

# CSS Cheat Sheet



# The Islamic State



Center for Security and Science

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## Introduction

This paper is designed to give the reader a working knowledge of the Islamic State —how it came about, how it works and how the conflict it started is likely to play out and why. A paper on how it came about and how it works is probably necessary, given the number of misconceptions about it.

For reasons that will be explained in this paper, the “Islamic State,” as it styles itself, is neither. However putting quotation marks around every occurrence of this term to denote its dubiousness would be annoying to readers, so I didn’t. The reader will also notice that the language is probably more blunt than what he is used to seeing in such a work. Analysts analyze things. If an analyst, after careful consideration, concludes that something is criminal in character, he isn’t doing his readers any favors by characterizing the act that he believes, in good faith to be motivated by criminal intent as: “questionable” or “unorthodox” in order to appear more scholarly. That the Islamic State is a work of criminality and not religious fundamentalism is the central thesis of this paper. There is no point in tiptoeing around it.

As discussion of how it will end might seem unusual for a paper like this. Such works usually don’t get into predictions. However, I think a word on the subject is in order, given that the Islamic State looks a lot more dangerous than it actually is. In fact, though it might not appear that way, it is on its way out of existence. In my view, that isn’t really a prediction, but a reminder of what has tended overwhelmingly to happen to such regimes historically. No conflict is truly unique. Men have been making war in organized bodies for thousands of years. If something happens in a conflict, it has happened before, often, in other places and at other times. Consistent patterns have emerged. We therefore already know what we need to know in order to understand the weaknesses of the Islamic State and how those weaknesses are likely to cause problems for it. Historically, certain problems have consistently resulted in certain consequences. The consequences are therefore fairly predictable.

This situation is quite common, historically. A group of violent and ruthless, but not particularly bright, individuals have seized power over a certain geographic area. They have selected various ethnic groups as scapegoats and made charges against them that they claim justify stealing their property and even killing them. Instead of quitting while they were ahead, they attacked just about every outside entity within reach, in all directions. Now, all the entities that they have attacked are closing in on them from all sides. No one really needs to be clairvoyant to have a good idea how this story will end. A solid grasp of history will suffice.

Hopefully, the reader finds this work useful in understanding the Islamic State.

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## From a Dozen Bunglers to a Caliphate

What is now the **Islamic State** began in 1993 as *al-Tawhid* (Monotheism). It was founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (whose real name is Isam Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi). Zarqawi was a Jordanian with a history of petty crime. Al-Maqdisi was possibly the most highly regarded Salafist writer in jihadist circles. His book, *The Creed of Abraham*, which he wrote in the 1980s, is widely considered required reading for Salafist insurgents. He is a Palestinian who was raised in Kuwait. He came to Jordan when Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait after the first Gulf War. The two had met while Zarqawi had been fighting in Afghanistan.

The group consisted of only about a dozen men. After only a few months, it changed its name to *Bayat al-Imam* (Allegiance to the Imam). The group was almost comically inept. In its first operation, one of its members was sent to plant an explosive device in a movie theater which was showing films that the group regarded as pornographic. He ended up staying too long at the movie and the device blew his legs off. Almost immediately thereafter, al-Maqdisi smuggled seven hand grenades into Jordan. Zarqawi, who was already under surveillance by Jordanian police, hid them in the basement of his family's house. The house was raided, the grenades were found, and in 1994, most of the group, including Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi, was sent to prison, Zarqawi receiving a 15-year sentence.

At that time, potential jihadists were abundant in Jordan. Men who had fought in Afghanistan began forming small insurgent groups, as most of the established anti-government and anti-Israel groups had lost credibility with hardliners.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, economic reforms undertaken at the behest of the International Monetary Fund had sent unemployment up significantly. Both in prison, where Zarqawi was practically running things, and in the cities of Zarqa, Salt and Irbid, followers rallied to *Bayat al-Imam*.<sup>2</sup>

In May of 1999, Zarqawi and most of his followers, as well as hundreds of other jihadists, were released from prison as part of a general amnesty declared by King Abdullah II, who had taken the throne after the death of King Hussein.

A few months later, Zarqawi left for Pakistan in a trek to meet Osama bin-Laden. Carrying a letter of introduction from a highly regarded Jordanian cleric, he met bin-Laden in Kandahar in December of 1999. Bin-Laden took an immediate dislike to him. In addition to the distrust engendered by bin-Laden's belief that most Jordanian jihadist groups had been penetrated by Jordanian intelligence, bin-Laden found him vulgar, abrasive, and overly ambitious. It was also clear to him that Zarqawi was bent on all-out war with Shi'ites. As bin-Laden's mother was a Shi'ite, he had not seen any particular need for such an all-out war, and he regarded it as an unnecessary diversion and something *al-Qaeda* and its allies lacked the resources for. The Taliban had basically the same attitude toward Shi'ites as Zarqawi, but they were bin-Laden's hosts, and he was in no position to force the issue. A nobody in charge of a small jihadist outfit was another matter. He attempted to talk Zarqawi down and was told defiantly that "Shi'ites should be executed." Zarqawi then went on to lecture bin-Laden about his

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<sup>1</sup>The Muslim Brotherhood had agreed to support King Hussein in exchange for being allowed to participate in politics. Palestinian insurgent groups had signed the Oslo Accords in 1993.

<sup>2</sup>While Zarqawi's popularity in Jordan plummeted after the Amman hotel bombings, he has remained popular in these cities, hotbeds of anti-government sentiment.

support of the Taliban in the form of Arab fighters. He reportedly told him that the war against the Northern Alliance, as it involved Muslims killing Muslims, was un-Islamic.

Bin-Laden left the meeting with absolutely no use for Zarqawi. However, bin-Laden's chief of security, a former Egyptian colonel with a special operations background named Saif al-Adel, saw merit in Zarqawi and his group. After a great deal of prodding by Saif, bin-Laden authorized Zarqawi to set up *al-Matar* training camp near Herat, near the border with Iran, and provided about \$5,000 to stand it up. Within a year, the camp was home to a few hundred fighters. The flourishing of the *al-Matar* camp, the fact that it was the only camp in Afghanistan successfully recruiting from the Levant and constant prodding from Saif resulted in another \$200,000 disbursement from *al-Qaeda* to set up ***Jund al-Sham*** (Soldiers of the Levant). Zarqawi's key subordinate leaders in this effort were mainly Syrians who had fought in Afghanistan earlier. By the time the United States attacked in October of 2001, there were between two and three thousand fighters and dependants in *al-Matar*.

The seed money Zarqawi was getting from al-Qaeda seemed to inspire no feelings of loyalty. On at least five occasions from 2000 to the beginning of the U.S. air assault, bin-Laden called for Zarqawi to come to Kandahar and pledge personal loyalty (the pledge is known as *bayat*) to him. On each occasion Zarqawi begged off. He felt that bin-Laden was too focused on his war against "far enemies" like the United States and not committed to *jihad* against "near enemies," —the regimes in the region he felt needed to be overthrown. He also did not want to be drawn into the war against the Northern Alliance, which again, he felt was un-Islamic.

