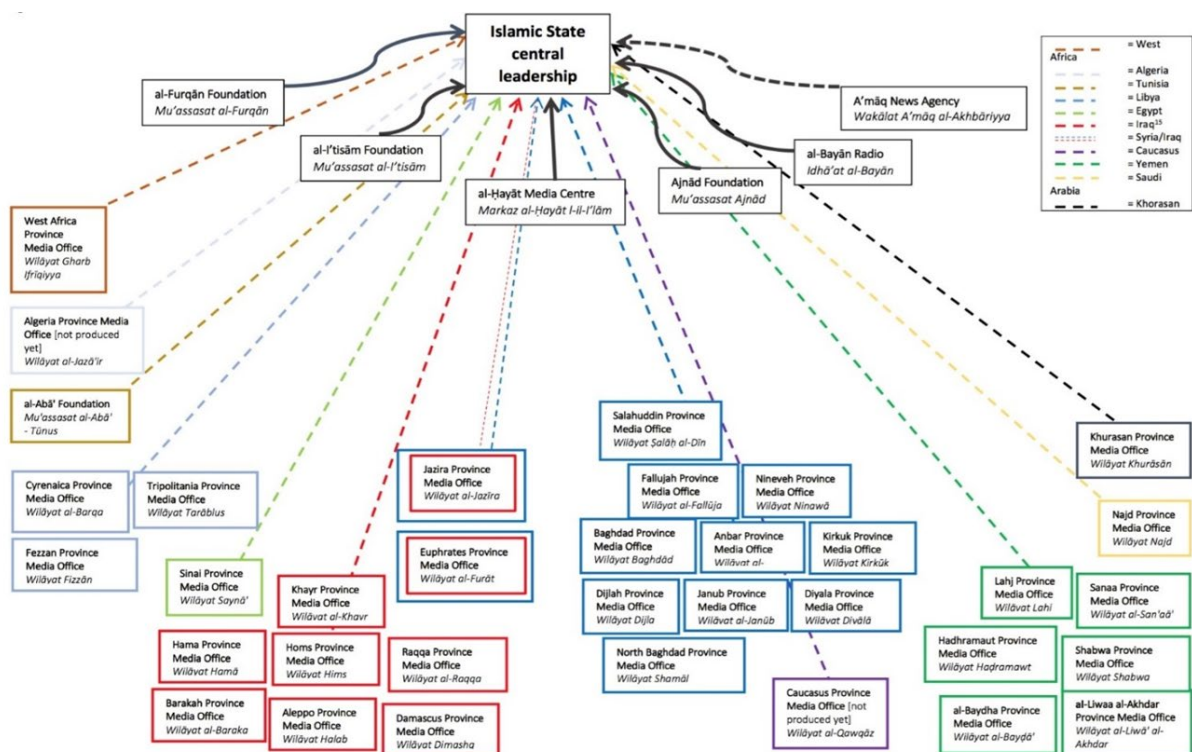


Figure 8.3. ISIL Media Outlets Network.<sup>29</sup>

**Al-Itisam:** This media outlet is a film production unit based in Syria and responsible for most of the slick, high production value videos that Al-Hayat disseminates.

In Syria and Iraq, ISIL organizes its media outlets by provincial center or *wilayat*. Each wilayat runs its own media office with camera operators and editors who produce both audio and videos specific to the news in that region.<sup>30</sup> In one report, a former ISIL media employee claimed that he had been paid \$700 per month.<sup>31</sup>

## Mass Communications

### Radio and TV

ISIL most likely has broadcast capabilities in six radio stations within Syria and twenty in Iraq, as well as two Syrian television stations and nine Iraqi television stations.<sup>32,33,34</sup> According to estimates, ISIL can reach up to forty-two million people in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran and Jordan from these stations.<sup>35,36,37</sup> If those estimates are correct, then ISIL can reach 82.0% of the population in Iraq and 56.4% in Syria.

Below are known ISIL radio and TV stations.<sup>38</sup>

- Islamic State Radio/Islamic State Television
- Aleppo Province News
- Raqqa Province News
- Diyala Province News
- Euphrates Province News
- Radio Station – A-Bayan, based out of Mosul, Iraq
- Satellite TV Station – Tawheed, based in Lybia
- KalifaLive.info. – a 24-hour Internet television channel

### Instant Messaging Platforms

All of ISIL's online networks such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have designated moderators. It has been bombarding the tweeting world with several thousand tweets per day, pushing out its violent, extremist views in hopes of attracting new recruits. These tweets are produced by a small number of ISIL members, estimated to be approximately 500 to 2,000.<sup>39</sup> (In addition, there are thousands of worldwide unofficial and informal ISIL-supporters and bloggers who bombard social media.) Some of ISIL's posts and websites (i.e., Facebook and YouTube) have been shut down or deactivated. Table 8.1 shows instant messaging services ISIL is known to be using. (See

*Wired* article for detailed coverage on "Why ISIS is Winning the Social Media War," April, 2016.

**Table 8.1. Known ISIL Instant Messaging Platforms Used.**<sup>40,41</sup>

PlayStation	Twitter	Skype	Surespot
Internet telephone	Facebook	Instagram	Justpaste
WhatsApp	Kik	Sound Cloud	Tumblr
YouTube	Flickr	Google Play	Telegram <sup>42</sup>

*Muslimbook*, a closely guarded version of Facebook has recently launched, "Dawn of Glad Tidings." It is a mobile phone app and updates users on ISIL's news, and uses Twitter accounts to disseminate information automatically. This app also reaches potential funders.<sup>43</sup> It is reportedly a huge hit. ISIL uses social applications much like radios were used in days past-by employing frequency-hopping. Table 8.2 shows messaging platforms ISIL is suspected of using.

**Table 8.2. Suspected ISIL Instant Messaging Platforms Used.**<sup>44</sup>

Userveice	Slideshare	Vimeo	LinkedIn
Pinterest	Foursquare	Socrata	Blip
Disqus	Github	Ideascale	Ustream

### Print Media

ISIL's crowning achievement in print media is its high quality, glossy magazine *Dabiq*. As part of ISIL's propaganda campaign to recruit foreign fighters, *Dabiq* is translated into multiple languages, including English.<sup>45</sup> It depicts ISIL and its Caliphate in a very positive light, preaching holy war, boasting about military victories and promoting a romantic view of an Islamic Golden Age.<sup>46</sup> *Dabiq* contains photo reports, current events, and informative articles related to ISIL.<sup>47</sup>

ISIL has its own web developers who aggregate their knowledge and developments, producing online resources such as Technical Mujahid, a training manual for jihadists released every two months. ISIL also publishes annual reports on the web, very similar to global businesses.

### Propaganda Videos

ISIL produces and disseminates its propaganda videos to recruit foreign fighters and to shore up local



support. Execution videos grab headlines, but are only a small percentage of ISIL's total media output. In a majority of its videos, ISIL seeks to entice foreign fighters and their families by emphasizing life in an Islamic utopia.<sup>48</sup> For example, one common genre of ISIL videos are the testimonials by recent immigrants regarding the quality of life in the Caliphate.

Another common theme in ISIL videos is its role as the champion of the idealized Islamic state free from pornography and other Western vices. The videos show a State so well-functioning that the regular people interact harmoniously with merchants, tax collectors, and religious police, alike. The videos promise a territory free from any trace of religious persecution and a real Caliphate.<sup>49</sup> The videos also project the image of a strong, secure Caliphate when they show lush farms and allied, non-Levantine groups pledging their allegiance to ISIL.<sup>50</sup>

ISIL also creates video games showcasing its jihadist means and methods of combat, but piggybacking on western, commercial game formats. Recently, ISIL hijacked and modified the extremely popular Grand Theft Auto video game for the Xbox 360. It renamed it *Salil al-Sawarem* (Clashing of Swords). Its intent was to frighten the Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>51</sup>

## Analysis

ISIL has constructed a multi-layered communications system aligned with its political objective of establishing a worldwide Caliphate. ISIL's system fosters compliance within its territory by promoting its legitimacy, nurturing a feeling of belonging among its people, and creating the sense that ISIL is omnipresent. ISIL's multi-layered communication system sets the conditions for external support and expansion providing a conduit for ISIL to link to like-minded Muslims across the globe. Through its global messaging program ISIL attempts to draw foreign fighters to the Levant; create affiliates in other countries; and galvanize worldwide Muslim public opinion against the West.

ISIL's communications effort is centered on a simple, yet consistent, message: ISIL is the new Caliphate. By invoking the earlier Caliphates, ISIL links to Islamic lore, which not only portrays earlier Caliphates as the Islamic Eden, but also predicts the reestablishment of the Caliphate at the end of days. ISIL is also tapping

into an anti-modern/anti-Western strain in the Muslim world by harkening back to past Islamic Empires.

ISIL's self-proclaimed status as the new Caliphate provides it two benefits. First, it offers a vision for Muslims throughout the world to aspire to by reminding them of the goal and conditions of success: one world Caliphate without apostates or infidels. Second, it provides moral justification for the jihadist tactics ISIL uses to maintain and expand its realm.

ISIL employs multiple communications methods to garner support. It uses symbols to reinforce its legitimacy, build unity, and enforce compliance in the areas it controls. It uses mass media to project its message in the areas it controls and those adjacent to it. It uses the Internet and social media to simultaneously reinforce its local media messaging and to reach a global audience.

ISIL uses multiple symbols within the area it controls. ISIL employs some symbols to reinforce its status as a State that controls territory. ISIL's flag, its national motto, and its coinage of money are all nation state functions. ISIL employs other symbols to promote unity. The black masks, bandannas, black cargo pants, indeed the entire jihadi chic line of clothing, promote the ideas of unity, cohesion, and specialness. On the other hand, many ISIL symbols have an ominous side, too. The ever-present black flag, for example, conjures a feeling that dissention will not be tolerated. Additionally, the proliferation of these symbols in ISIL-controlled territory convey a sense that ISIL is everywhere and it is better to acquiesce than resist.

ISIL uses radio and television to solidify its base of support inside its territory and to build support in the five neighboring countries. ISIL's radio and television programming is decentralized, which allows local programmers to address local issues. In this way, ISIL is able to connect with local populations. ISIL saturates the airwaves with positive programming promoting its progress towards an ideal Islamic state. ISIL's positive programming stands in stark contrast to burnings, crucifixions and other forms of cruelty, for which ISIL is most famous, but serves the same purpose. Both are designed to garner support for the Caliphate.

ISIL employs the Internet and social media in the same way and for the same purposes it does its mass media, only the Internet and social media allow ISIL

to broadcast its message worldwide. By projecting its message of an ideal Islamic society worldwide, ISIL is employing these media to support its expansion. It is through these media, ISIL recruits foreign fighters who can join it in the Levant or create their own ISIL affiliate wherever they are.

The Internet and social media are also critical to ISIL's plan to galvanize worldwide Muslim public opinion against the West, in order to bring about the end of days scenario of ISIL mythology. On the one hand, ISIL uses these media to exhibit its military prowess by broadcasting successful tactical operations; to promote its status as a true Islamic state airing videos showing Sharia justice; and to foster an image as an Islamic utopian society by showing happy families living in harmony. On the other hand, ISIL uses these media to foster the concept of ISIL as victim by showing the civilian casualties and infrastructure destruction caused by the West's bombing campaign. The message ISIL intends viewers to take away is the West is attacking Muslims because they are acting as Muslims, which ISIL believes will eventually bring more and more Muslims to its assistance.

In summation, ISIL has developed an almost textbook information operations campaign using all mediums of communications at its disposal to further its strategic goal of establishing a Caliphate. Using symbols and assorted media, ISIL is employing a multi-layered communications strategy to promote its ideology, secure its base, attract foreign fighters, create affiliates, and turn Muslim public opinion against the West.

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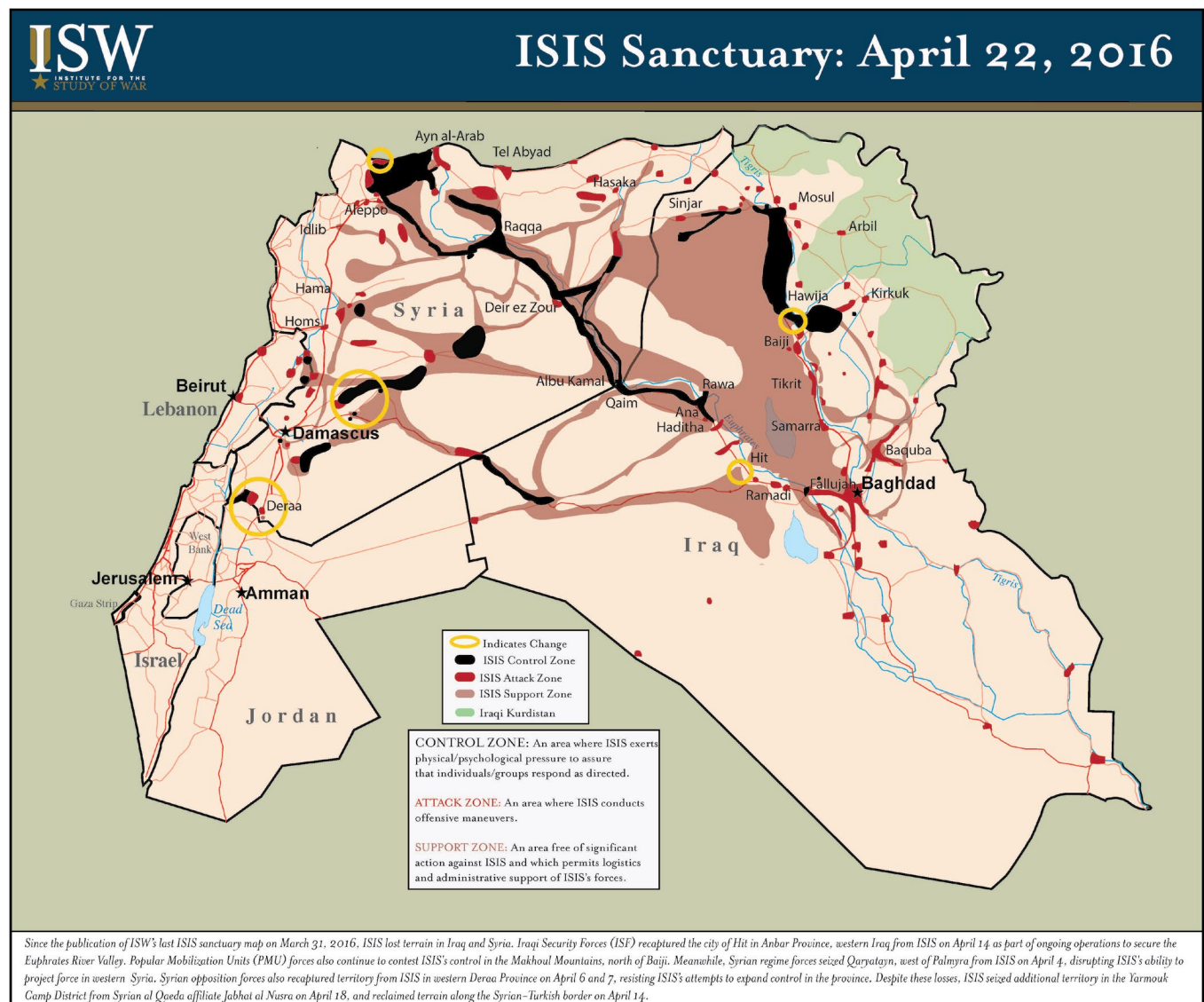