When the United States began bombing in October of 2001, Zarqawi was compelled to join forces with *al-Qaeda* and the Taliban. His fighters fought against the Northern Alliance, mostly around Herat. Bin-Laden escaped with his most trusted fighters, but left Zarqawi behind. In December of 2001, Zarqawi and around 300 fighters slipped across the border into Iran.<sup>3</sup>

For the next year, Zarqawi bounced between Iran, the autonomous area of Kurdistan in northern Iraq (Saif al-Adel, who regained contact with Zarqawi in Iran, provided contacts in Iraq.), and Syria. In Kurdistan he lived and worked with *Ansar al-Islam*, a separatist militant Islamist group. At this point, Zarqawi was just one of many fugitives the end of Taliban rule in Afghanistan produced. Then, the United States government made him a star.

Though he had absolutely no links whatever to Saddam Hussein, and had refused to join *al-Qaeda*, whose leader couldn't stand him, Colin Powell named Zarqawi as *the* critical link between *al-Qaeda* and Saddam Hussein's regime.<sup>4</sup> This gave him prestige he had done nothing to earn, but was useful when he began operating in Iraq. Soon, small groups of insurgents looking for an insurgency began to flock to him. More importantly, the welcome mat was out for him throughout the hard line Sunni community in Iraq.

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<sup>3</sup>Jordanian Intelligence has claimed that in addition to turning a blind eye toward his presence in Iran, the Iranian government was providing Zarqawi with small arms and ammunition because destabilizing the Iraqi government was in its interests, no matter who was doing it. This seems unlikely. Zarqawi, always focused on the Levant, did not turn his attention toward the Iraqi government until relatively late in his stay in Iran. In addition, his absolutely genocidal hatred of Shi'ites is not something the Iranian government would have found easy to ignore. And, given the fact that his followers felt the same about Shi'ites as he did, it is unlikely that he would have risked his credibility by cozying up to the Iranian government for a relatively small cache of small arms and ammunition. In all likelihood, he received nothing from Iran, including safe harbor, and escaped detection because there are a lot of places there that a Muslim can get lost.

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Intelligence had somehow gotten the (wrong) idea that the *Ansar al-Islam* camp near Khurmal, in northern Kurdistan, was producing ricin. And, on finding that Zarqawi was staying at the camp, it jumped to the incorrect conclusion that he was running it, as well as other camps, rather than just visiting.

In the summer of 2003, after the fall of Saddam's government, Zarqawi began launching attacks. On August 7, he was behind a car bomb attack at the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad. He was also linked to the bombing of the United Nations headquarters on the 19th. On 29 August he sent his father-in-law out on the car bombing of the Shia shrine in Najaf. The blast killed over a hundred people, including Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, a revered cleric.

Though his group was responsible for only about 10% of the insurgent attacks in Iraq, his attacks garnered the most publicity. His group, now known as *al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* (Monotheism and Jihad) became best known for its videotaped beheadings, always with the group's banner in the background.

In October of 2004, after eight months of intense negotiation, Zarqawi finally paid *baya* to Osama bin-Laden—but only on condition that he would maintain control over his group, and that he would have operational autonomy. After pledging his loyalty, Zarqawi proclaimed himself to be the “Emir of *al-Qaeda*'s Operations in the Land of Mesopotamia.” Thus, *al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers (or al-Qaeda in Iraq, or AQI)* was born.

The arrangement was the very definition of a marriage of convenience. Zarqawi benefited from the prestige the *al-Qaeda* brand and bin-Laden's endorsement carried among militants and Sunni tribes without having any constraints placed upon him. In return, bin-Laden benefited from the prestige that came from being seen to have an active presence in Iraq that he didn't really have. More importantly, the move cut off any discussion about whether or not Zarqawi was supplanting bin-Laden as the leader of world *jihad*. Bin-Laden could continue to be seen as the world's top terrorist.

What bin-Laden also ended up getting was a public relations nightmare and a backlash in the Muslim world as gruesome act followed gruesome act in Iraq. Then came Zarqawi's suicide bombings of three hotels in Amman, Jordan, in which some 60 people died, many of them at a wedding celebration, in November of 2005.

In January of 2006, AQI merged with a few smaller Sunni groups and formed the *Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen* (MSM, sometimes referred to as the Mujahideen Shura Council)<sup>5</sup> with Zarqawi, leader of AQI, at its head. The move was apparently intended to create the impression that other organizations were coalescing around Zarqawi's group and accepting his leadership.

On 7 June 2006, Zarqawi was killed in a U.S. air strike.<sup>6</sup> He was succeeded as both head of AQI and MSM by Abu Ayyub al-Masri, an Egyptian militant. Then, in October of 2006, the MSM joined four more insurgent factions and the representatives of a number of Iraqi Arab tribes to create the **Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)**. Abu Omar Baghdadi was proclaimed the State's emir and al-Masri became Minister for War in the organization's ten-member cabinet.

Zarqawi's leadership had resulted in an organization that was long on violent people, including a fair number of psychopaths, and short on long-term strategic vision. By late 2007, indiscriminate attacks against Iraqi civilians had resulted in massive loss of support among the population. Its attempts to govern territory it controlled by a regime of almost pure terror led to a backlash from Sunni Iraqis and other insurgent groups. Sunni militants who had previously fought alongside the group began to cooperate with U.S. forces, which had adopted more enlightened methods of

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<sup>5</sup>“*Majlis*” means “Council.”

<sup>6</sup>*Bayat* is a personal, not an organizational, concept. When Zarqawi pledged *baya* to Osama bin-Laden, he was binding (if you can even call it that) only himself, not the organization he headed. The link between AQI and *al-Qaeda* was therefore technically severed the moment Zarqawi died.

pacification. The U.S. troop surge supplied the military with the manpower to target the group more intensely. During 2008, a series of U.S. and Iraqi offensives drove ISI insurgents from their former safe havens to the area of the northern city of Mosul. Al-Baghdadi and al-Masri were killed in Joint U.S.-Iraqi raid on 18 April 2010. Two months later, General Ray Odierno reported that 34 of the ISI's top 42 leaders had been killed or captured.

On 16 May 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was appointed Emir of the ISI. He replaced many of the killed or captured leaders with former military and intelligence officials from Saddam Hussein's regime. By then, several were already serving in high positions. One of them was a former Colonel named Samir Abd Muhammad al Khlifawi, also known as Haji Bakr or Abu Bakr al Iraqi. At the time of al-Baghdadi's appointment, he was already head of the ISI's main advisory body, the Shura Council. Haji Bakr was a secularist Ba'athist who was casual about religious observance, but his organizational skills, knowledge of the Iraqi Army and ex-Ba'athist contacts made him virtually indispensable.<sup>7</sup> From May 2010 to August 2011, the group essentially bided its time and regrouped.