## 9. GEOGRAPHY



This chapter discusses the physical and cultural geography of ISIL-controlled territories in the Levant. It does not discuss the territories controlled by ISIL affiliates around the globe. ISIL controls pockets of territory across a large part of Syria and into the north and west parts of Iraq. According to the Institute for the Study of War's 22 April 2016 update of their "ISIL Sanctuary" map (shown in Figure 9.1), ISIL's area of control in Syria centers on its de facto capital, Raqqa and extends northwest to the Turkish border and southeast along the Euphrates River to the Iraq border. They are also in control of several areas straddling

the road between Deir al-Zour and Damascus to the southwest. On the Iraq side, its areas of control along the Euphrates continue across the border up to about the town of Haditha, although the city of Fallujah—a mere 70km west of Baghdad—is still under siege by ISIL militants as of May 2016.<sup>1</sup> In the north lies its most important Iraqi stronghold, Mosul. South of Mosul, its areas of control extend down the Tigris River to the large agricultural region surrounding the town of Hawija, just west of Kirkuk. As the ISW map indicates, its areas of influence or "support" extend well beyond these areas.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 9.1. ISIL Sanctuary: April 22, 2016. Source: Institute for the Study of War**

## Physical Geography

### Terrain

The “stringy,” non-contiguous nature of ISIL’s areas of control are due largely to the enormous expanses of desert that characterize much of eastern Syria and western Iraq. Most of the population in this region resides along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, or along roads connecting the larger cities. The terrain is relatively flat with a few small mountain ranges in central Syria and northern Iraq. The larger mountain ranges in the area lie just outside ISIL territories within the Kurdish area of Iraq and the area along the border with Lebanon in Syria. Figure 9.2 illustrates the terrain of Syria and northern Iraq.

### Climate/Weather

The climate in ISIL territory in Syria and Iraq falls mostly into two distinct Köppen-Geiger climate classifications: BWh (hot desert) in the southern areas and BSh (hot steppe) in the north.<sup>3</sup> These regions experience hot summers and relatively cool winters with temperatures dipping below freezing during the deep winter nights.<sup>4</sup> Mean annual temperatures in the region range from around 17 degrees Celsius

(62.6° F) in the Syrian and northern Iraqi highlands and increasing in an easterly-southeasterly direction to near 24 degrees Celsius (75.4° F) in the area around Baghdad.<sup>5</sup> Precipitation is sparse, and averages less than 300mm annually in most of the ISIL areas, decreasing further toward the south. The maps in Figures 9.3 and 9.4 illustrate the mean annual temperature and total annual precipitation, respectively, derived from interpolations of 50 years of observed data from 1950-2000.<sup>6</sup>

### Ecosystems

ISIL areas in Iraq and Syria are primarily characterized by lightly wooded shrubland and desert ecosystems, with cultivated areas and urban areas interspersed.<sup>7</sup> Of primary importance to the region are the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and their tributaries; they supply water for terrestrial creatures and a habitat for 46 species of fish.<sup>8</sup> Mammals inhabiting the area include wolves, wildcats, foxes, gazelles, badgers, and boars. Birds are found thriving in both the river areas and in the desert, the latter supporting several species of bustards.<sup>9</sup> Migratory waterfowl such as flamingos and teal utilize the river valleys as stops on their routes, as do turtle doves which can be seasonally found in large numbers on islands in the rivers.<sup>10</sup> Iraq is also home to

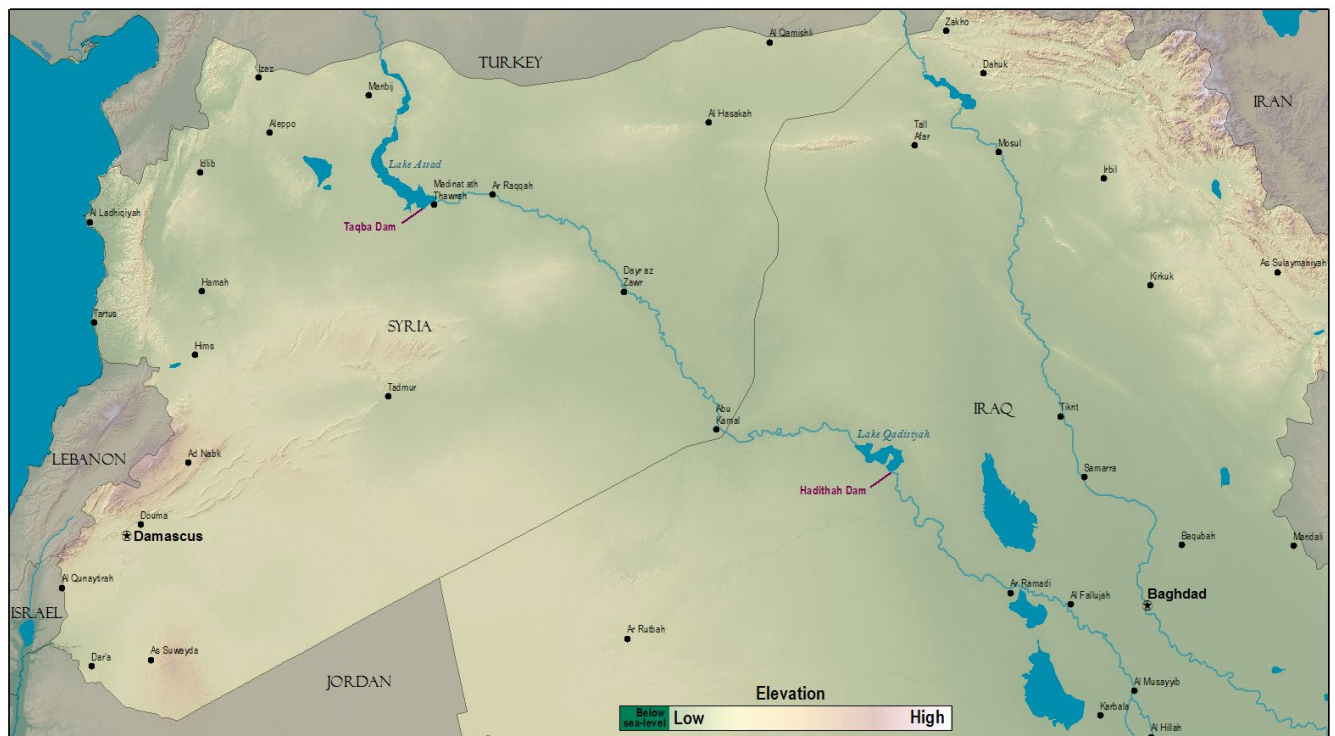


Figure 9.2. Terrain map of Syria and northern Iraq. Data sources: NASA SRTM 90m, Natural Earth v2.0