In August 2011, al-Baghdadi began sending Syrian and Iraqi ISI fighters into Syria. Led by a Syrian known as Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, this group recruited fighters and established cells throughout the country. On 23 January 2012, the group announced its formation as ***Jabhat an-Nusra li-Ahli ash-Shām*** ("The Support Front for the People of *al-Sham*," commonly known as *Jabhat al-Nusra* or the *al-Nusra* Front). *Al-Nusra* quickly grew into a capable fighting force that enjoyed popular support among Syrians opposed to the Assad regime. By the end of 2012, Al-Jawlani had built JN into one of the opposition's most effective fighting forces. Locals viewed its members as fair and honest in settling disputes and providing services.

In April 2013, al-Baghdadi released an audio statement announcing that *al-Nusra* Front had been established, financed and supported by the Islamic State of Iraq, and that the two groups were merging under the name **Islamic State of Iraq and *al-Sham*** (ISIS, also known in the West as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL). Al-Jawlani immediately issued a statement denying the merger and complaining that neither he nor anyone else in *al-Nusra*'s leadership had been consulted about it. He submitted the matter to Ayman al-Zawahri, who, with the death of Osama bin-Laden, held the top spot in *al-Qaeda*. Zawahri nullified the merger, announcing that Baghdadi had "made a mistake" by announcing a merger "without consulting us." In response, al-Baghdadi, who had never pledged *baya* to Zawahri, announced that he would not abide by the ruling, as he was bound to follow the dictates of Allah, not decisions that deviated from them. Nevertheless, because al-Jawlani had no intention of recognizing the merger, JN effectively became independent of ISIS.

In September of 2013 skirmishes broke out between other anti-Assad groups and ISIS. By January of 2014 there was open warfare. In February, after a string of ISIS attacks and assassinations, *al-Qaeda* took the unprecedented step of disaffiliating the organization. On 2 February, *al-Qaeda*'s general command released a statement disavowing ISIS: "ISIS is not a branch of the *Qaidat al-Jihad* [*al-Qaeda*'s official name] group, we have no organizational relationship with it, and the group is not responsible for its actions."

On 29 June 2014, ISIS removed "Iraq and *al-Sham*" from its name and began to refer to itself as the "Islamic State," proclaiming itself a caliphate and naming Abu Bakr as Caliph. The announcement of a caliphate apparently captured the imagination of would-be insurgents. In the

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<sup>7</sup>He ultimately died fighting the Free Syrian Army North of Aleppo in early January of 2014.

month after the announcement, a reported 6,300 volunteers enlisted. This represented a roughly 33% increase in the organization's strength. The following month, it launched its offensive in northern Iraq.

### **The Islamic State's "Ideology"**

The Islamic State is not a religious entity. There is no understanding the Islamic State without understanding that.

As to its ideological pretensions, the Islamic State is similar to Nazism, which was also not an ideology. One can like or dislike Marx or Lenin, but their theories, right or wrong, were attempts to explain socioeconomic trends. Communism was a program built on the conclusions they reached. Though they were nationalists, the individuals behind Nazism had no real ideology. They sought to build an empire largely through theft. They would expropriate property from Jews in Germany, and later, in conquered nations. They would take land from other nations through conquest. They would even steal labor from any number of ethnic groups in Germany and conquered countries —slave labor. Nazi "ideology" was simply a rationalization of these activities, which are beyond the pale, as was the illegal violence they used in pursuit of them. So, the Jews were not really being stolen from, according to the Nazis. The Nazis were simply taking back what Jews had supposedly robbed from Germans over centuries. The Nazis claimed that they were provoked into attacking every country they attacked.<sup>8</sup> The attack on the Soviet Union, according to the Nazis, was a climactic battle to defend civilization from Communism. As to slave labor, there were as many rationalizations for why the ethnic groups in question supposedly deserved to be exploited as there were ethnic groups exploited. Nazism was a collection of rationalizations, not an ideology.

The Islamic State, likewise, offers not a coherent ideology, religious or political, but a series of rationalizations for doing as it pleases. It couches its actions, almost invariably illegal, in religious rhetoric, and has even appointed a cleric with questionable religious credentials as its "Caliph." Probably the most pressing problem in the Muslim world today is the increasing tendency of violent criminals to cynically hijack Islam as a justification for the exercise of illegitimate power. The head of an armed gang, complete lack of formal religious training notwithstanding, dons a black turban, spouts a few passages from the Quran, gives himself some sort of religious title and decrees that the area he controls through violence will now be governed by Sharia law —as he interprets it. This invariably means that people have to pay "taxes" or "fees" to him and that any challenge his rule is punishable by death. This is simply warlordism with a thin religious veneer. The Islamic State is a super-sized example of this.

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<sup>8</sup>It is no accident that the claims the Islamic State uses to justify its actions are, by and large, patent nonsense. Aggressive regimes and insurgencies concoct grievances to justify taking territory or power. They avoid reliance on legitimate grievances. A legitimate grievance might be addressed, removing the justification for violent action. To the extent that there are legitimate grievances, the aggressive regime will usually make demands for their satisfaction so outrageous that they can never be agreed to. Such regimes or insurgencies do not want satisfaction. They want violent conflict and the spoils they expect to flow from it, be they territory or power. Concocted grievances, by their nature, cannot be addressed, so the pretext for violent action cannot be removed. For example, the "*casus belli*" that Germany used to justify its attack on Poland in 1939 was a purported attack on a German radio station by Polish forces. It later emerged that the "attack" was staged by S.S. men who fired at the building while the station was on air, then withdrew after leaving behind murdered concentration camp inmates dressed in Polish Army uniforms.

That the Islamic State's actions are not governed by Muslim principles is too obvious to require much exposition. The blatant hypocrisy shown by the Islamic State invalidates its "Islamist" pretensions and relieves analysts of any duty to credit them as genuine and then strain to reconcile them with its behavior. They cannot be reconciled.

The Islamic State has shown such vast theological flexibility that it is impossible to credit its "principles" as such. For example, if it believes that some act or other can be justified by some passage in the Quran, it is quick to cite it, or even to rely on a strained interpretation of something in the Quran if no cite is handy, while ignoring the explicit prohibitions on most of what it does. The most obvious examples are theft and wanton murder, mostly of Muslims and the blowing up of Mosques.

For another example, it beheads some hostages, supposedly for what their governments have done (though they were completely unconnected with those governments), while allowing others whose governments they have accused of the same crimes to go free following the payment of massive ransoms. If the Islamic State was really as aggrieved by what these governments had done as it claims and really believed that beheading their citizens was a just and appropriate punishment for it, it would have carried out the beheadings in all cases. It would not have deviated from what it claims is its duty to justice in response to what amount to large bribes from nations it claims are guilty of war crimes against it.

Its behavior regarding antiquities has been similar. It has made a great public show of destroying a few ancient statues on the grounds that they constituted idolatry. Meanwhile, it has been selling off other "idolatrous" pieces on the black market as fast as it can for as much as it can. If the Islamic State was really as upset about what it claims is idolatry, it would have destroyed every statue and would not have allowed itself to be diverted from its religious duty by something as vulgar as large cash payments by black market dealers.

The Islamic State's behavior with regard to hostages and antiquities would be puzzling to anyone attempting to understand a religious movement. However it would make perfect sense to any criminologist or police detective. It does not demonstrate inconsistency in carrying the out of justice or of religious obligation. It instead reflects an absolutely consistent policy of cashing in where it can and killing certain hostages or destroying select antiquities as a warning to the entities that they are attempting to extort of what happens when they do not pay up.

To be sure, there is an element of terrorism to the beheadings and other outrages against civilians. Terrorism is the intentional employment of physical violence against civilians, accompanied by the threat of more such violence, to instill fear in a society to force political change or acquiescence to political change.<sup>9</sup> Acts in furtherance of these goals generally have been designed to intimidate the many with the grim plight of a few victims. The people who run the Islamic State know little about Western governments or societies. To some extent they believe that beheadings and similar outrages will either frighten Western governments into accepting the political status quo or frighten the citizens of those countries into forcing their governments to accept it.<sup>10</sup> However, even if we grant that this is a political goal, it is

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<sup>9</sup>Center for Security and Science definition. The CSS definition differs from the United States government's, which holds that only non-national actors can be guilty of terrorism. *See* Title 22, United States Code, Section 2656f(d).

<sup>10</sup>How ill-informed they are about Western governments became evident in how badly the beheadings backfired. They even managed to badly miscalculate the reaction in Jordan to burning a Jordanian pilot alive. Before they did it, a significant segment, maybe even a majority, of the Jordanian population questioned the wisdom of working with Western powers against the Islamic State. After they did it, hatred for the Islamic State in Jordan became almost universal and the government now has a virtual blank check from the Jordanian citizenry to do whatever it

nevertheless closely intertwined with criminality in that it amounts to trying to get Western countries to let the Islamic State keep its ill-gotten gains.

The individuals who run the Islamic State think and act as criminals think and act.<sup>11</sup> No convoluted sociopolitical theories are necessary when (a) they are so difficult to reconcile with the Islamic State's behavior and (b) such a simple and rational explanation for the Caliphate's behavior that actually works is so obvious. If, when attempting to predict the actions of the Islamic State, analysts ask themselves not what a hard line religious fanatic would do, but what rational but violent criminals operating a multibillion dollar criminal enterprise would do, they will not be wrong often, or by much.

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pleases to the Islamic State. No one should think for a second that the people running the Islamic State are masterminds.

<sup>11</sup>To state what already should be fairly obvious, if a group of people attempt to extort ransom for a pilot they know full well they have already burned alive, they are not doing it because they are guided by Muslim principles. Such behavior falls so far short of the level of integrity the Quran requires of believers that no possible argument can be made that the Quran even allows for it, let alone requires it.

## Financing the Islamic State

What is now the Islamic State has been self sufficient from early in its existence. There is no evidence that it has ever received any state funding. Contrary to popular belief, the Islamic State and its previous incarnations have received little financial assistance from *al-Qaeda*. Because it has been beholden to no one financially, it has never had to deal with demands or constraints placed on it by sponsors.

The organization's beginnings were financed largely by individual donations. It quickly segued into criminality of the "strong arm" variety. Because the criminality involved activities in or near areas under its control, it has been virtually immune to U.S. and Allied government actions to shut down international channels of financing that have impacted *al-Qaeda* so severely. In fact, in 2005, Ayman al-Zawahri, Osama bin-Laden's second-in-command, asked the organization's then-leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi for \$100,000.<sup>12</sup> By 2006, as *al-Qaeda* in Iraq, the organization's criminal enterprises were bringing in at least \$70 million a year.

Documents seized from the laptop of Abdulrahman al-Bilawi (then a member of the Military Council) in June 2014 after his killing by Iraqi security forces, indicated that the Islamic State had around \$875 million in cash and assets before the fall of Mosul. There is some dispute about the exact amount it netted in Mosul, but there have been reports that the group seized as much as \$430 million, mostly in Iraqi dinars, from the Central Bank and other financial institutions in the city during the offensive. The fall of Mosul also yielded a substantial haul of government property, including abandoned military equipment.

A chief source of income for the Islamic State has been oil production facilities in Syria and Iraq. Oil production from facilities under Islamic State control was estimated at between 30,000 and 80,000 barrels per day. Even if sold at the heavily discounted prices, this would have netted the Islamic State anywhere from \$900,000 to \$4 million per day.<sup>13</sup> However, the regime lost control of three major oilfields during the recent Iraqi government/Kurdish offensive. In Iraq, it now controls only the Northern Qayara oilfield outside Mosul, the maximum production capacity of which is estimated to be about 2,000 barrels per day.

The Islamic State makes far more in extortion and toll collection, however. The extortion mostly takes the form of "taxes" levied on businesses in areas under its control. The Islamic State extorts everything from small businesses to large enterprises like electric companies and other energy suppliers. Another form of extortion involves a protection racket in areas outside of Islamic State control. Terrorists threaten to blow up electricity substations, utility poles and cell phone towers unless the companies that own them pay protection money. In addition, any non-Muslims who stay in areas under the control of the Islamic State are obliged to pay *jizya*, or head tax, of around \$700 per adult male. Another source of income is "tolls" from highway checkpoints. It is reported that each large truck entering Mosul must pay \$400, and smaller commercial vehicles pay \$50 to \$100. This is a key reason why the Islamic State has been so keen to seize key supply routes.

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<sup>12</sup>Whether or not he got it is unknown.

<sup>13</sup>The net is probably closer to the lower end. A good deal of the oil is of the "heavy sour" variety, which is more difficult to refine and commands much lower prices than the preferred "light sweet."

To provide some idea of the volume of cash produced by these activities, the Islamic State was taking in an estimated \$8 million per month in Mosul even before the city was under its complete control just from extortion and tolls.

The Islamic State has also sold manufactured goods or equipment stripped from factories it has seized, as well as produce from farms it has seized. It also profits from the expropriation of property belonging to non-Sunnis who have fled territories under its control. It has also made a great deal of money from selling captured stocks from government depots and has made millions of dollars from the sale of looted antiquities. For example, the Islamic State has reportedly netted \$36 million from the sale of antiquities in one area in the Qalamoun mountains west of Damascus.

Finally, the Islamic State has been heavily into kidnapping for ransom, particularly foreigners. The kidnapping of four French citizens in 2014 may have netted as much as \$18 million. The total revenue from all ransoms is believed to approach \$100 million.