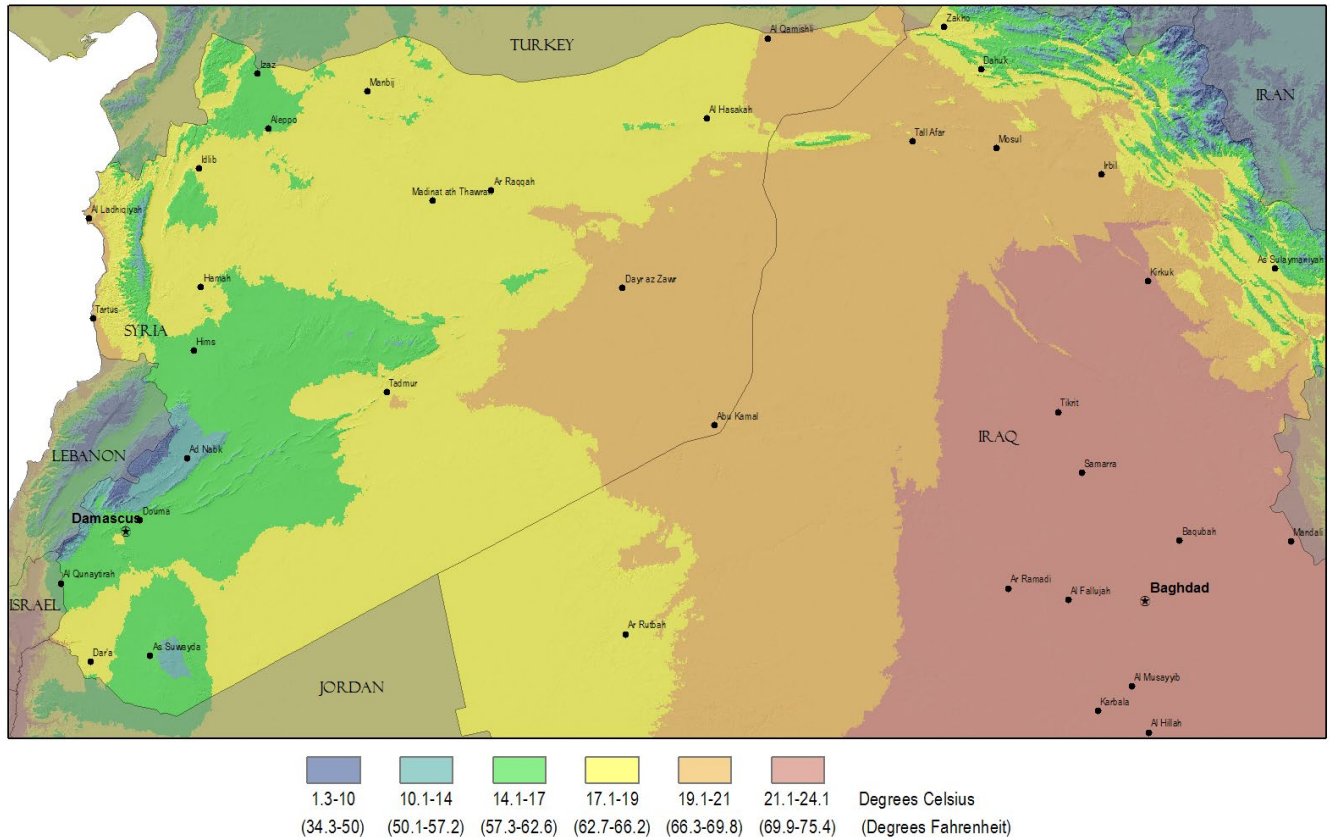


Figure 9.3. Mean annual temperature in ISIL areas. Source data: Worldclim Global Climate Data, Natural Earth v2.0

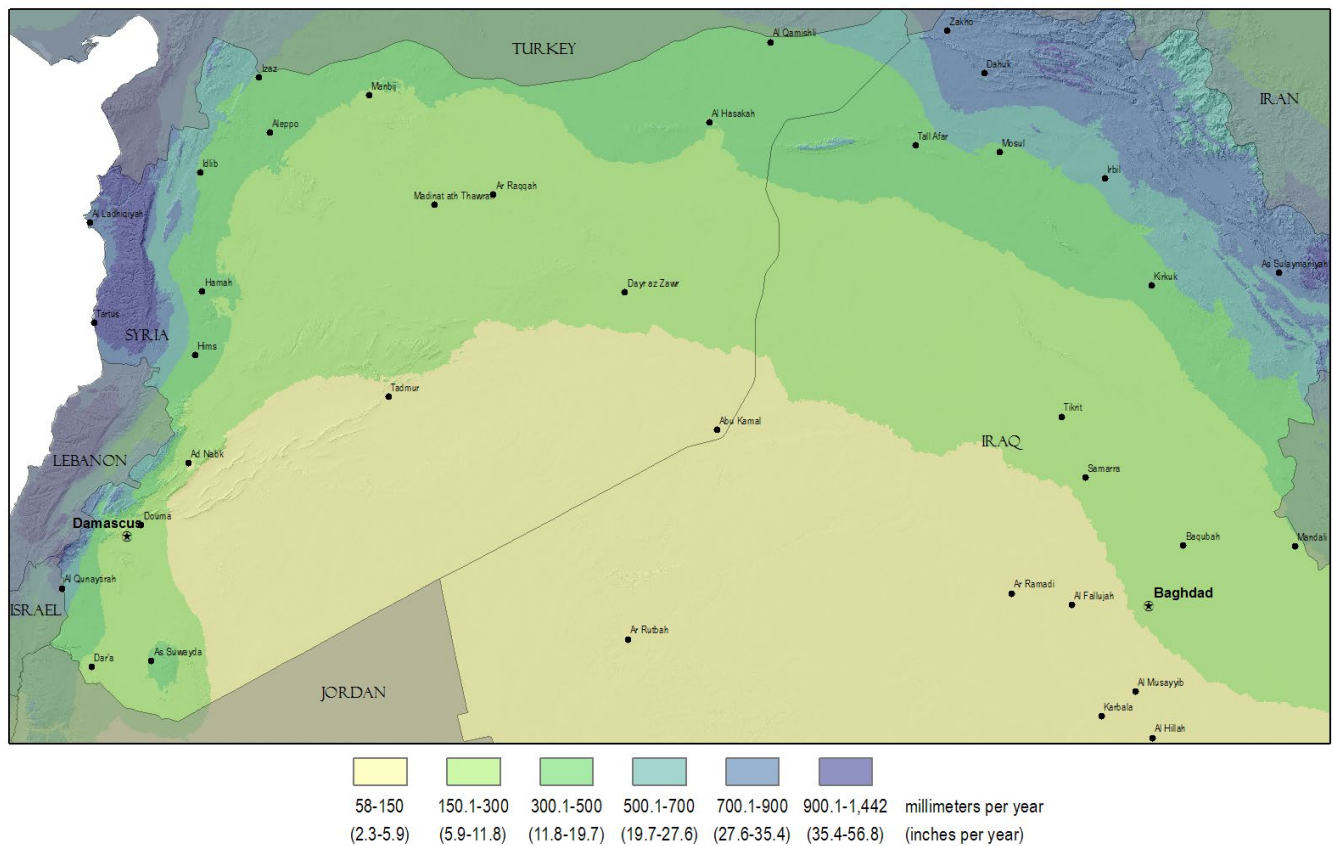
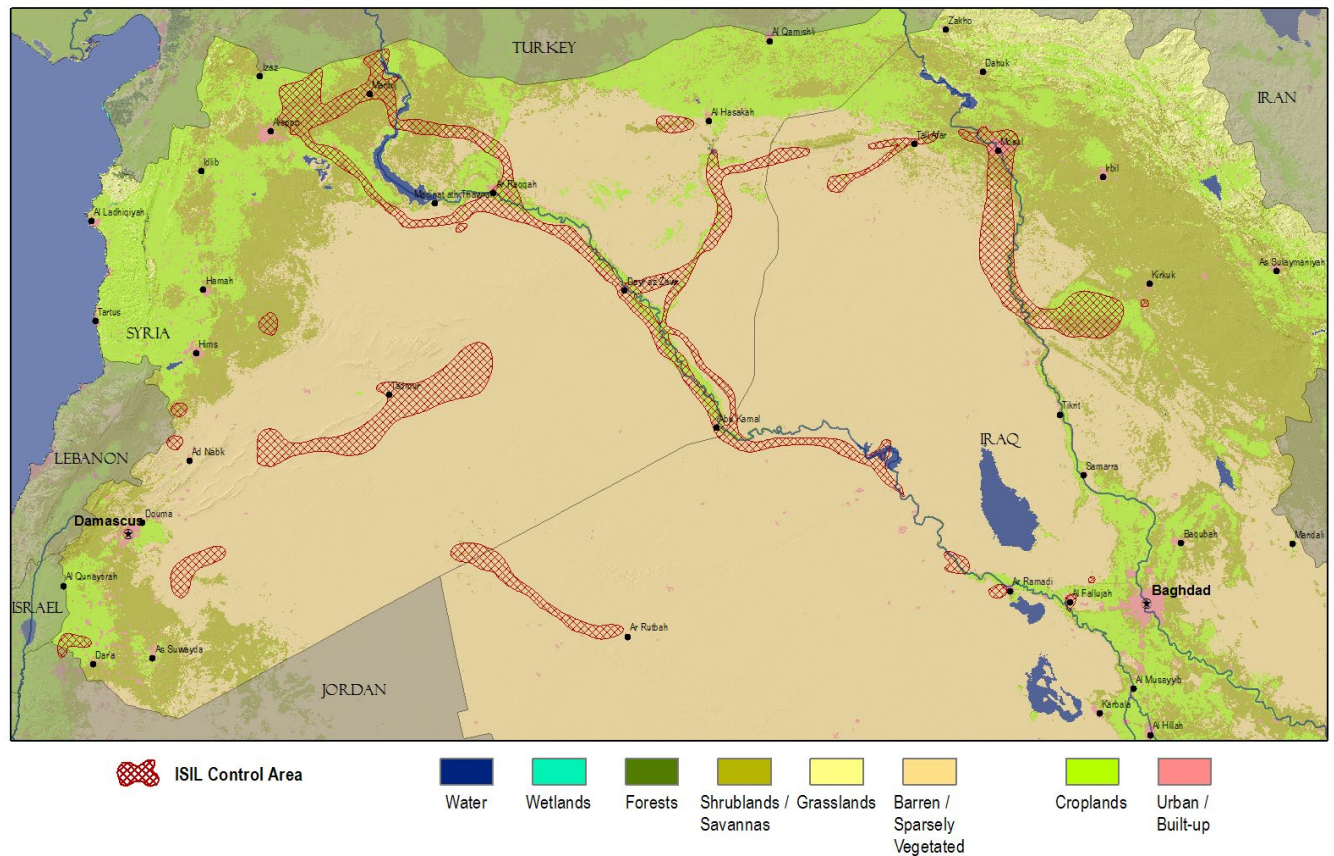


Figure 9.4. Average total annual precipitation in ISIL areas. Source data: Worldclim Global Climate Data, Natural Earth v2.0





**Figure 9.5. Landcover in ISIL territory. Data sources: USGS Land Cover Institute MODIS-based LULC, Natural Earth v2.0, Institute for the Study of War**

several deadly species of viper snakes and scorpions.<sup>11</sup> Figure 9.5 illustrates the land cover types in ISIL-controlled areas.

## Natural Hazards

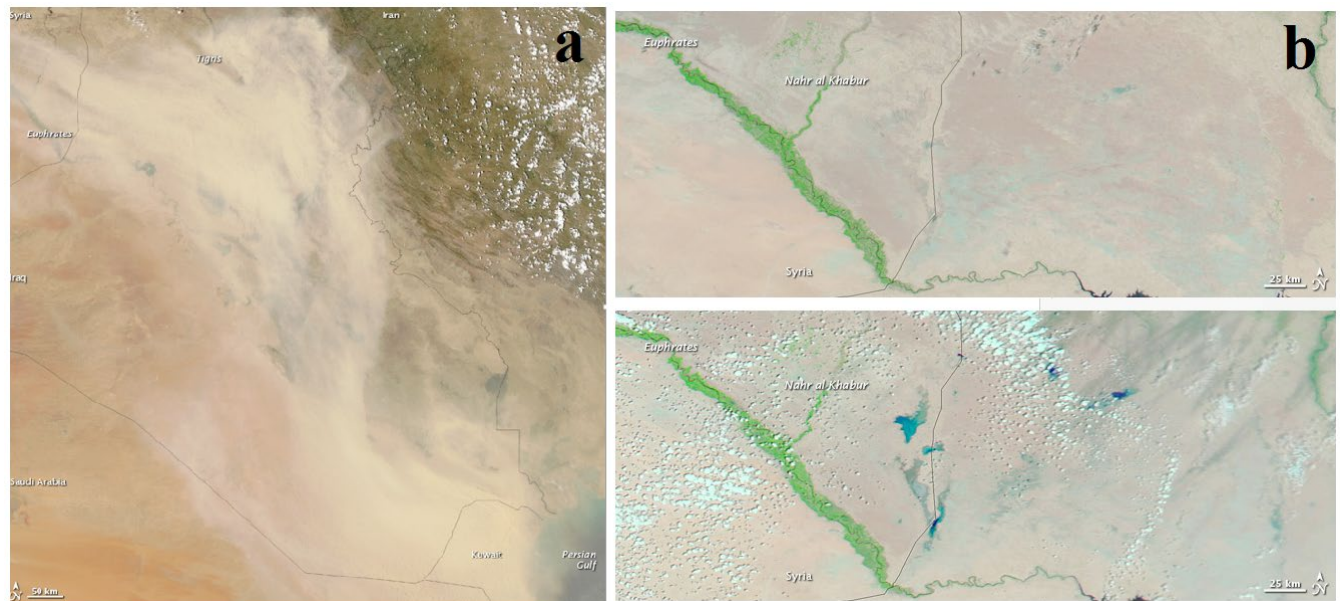
One of the more obvious natural hazards in the area is the expansive desert, which can be deadly if one finds themselves stranded without appropriate supplies. The desert also presents the potential for dust and/or sand storms (Figure 9.6a).<sup>12</sup> In the river valleys, floods can be a potential natural hazard (Figure 9.6b), although it should be noted that the risk of intentional flooding by manipulation (or failure) of the dam infrastructure is ever-present, especially given the military situation in areas around important dams.<sup>13</sup> Drought is yet another problem faced in the area, with some sources positing—and others rejecting—that the drought that affected Syria from 2006-2011 was an aggravating factor in the propagation of the original hostilities in 2011.<sup>14,15</sup>

## Geology and Natural Resources

The geology of the ISIL-occupied areas consists of Mesozoic and Tertiary rocks with black basalt boulders found to the southeast. Soils in the river valleys are of the alluvial and colluvial types.<sup>16</sup> The most important natural resource found in this region is crude oil, the sales of which in 2014 were amounting to an estimated \$800 million per year industry.<sup>17</sup> However, since that time, the escalation of Coalition air-strikes on the oil infrastructure has reduced this figure dramatically.<sup>18</sup> While oil revenue has decreased, natural gas and phosphates continue to be important resources found in ISIL-occupied areas.<sup>19</sup>