Thus far, there have been no reports of any serious leakage of cash, or much sticking to the hands of those involved. This is not surprising given the seriousness of the penalties for theft. What has been surprising has been the meticulousness of the Islamic State's recordkeeping. For almost every one of the acts listed above, there is apparently a written receipt.

The Islamic State still receives donations from wealthy individuals, mostly in Saudi Arabia, despite the Kingdom's attempts to clamp down on such funding, but these donations now add up to less than 5% of the Islamic State's revenue stream.

While the recent loss of major oilfields in Iraq and ongoing efforts to limit the flow of international money to the Islamic State will restrict cash flow somewhat. There is no practical way to deal the Islamic State a decisive financial blow. When it dies, it will not be because it ran short of cash.

## **Governance of the Islamic State**

### The Caliph

At the top of the Islamic State's organizational chart is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, known by his supporters as Caliph Ibrahim, the titular head of the regime. In all likelihood, he is a rubber stamp for the hard men in the organization.

Before becoming Caliph, al-Baghdadi's concerns had been purely religious, not military. Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Baghdadi served as the head of the Sharia Committee for *Jamaat Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamaah* (JJASJ, or the Army of the Sunni People Group), a small militant group that operated in Samarra, Diyala, and Baghdad. Coalition forces detained him from February to December of 2004 but released him, as he was not considered a high-level threat. In early 2006, JJASJ's leadership pledged *baya* to the leaders of *Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin* (MSM, or Mujahideen Shura Council, formerly *al-Qaeda* in Iraq) and joined the umbrella organization. He served, once again, on the Sharia Committee. When the organization changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) later that year, Baghdadi became the general supervisor of the Sharia Committee for the *wilayats* (provinces) within the new "state" as well as a member of ISI's senior consultative council. When ISI's leader, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, died in April 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi succeeded him, apparently largely due to the influence of former officials of Saddam Hussein's regime in the organization. Thereafter, many of his appointments to fill the leadership positions of those who had been killed or captured were men who had held responsible positions in Saddam's military/intelligence apparatus.

### Advisory Councils

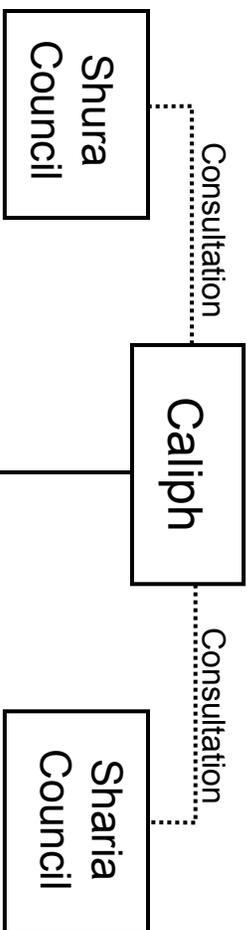
Al-Baghdadi has two councils with which he consults, the **Shura Council** for practical matters and the **Sharia Council** for religious ones. After consultation, orders come down from him. Given his background, expertise, and the nature of the orders he has handed down, it is fairly clear that he plays a dominant role in Sharia Committee consultations and just signs off on the recommendations of the Shura committee.

### Implementation of Policy

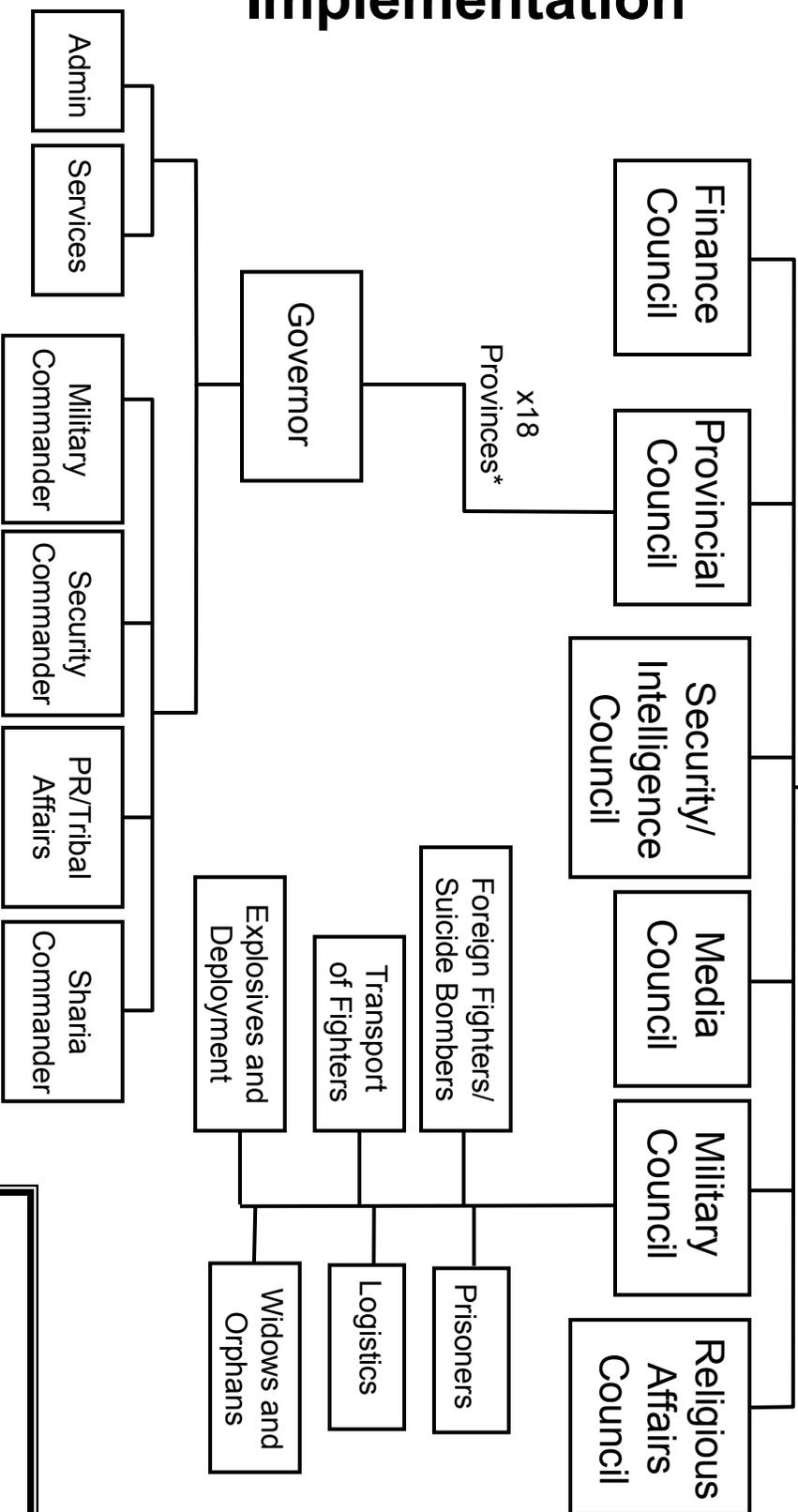
Policy is implemented by six major councils: Religious Affairs, Media, Finance, Military, Security/Intelligence, and Provincial. The duties of the first five are self-explanatory. The governing of the territory controlled by the Islamic State, which now contains an estimated six million people, is done by the Provincial Council.

The Islamic State divides civil administration responsibilities into eighteen *walyat*, or provinces, each with its own governor. Each governor has a Military commander, a Security commander, a Sharia Commander, and a Public Relations/Tribal Affairs representative. Their roles are self-explanatory. There is also an Administrative office and a Services office. At provincial level, the Administrative office is not particularly busy, as most administration is done at the local level. The job of the Services office can be demanding, for while most services are provided at the local level, major utilities like power and water involve large facilities run at

# Policy



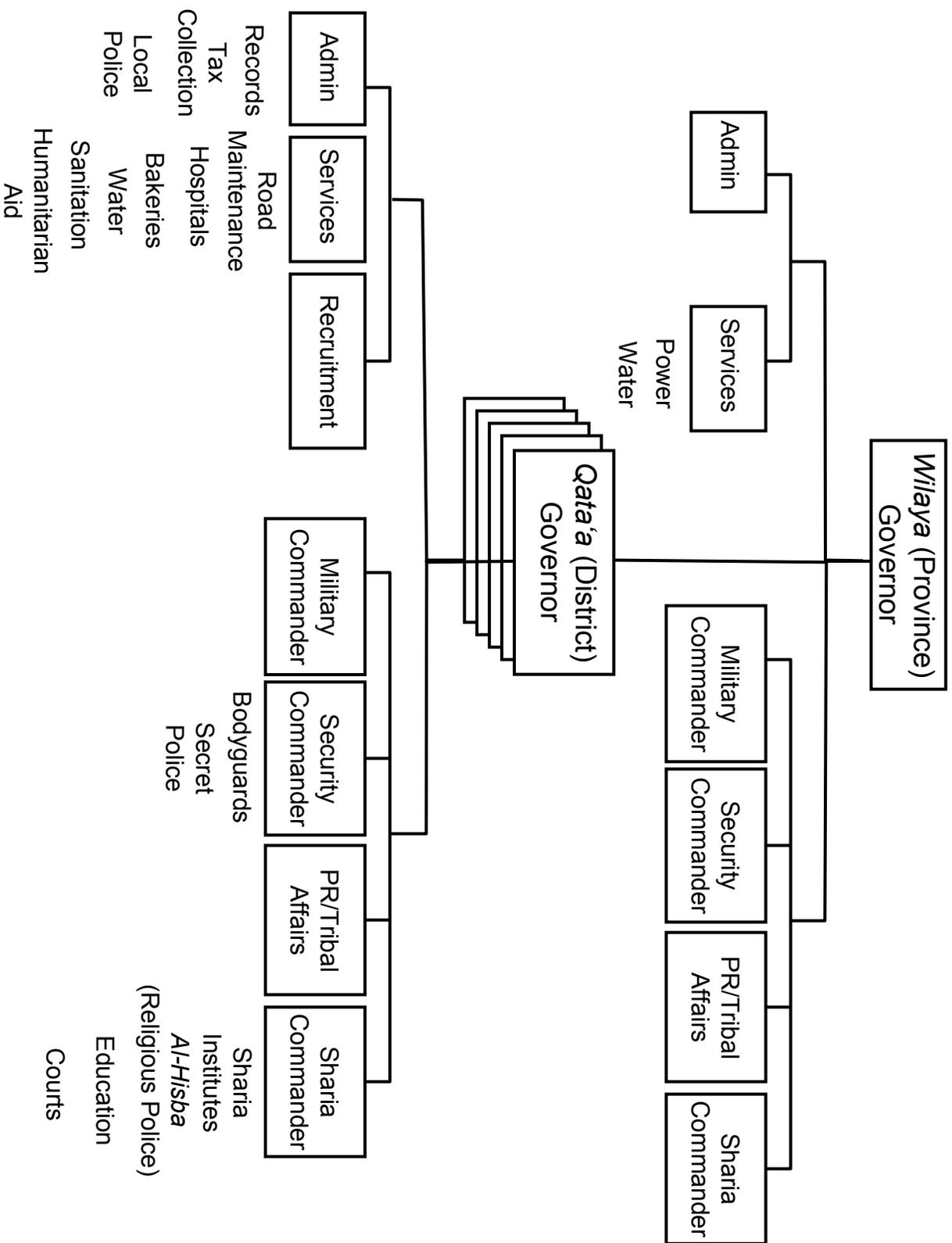
# Implementation



\*Each provincial district has basically the same leadership structure

**ISLAMIC STATE  
STRUCTURE**

# TYPICAL ISLAMIC STATE PROVINCIAL STRUCTURE



provincial level. It is here that the Islamic State experiences a certain level of breakdown over the previous administrations. While many of the people who are currently running the machines are the same people who have been running them in the past, much of the executive talent has fled and mistakes are made as a result. The political nature of many of the decisions is another problem. To cite just one example, political considerations place pressure on operators of dams to provide electricity, which always seems to be in short supply. This results in water shortages.

Each province is further divided into *Qata'a* (districts). This is where most of the provision of services happens, and there is real interaction with the population. Like the provincial governor, each District governor has a Military commander, a Security commander, a Sharia commander, and a Public Relations/Tribal Affairs representative.

As religion plays a central role in the Islamic State, it follows that at local level the Sharia commander would have a great deal of responsibility. Wherever the Islamic State is in control, it establishes Sharia institutes, essentially mechanisms for adult religious education. There are religious police, *al-Hisbah*, who see that religious standards are met in public. Education mostly deals with religion, and the Courts are usually presided over by religious officials.

As at district level, there is also an Administrative office and a Service office. The Administrative office, in addition to record keeping and tax collection, is responsible for the police who maintain civil order (as opposed to the religious police). Meanwhile, there are, for lack of a better term, the secret police who are on the lookout for political resistance. So, in most districts, there are three police forces answering to three different authorities.

The Service office is responsible for basic health and welfare needs. These include road maintenance, running medical facilities, water, sanitation, bakeries and humanitarian aid. In many districts, the jobs are done by the same people who did them before the Islamic State took over. Only the senior supervisors have changed, and as these are fairly straightforward activities, the replacement of previous supervisors with less well-trained or experienced ones has been problematic, but not disastrous. Many services have proceeded surprisingly smoothly.