## Hydrosphere

The most important source of water in ISIL territory is the Tigris-Euphrates river system (shown in Figure 9.2). These rivers have their source in the highlands of eastern Turkey to the north and flow generally in a southeasterly direction through ISIL's Syrian and



**Figure 9.6. a) Dust storm in Iraq, b) Flooding in northeast Syria. Source: NASA Earth Observatory**

Iraqi territories before emptying into the Persian Gulf. Along the Euphrates, ISIL has control of two dams which form the Hadithah Dam Lake in west-central Iraq and Lake Assad (formed by the Taqba Dam) in northern Syria. ISIL is holding the latter as a hub of wielding water power and as a safe-house for senior officials.<sup>20</sup>

## Cultural Geography

### Major Cities

The most important city to ISIL on the Syrian side is Raqqa (official 2004 population, 220,268), its de facto capital.<sup>21</sup> It is a prison for many, as men under the age of 24 and women under 45 are prohibited from leaving the city.<sup>22</sup> In Iraq, Mosul is ISIL's primary stronghold and the largest city that they occupy with an estimated population of 700,000 as of February 2016, down from one to three million prior to the ISIL incursion.<sup>23,24,25</sup> Some sources maintain that the population still lies in the 1-1.5 million range following the ISIL occupation.<sup>26</sup> Other cities in the ISIL control zone include the Syrian towns of Manbij, Deir al-Zour, and Abu Kamal; and the Iraqi towns of Hawija, Qa'im, and notably Fallujah—at present its closest stronghold to its prized goal of Baghdad.

### Historical & Religious Sites

Arguably some of the most internationally well-known historical sites in ISIL territory are Palmyra in central

Syria and Ninevah and Nimrud in north-central Iraq, all of which were given significant international press when ISIL began its campaign of demolition. In essence, any site with a heritage not in line with ISIL's strict interpretation of Islam is fair game for destruction.<sup>27</sup> This includes temples, shrines, libraries, churches, pre-Islamic and Islamic historical sites, and mosques. ISIL loots many of these sites prior to demolition and sells the artifacts on the black market. In many cases ISIL will record the demolition events and post them on the Internet as propaganda.<sup>28,29</sup> The map in Figure 9.7 illustrates the locations of just a few of the historical sites that have been demolished by ISIL.<sup>30</sup>

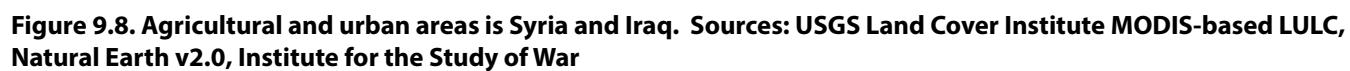
### Land Use

The bright-green and pink areas in Figure 9.8 outline the generalized land use in ISIL-controlled territory, symbolizing cultivated areas and urban areas respectively. Most of the land in ISIL territory is either unused or cultivated, the latter lands found particularly along the Euphrates River and in the large arable region in north-central Iraq around the town of Hawija, just west of Kirkuk.

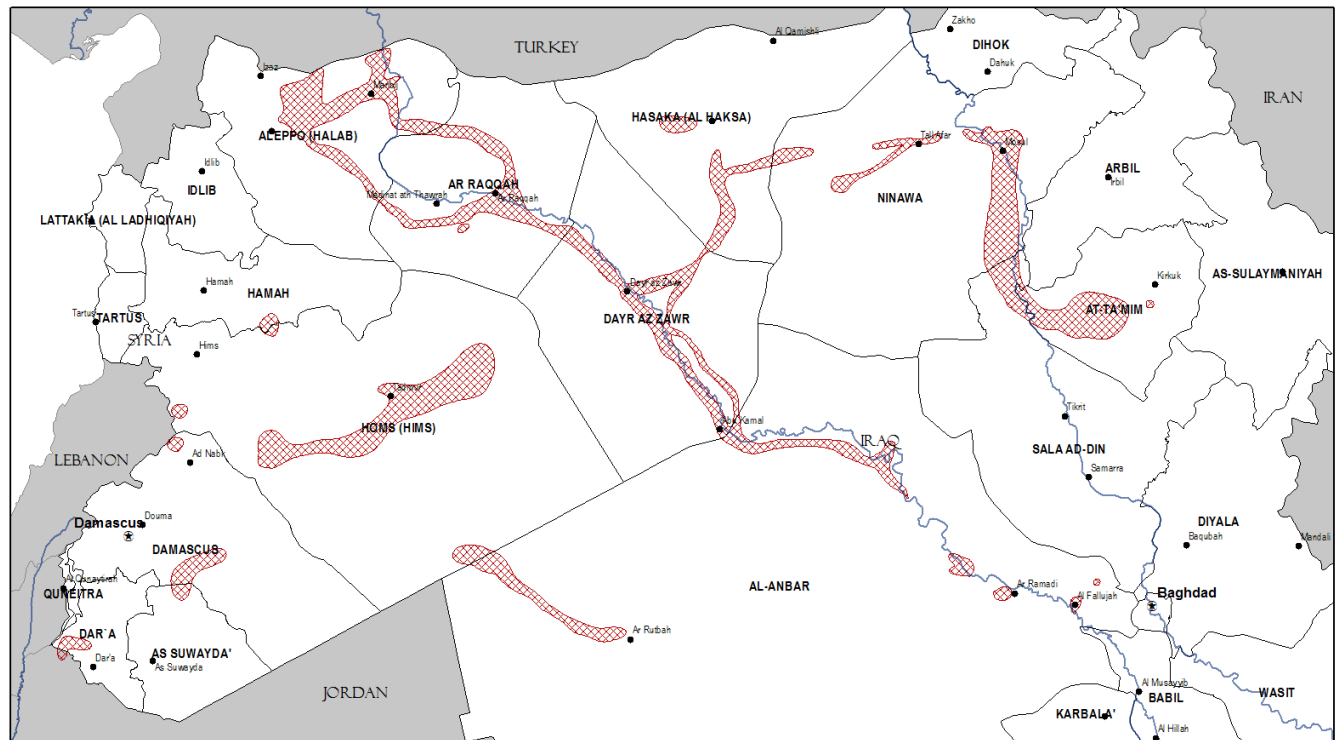
### Territorial Organization

ISIL has established its own Governorates (of which there are at least 18 according to one source) to administratively divide its territory.<sup>31</sup> It is unclear precisely where these Governorates lie geographically.









**Figure 9.9. ISIL Territory and existing Syrian and Iraqi Governorates. Sources: ISW, Natural Earth v2.0**

The map in Figure 9.9 illustrates ISIL territory superimposed over the preexisting Governorate boundaries in Iraq and Syria.