## The Use of Terror

In areas under firm Islamic State control, the Islamic State applies terror liberally, and it performs the function it is intended to perform efficiently. A cowed population will never be as productive as a free and vibrant one, but the Islamic State is concerned not with productivity, but control. Terror is undeniably useful for small groups of people trying to control large groups of people. Again, one central feature of terrorism anywhere is that it seeks to cow the many with the grim plight of a few victims. In this context, that is precisely the goal of the Islamic State. The murder of someone, or several people, in the village square sends a message with an impact that no public service announcement or campaign can ever achieve.<sup>14</sup> A citizen's decision of whether

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<sup>14</sup>I decline to use the term "executions" here. When speaking or writing about law, words and terms have specific meanings. An execution is the culmination of a legal process by a legally constituted authority. It is the ultimate state sanction and is applied to punish people for the most extreme violations of law, like murder, and to deter others from committing such infractions. The killings here are being done by an illegal regime following proceedings, in cases where there actually are proceedings, which are most often shams undertaken for the sake of ceremony or propaganda. The killings are not conducted for the punishment or deterrence of serious illegality. They are themselves illegal acts conducted in order to terrorize the population into obeying the illegitimate dictates of a regime that is itself illegitimate. These killings are therefore murder. No point is served by mincing matters in the

or not to rebel against a government he is unhappy with always involves a risk-benefit analysis. Regimes like the Islamic State dial the risk factor up to eleven on a one-to-ten scale, so the population is cowed, and a cowed population will always be easier to control than one that isn't. The Islamic State is about control, not broad based public consent.

### Lack of Popular Support

The Islamic State will ultimately be badly hurt by lack of popular support, however. In the areas under its control, it expropriates what it wants. Its fighters eat first, and eat well. The civilians get the leftovers. Anyone who complains is imprisoned and/or tortured and/or executed.

Here, one example can serve for literally thousands of historical examples of what tends to happen when civilians are seen and used as nothing but a life support system for soldiers/insurgents/bandits. In a remarkably candid report (*Izvestya*, 8 May 1919) of why the city of Vilnius fell so easily to Polish forces, Vincas Mickevičius (pen name Kapsukas), prime minister of the short-lived Lithuanian–Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, wrote:

Disorderly requisitioning and endless demands provoked mistrust, and embittered even those sections of the population who had formerly welcomed the Red Army as their liberators from the hated German occupation and from landlord oppression.<sup>15</sup> ... It was impossible to fill the ranks of the Red Army with local men owing to their hostility toward it.<sup>16</sup>

Day-to-day contact with Islamic State fighters is also not engendering any love in the population of occupied territories. Psychopaths, looters and rapists are a problem in the Islamic State.

Anyone enlisting for combat service is issued an unwritten and unspoken but very real license to kill, issued by whatever authority the individual is fighting for. In most armies, most individuals join because they are patriotic or because they want to test themselves against challenges. However, it would be completely unrealistic, given the nature of the job, to assume that everyone who enlists does so for such reasons. The occasional psychopath will always show up, attracted, sometimes solely, by the fringe benefit of being able to kill people without going to jail for it—the ability to hunt humans. There usually aren't many of these people, given the filters at recruitment level or in the levels of training that must be successfully completed before someone is assigned to a unit. Inevitably, however, some slip through. Commanders don't generally talk about this problem, but only the most irresponsible are not constantly on the lookout for these soldiers, who tend to be war crimes looking for a place to happen. There is no evidence that the Islamic State takes any steps at all to filter or weed out such individuals. To the contrary, it seems to welcome them.

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interest of “value free” academic writing. I likewise decline to apply the term “confiscation” to acts of theft by the Islamic State.

<sup>15</sup>Widespread liquidation of “criminal and counter-revolutionary elements” had also been a significant cause of the people's embitterment.

<sup>16</sup>The Bolsheviks who remained in the city were also unpleasantly surprised to find that the local inhabitants were not only willing, but eager, to point them out to Polish forces so that they could be arrested.

Most armies also go to great lengths to discourage looting and rape, to screen out would-be looters and rapists, and to severely punish the ones who had not been screened out. The Islamic State actively courts them, and does not seem particularly worried about what they do to civilians when they arrive.

The Islamic State may not care whether a volunteer is a psychopath or a looter or a rapist, but individuals in elite units tend to care deeply. Serious warriors don't like to be around them. In addition to finding such people morally distasteful, true believers generally look at people who aren't with considerable disdain. If someone is fighting for a cause, and the guy next to him is fighting to satisfy bloodlust or to grab whatever he can take, the true believer will tend to find the opportunist's presence offensive and make his feelings on that score known. Competent leaders recognize that this causes unit cohesion problems and will ease or even throw the offensive party out of the unit. Thus, in the Islamic State, these individuals get pushed to the rear. Civilians thus have the most contact with the worst elements of the Islamic State's forces.

As in the Lithuanian–Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, the population of areas occupied by the regime will be worn down and embittered by abuse in the form of expropriation, crimes against civilians, including frequent killings, and the overwhelming presence of constant fear. When areas occupied by the Islamic State come under attack, Islamic State forces will receive little or no help from the civilian population. After liberation, that population will be happy to point out anyone who has had any part in the previous administration to the victors.

## Military Operations

### Structure

While estimates vary, most estimates place Islamic State strength at more than 25,000 fighters. However, the portion of the Islamic State's fighters that is actually effective is relatively narrow, a point to which I will return. Fighters receive regular salaries as well as free housing, usually confiscated from those who have fled Islamic State-controlled areas. Monthly pay runs from \$400 to \$600. By way of perspective, semi-skilled workers in Iraq generally earn between \$100 and \$200 per month. Pay is determined mostly by the size of the fighter's family, not by rank.

The strike arm of the force consists of some 3,000 fighters deployed in soft-skinned vehicles sometimes light armored vehicles, usually armed with heavy machine-guns. That force is modular and strike units are formed on an *ad hoc* basis, with armed columns usually consisting of anywhere from ten to thirty vehicles. When necessary, a column can be supplemented by light armored vehicles. The remaining fighters are of inconsistent quality and are used mainly to occupy and hold ground taken by the flying columns.

Operations are directed by the Military Council, which has access to many former officers from Saddam's regime to do its planning. There are six main activities supporting military operations. One is in charge of housing and training foreign fighters and suicide bombers. One is in charge of deploying suicide bombers and placing IEDs. There is a department concerned with the transport of fighters and another concerned with logistics. Finally, there are prisoner handling units and a unit for seeing to the welfare of the families of slain fighters. The latter function is critical, given the importance of suicide bombers in Islamic State operations.