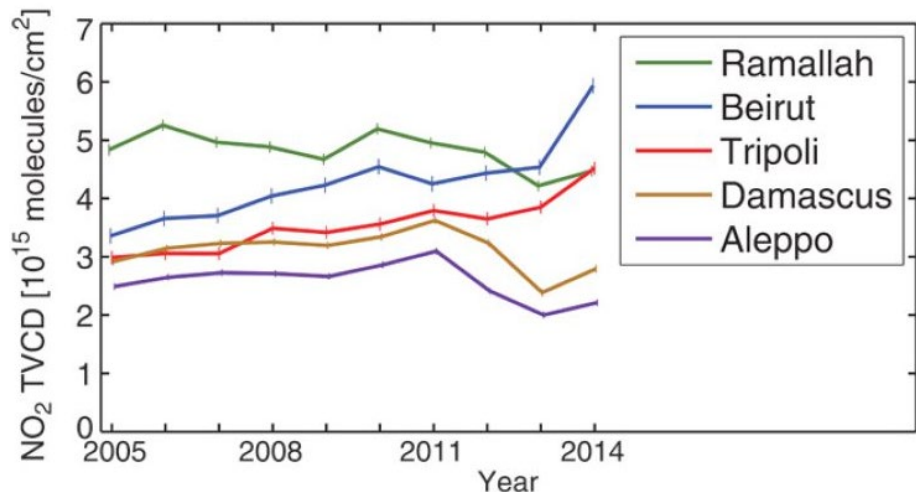
In a move to strengthen the significance of a border-free Caliphate, and very likely in an effort to sync the time between its two largest strongholds, ISIL has pushed forward the clocks in its de facto capital city Raqqa by one hour to match the time zone in Iraq.<sup>32</sup>

## Neighboring States

According to the Institute for the Study of War's April 2016 map of ISIL-controlled areas, its immediate neighbors are Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. While not internationally recognized as a sovereign nation, another important neighbor is Iraqi Kurdistan. Since ISIL's goal is to establish a worldwide Caliphate, any relationships it has with its neighbors likely have the sole purpose of facilitating that end, rather than to initiate any sort of agreement or collaboration.

## Environmental Issues

ISIL's occupation has had an effect on pollution levels in its area of control. According to a study done using NASA ozone measurement satellites, levels of nitrogen oxide—a pollutant emitted via combustion—have dropped markedly in the war-torn areas of Iraq and Syria since 2011. This drop came at the tail end of a steady rise of nearly 10% per year over the previous six years in the cities of Baghdad, Tikrit, and Samarra. At the extreme, the study indicated a drop of 40-50% in



**Figure 9.10. NO<sub>2</sub> emission levels in select Syrian and Lebanese cities. Source: Fusion**

nitrogen oxide levels over Damascus and Aleppo in Syria. The drops are attributed to the sharp decline of the economies of the occupied cities as a result of the emigration of large portions of the working populace.<sup>33</sup> Concurrently, the study found that nitrogen oxide levels in the Lebanese cities of Beirut and Tripoli—where populations have quickly risen due to the influx of refugees—have increased from 20-30% (Figure 9.10).<sup>34</sup> While the cause of these changes cannot be attributed specifically to ISIL, as the changes have been documented prior to its occupation, they demonstrate the plausibility that its occupation has some effect on air pollution levels.

A source of some concern in ISIL territory with regard to pollution are the effects of the destruction of the oil infrastructure on the environment. A former US Government official indicated in an interview that one reason the US did not strike ISIL oil infrastructure early in the conflict was due to environmental concerns.<sup>35</sup> ISIL itself has weaponized oil in its perpetuation of its “scorched-earth” campaign. A 2014 Iraqi News report indicated that the drinking water in parts of Balad District was contaminated with crude oil by ISIL militants. The source attributes the contamination to ISIL’s “repeated defeats in the areas of the province.”<sup>36</sup>

## Property Rights

For all intents and purposes, it appears that all property rights inside ISIL-controlled territory have been claimed by ISIL itself. People or groups of people that do not hold the beliefs and ideology that ISIL deems proper may be systematically evicted (or murdered) and their homes either sold, rented, given to fighters and their families, or destroyed outright.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the single event with the most media exposure was the driving of upward of 275,000 of the Yazidi people out of their homes in the Sinjar area of Iraq immediately following the ISIL occupation of Mosul.<sup>38</sup>

## Water Rights

As alluded to in the previous section, the general idea of “rights” seems to be largely absent in ISIL society, and appears to be solely dependent on whatever ISIL allows or disallows at any given time. It has near-exclusive control (although Turkey has an upriver influence by way of two other dams) over the flow of the Euphrates River in its territory via its occupation of the Taqba Dam in northern Syria.<sup>39</sup> ISIL has been

using—and is threatening future use of—its control over water in a form of “hydro-terrorism” to not only stymie the advance of enemy forces, but to strengthen its grasp on the will of the people under its control.<sup>40</sup>

## Foodways

Shortly after ISIL took control of Mosul in the summer of 2014, it cajoled fleeing citizens to return to the city by offering cheap food, amongst other things. It accomplished this by simply forcing traders to offer certain food items at half price.<sup>41</sup> However, by fall of that year, the conditions in Mosul changed significantly, particularly after ISIL lost the key supply route to the city of Rabia at the Syrian border. Prices for some food items increased six-fold according to one Mosul resident.<sup>42</sup> In addition, regular rations that previously poured into Mosul from the Iraqi Central Government had ceased upon ISIL’s occupation.<sup>43</sup>

The food situation in besieged Fallujah has become one of desperation, so much so that some residents have taken to harvesting hibiscus growing wild on the sides of the roads for food.<sup>44</sup>

Much like it has done with water, ISIL has put itself in a position to weaponize food. In particular, it has seized agricultural lands and grain stores, taking full control of up to 30% of Iraq’s agricultural output. While it appears that for the time being ISIL has primarily used food to generate additional revenue streams, the potential for a “denial of services” through the withholding of food is of some concern.<sup>45</sup>

## Analysis

In terms of the physical geography, ISIL occupies an area with very narrow and linear habitable areas generally surrounded by vast expanses of desert. Because of the desert terrain and lack of significant rainfall, life in the region is almost entirely dependent on the Tigris-Euphrates river system. These rivers are the central life-blood of everything living near them, and so controlling the flow of water has enormous influence on a large number of people, as well as the ecosystem itself. The water control points (dams) are highly pivotal, as they not only offer the aforementioned control, but are typically safe from air strikes, as damaging the dams could have catastrophic effects on the people downriver.

Along with its implementation of its own form of “hydro-terrorism,” ISIL has taken full advantage of the buffering characteristics of the outlying desert areas in its territory. The complete lack of infrastructure or means of survivability in these areas transform them into a kind of “human corral,” debilitating freedom of movement and mitigating the border control problem. However, taking this buffering for granted may be detrimental if appropriately equipped forces take advantage of these flanks.

The cultural geography of the ISIL-occupied areas has taken on the ISIL flavor, that is, there is little room for anything that ISIL does not approve of. Society is forced to take the shape that ISIL prescribes for it by effectively ceding all rights to property, food, and water to the ISIL regime. ISIL maintains control over these rights through the use of fear, force, and ultimately violence. Essentially, ISIL weaponizes geographic features much like it does with all means of effecting social influence.

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# A. GLOSSARY

# A

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AI</b>	Ansar al-Islam
<b>AQI</b>	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
<b>CIFG</b>	Counter ISIL Finance Group
<b>CCSU</b>	Counterintelligence Combat Support Units
<b>CSR</b>	International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation
<b>FSA</b>	Free Syrian Army
<b>HRFO</b>	Human Rights First Organization
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>IIACSS</b>	Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies
<b>IRGC</b>	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
<b>ISI</b>	Islamic State of Iraq
<b>ISIL</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
<b>KBL</b>	Katibat al-Battar al-Libi
<b>NF</b>	Jabhat al-Nusra Front
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>SVBIED</b>	suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

## LIST OF TERMS

**Caliph** (in Arabic, “successor”) - In Islam, the chief civil and religious leader, regarded as the successor to the Prophet Mohammed and the leader of the worldwide Muslim community (Umma). Caliphs claim succession from Mohammed, though there is no shared agreement amongst Islamic scholars if Mohammed appointed a successor or legislated how one should be chosen. Sources vary on the origin of the Caliphate, an Islamic Empire ruled over by the Caliph.

Historically selected by committee, the holder of the Caliph title claims temporal and spiritual authority over all Muslims, but is not regarded as a prophet as Mohammed is revered as the final prophet. Mohammed’s father-in-law and closest friend, Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, is seen as his first successor or Caliph in Sunni Islam. The Shia Muslims believe that Ali ibn Abi Talib, a cousin and son-in-law of Mohammed, should have been his original successor and that succession should have been on the basis of blood relationship to the Prophet.

**Hawala** (literally means “transfer” in Arabic; also known as hundi or Hewala) - a trust-based informal banking system and form of transporting financial obligations from one place to another, without the physical movement of money and also without a paper trail. A huge network of money brokers are the conduits and it is used primarily in the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa and Indian continent. Hawala is a traditional form of exchange based upon a strong sense of honor and trust as that which exists among extensive family networks and runs parallel to formal banking and financial channels.

## LIST OF TERMS (continued)

- Jihad** (in Arabic, it is a noun meaning “the act of struggling, striving, applying oneself and persevering”) - For Muslims, jihad is the internal struggle against oneself and sin. In military jihad, it means to protect the Islamic faith against other religions and practitioners, either through legal, diplomatic or political means. If there is no peaceful alternative, Islam allows the use of force to achieve jihad, but there are strict rules in its use, such as no harm to women, children or invalids. In militant Islam or radical Islamism as ISIL practices, it has come to mean a holy war or struggle against all non-believers using violence.
- Mohammed** (in Arabic translates to “highly praised”) - The founder of Islam and its main Prophet. Born in AD 570 at Makkah, Arabia (now, Saudi Arabia), he was raised by his uncle, worked as a shepherd and camel driver and subsequently managed merchants’ caravans as a young man. He met his first wife at twenty-five years old, an older businesswoman who was instrumental in his educational and business development. He preached monotheism (belief in one god) over pagan polytheism (belief in several gods) to his followers, which became Islam or the worship of the one true God, Allah. Before he died at age sixty-three, the greater part of the Arabian Peninsula had become Muslim and within one hundred years of his death, Islam had spread to Spain in the West and China in the East.
- Mubayeen** ISIL’s local fighters from Iraq and Syria, or other Levantine countries and comprising approximately 80% of its total fighting forces. They are part of the group’s regional and national security forces, but are primarily concentrated in ISIL’s local forces and with internal security duties. They have pledged their allegiance to ISIL by oath.
- Mujahdeen** ISIL’s foreign fighters who make up approximately 20% of its national fighting forces. They are originally from at least fifty countries, but the most are from Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and several Central Asian countries. Nearly one-fifth are residents or nationals of Western European countries. They receive the best pay and the most perks amongst all of ISIL’s fighters and are organized according to geographic region, language and ethnic group into special brigades.
- Munasireen** ISIL’s local fighters and foot soldiers who have not pledged allegiance to ISIL. They receive the lowest pay and reportedly, no benefits. They are, in effect, mercenaries.
- Quran** (in Arabic, “the recitation”) - The central religious and holy text of Islam. Muslims believe that the Quran was verbally revealed to Mohammed by God through the angel Gabriel (i.e., Jibril) over a period of twenty-three years. Muslims also believe that the Quran was the most important miracle of Mohammed and proof of his prophethood. According to traditional narratives, several of Mohammed’s companions and scribes were responsible for writing down the Quranic revelations. It is organized into chapters called surah and verses called ayat. It is written in Arabic and Muslims therefore consider this language sacred. It is widely regarded as the finest piece of literature in the Arabic language.



## LIST OF TERMS (continued)

**Sabaya** A sabaya is an enslaved woman taken during military offensives in Iraq and Syria for typically sexual purposes. Many sabaya are from minority groups, such as the Yezidi of Northern Iraq, Christians and other non-Sunni ethnicities. They are frequently kidnapped and held for high ransoms, or executed if they refuse to perform sexual jihad, termed jihad al-nikah. This practice advocates for unmarried women to offer sex to the ISIL fighters, either as volunteers or prisoners. This practice is a recruiting tool for new fighters to the cause. It allows and encourages pre-marital sex, forcing captured women to act as “comfort women” or sex-slaves for its fighters, without the blessing of marriage. ISIL’s fighters routinely receive a sabaya as a benefit for performance, and are allocated \$35 per sabaya per month.

**Sahwa** (Arabic for “Awakening”) - Beginning in 2005 and extending into 2013, several Iraqi Sunni Muslim Arabic tribal militias and former Iraqi military officers coalesced to maintain security of their communities in Anbar Governorate. They assisted the US Coalition to combat Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Sahwa forces numbered around 100,000 at their peak (2012) and were originally supported by the US with the Iraqi government eventually taking over paying their salary, where members made less than \$300 per month.

This first Sahwa was credited for its role in the dramatic reduction of violence across Iraq and was a key component of the US surge strategy. They were also known as the Sons of Iraq, Anbar’s Salvation and the Sunni Awakening movement. By 2013, they were virtually nonexistent due to former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s refusal to integrate them into the country’s security services.

The second Sahwa is a *hopeful* Sunni tribal alliance composed of Sunni militias aligned against ISIL. Sources report that this second Sahwa is not so much a full-fledged movement or Awakening, yet, (as in the First Sahwa); but US and Iraqi officials hope to convince more tribal sheiks and their tribal militia members to join together in an organized fashion against ISIL. However, several Sahwa are fighting alongside ISIL and other insurgent groups instead of against them due to being sidelined by Iraq’s Shia-dominated government and other reported grievances.

**Salafism** A Sunni Islamic sect that adheres to a literal interpretation of the Quran and Sharia Law. It idealizes the life and times of Mohammed and his followers and rejects modernity. By its nature, it is extremely conservative and ISIL has adopted a form of Salafism, Neo-Salafist rite Sunni Islam, which is a militant and conservative jihadist interpretation of Salafism.

**Socio-cultural** An adjective meaning the combination of social and cultural factors, combining elements within a person’s society and culture. In anthropology, it is a knowledge about the people around you and their family backgrounds, kin groups, institutions and membership. In psychology, it is a theory and perspective used to describe the awareness of circumstances surrounding individuals and how their behaviors are affected specifically by their surrounding social and cultural factors.

Cultural factors include education, language, law and politics, religion, social organizations, technology and material culture, values and attitudes. Social factors include family, role and status in society, reference groups, time and important historical events and available resources.

## LIST OF TERMS (continued)

**Turkoman** (also known as Turkmen, Turkmens and Turkomans) - Turkoman is an ethnic group designation and are a Turkic people, who have a traditional nomadic tribal heritage, that focused on special breeds of desert horses. Today, they are located primarily in Central Asia, Turkmenistan as well as in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, North Caucasus and northern Pakistan. They speak the Eastern Oghuz branch of the Turkic language family. Typically, most Turkoman are Sunni Muslims.

**Zakat** One of the Five Pillars of Islam (i.e., fundamental religious duties), a form of almsgiving and charitable contribution mandated in Islam and expected of all Muslims who have savings remaining over the year. They must pay a certain percentage to those in need, but is often 2.5%. While zakat can be paid anytime during the year, it is frequently paid during Ramadan (a spiritual holiday held in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, employing praying, fasting, charity-giving and self-accountability for Muslims. Fasting during Ramadan is also one of the Five Pillars of Islam.)



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