The most important Islamic State commander is 28-year-old Omar al-Shishani<sup>17</sup> (born Tarkhan Tayumurazovich Batirashvili), who currently serves as chief-of-staff of the Military Council. He is from Georgia, with a Christian father and a Chechen Muslim mother. He served in an elite reconnaissance unit in the Georgian Army and saw combat against the Russian Army. He rose to the rank of sergeant and had been tabbed for officership. However, his pre-course physical turned up tuberculosis, which disqualified him not only from officer training but further military service. He spent more than a year in a Georgian prison on weapons charges and arrived in Syria in March 2012, leading a group of Chechen fighters, *Jaish al Muhajireen wa al-Ansar* (Army of the Emigrants and Helpers). He originally fought alongside the *al-Nusra* front but swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in November of 2013 and was joined by a few of his fighters. Most of the JMA's fighters refused to join him, selected another leader and continued on in support of *al-Nusra*. He and his fighters have been involved in many of the Islamic State's military successes. It now describes him as its "military commander." Perhaps because of al-Shishani, Chechens have played an outsized role in the Islamic State's military operations.

### Tactics

The Islamic State does not attack anything until it has been well and truly softened up. The first phase of an Islamic State offensive invariably involves terror attacks and assassination of members of the forces in the target area over a period of months or even years. Early in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's tenure, the Islamic State of Iraq, the current group's forerunner, began

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<sup>17</sup>*Al-Shishani* means "the Chechen" in Arabic.

targeting pro-government leaders and personnel in a multi-year campaign of assassinations. The program reached a crescendo in al-Baghdadi's "Soldiers Harvest" campaign against on-and off-duty security force members from July 2013 to June 2014, preceding the offensive in northern Iraq. In addition to eliminating key leaders, these attacks have a devastating impact on morale, as no one in the target area ever feels safe and security forces are on edge for months before the attack even comes.

The second phase involves the liberal use of suicide bombers. Unable to use artillery competently, Islamic State forces use suicide bombers in its place. A major assault will usually be preceded by suicide bomb attacks on headquarters (usually vehicular) and key checkpoints (usually vest).

The motorized columns hit soon after, usually with the element of surprise, and capitalize on the confusion created by the suicide bomb attacks. The flying columns take critical points and throw already confused defenders into panic.

The second-line, ground holding fighters then follow on to occupy the seized ground in numbers as the flying columns push onward. The holding forces are often able to occupy the ground quite quickly after it is seized. There is generally very little fighting, so they usually advance into a vacuum created by the withdrawal of the defenders. The speed of occupation is also facilitated by the Islamic State's effective road transport arm. The Islamic State has been very nimble with regard to moving fighters and supplies. When, as a result of I.S. actions, Islamic State forces in Syria were attacked by other Syrian opposition groups, it was able to rapidly move not only flying columns but large numbers of second-line fighters with supplies to where they were needed.

### Treachery and Stalemate

The Islamic State attempts to dominate any other organization that don't see things its way and take whatever it can. It is therefore predatory and treacherous and has no true allies. Any opposition group that lets down its guard risks being attacked by I.S. forces. This has given the Assad regime a reprieve. An opposition group attacking the regime's forces may risk being attacked after it has suffered attrition or even while it is fighting with Assad's forces. An example of this occurred in November of 2013 as *Jabhat al-Nusra* (JN) launched an assault against Assad's 17th Division in Raqqa. Four days into the offensive, JN commanders began to notice that while their forces were in desperate combat with Assad's soldiers, I.S. forces were quietly withdrawing from the front lines and massing around JN headquarters as well as setting up checkpoints around the city to take control of areas JN forces had vacated in order to move to the front. JN had to pull forces from the front lines to deal with the threat to its headquarters and the opportunistic checkpoints. This dynamic was not unique to Raqqa.

The Islamic State has also made extensive use of bad-faith ceasefires with other opposition groups. These allow I.S. forces to move forces to areas of the battlefield where the situation is critical. Once the fire is put out, whatever group it had the ceasefire with is attacked, and, where possible, massacred. Again, Raqqa provides an instructive example. In January of 2014, Islamic State forces needed to attack JN forces in order to reach their besieged fighters in the governor's palace. In order to speed the attack, it arranged for a cease-fire with the Salafist group *Ahrar al-Sham*. The *Ahrar al-Sham* fighters agreed to leave the city without a fight in order to avoid bloodshed and I.S. agreed to let them withdraw in peace. After securing the city

and massacring some 100 JN prisoners, Islamic State forces turned on *Ahrar al-Sham* forces in the villages surrounding the city, in one case murdering every *Ahrar al-Sham* fighter who surrendered and burning their houses. The breaking of ceasefires after only a week or two has been commonplace.

I.S.'s penchant for treachery has taken pressure off of the governments in both Iraq and Syria, as the forces of the Islamic State wait for opportunities to attack other opposition forces and those forces avoid heavy combat so as not to provide that opportunity.

### Inconsistent Troop Quality

The most important question in the initial evaluation of a new recruit is not: "How were your grades in high school?" or "How many push-ups can you do?" It is: "Why are you here?" The Islamic State has a pretty hollow army largely because most of its fighters are there for the wrong reasons. There are a few thousand true believers. We may find their cause distasteful, but they believe that they are fighting for a cause. They are devoted and they are dangerous. The bulk of the Islamic State's gunmen have less idealistic motivations and are far less dangerous. A considerable number have been drawn by promises of money, cars and women. The best men do not fight for money (or cars, or women). The Islamic State has also attracted a number of psychopaths who have joined in order to indulge in killing.

Simply picking up a firearm never made anyone a soldier, let alone a good one. While the Islamic State's recruiting has been successful in terms of numbers, quality has been another matter. The Islamic State's recruitment pitch is based largely on the promise of booty and even sex slaves. Recruitment pitches aimed at base instincts like greed and lust, including bloodlust, invariably attract the worst people.

The prevalence of low-caliber recruits who are not up to the demands of offensive warfare has forced the Islamic State to concentrate its best fighters into mobile strike units.<sup>18</sup> The lower-caliber fighters are used mainly to occupy and hold ground taken by the flying columns. Though the lower-caliber units aren't as unsuited to defensive warfare as they are to offensive warfare, their defending has been uneven.<sup>19</sup> As a result, flying columns end up being pressed into service defending particularly sensitive areas or as fire brigades when faced with attacks pressed on a broad front with determination.

A disproportionate share of the fighting, and the casualties, therefore falls on the flying columns. Losses sustained by these units have a disproportionate impact on the regime's combat power. This is similar to calculations about combat effectiveness in Western armies. At a loss rate of 30 percent, an infantry division is generally considered combat ineffective. That is

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<sup>18</sup>Even the strike forces are not all that they could be. The Islamic State is paranoid. Its behavior has made enemies of almost every other group in both Syria and Iraq, including *al-Qaeda*. It therefore places a massive emphasis on counterintelligence because it fears spies and traitors. The most intelligent recruits therefore tend to be placed in counterintelligence. Thus, individuals who could be serving as leaders on the battlefield are stalking the villages and towns in the rear looking for anything suspicious.

<sup>19</sup>This problem definitely is not unique to the Islamic State. Saddam Hussein concentrated his best soldiers in the Republican Guard or Regular Army armored and mechanized units. As a result, units used solely for defense were left to operate on an extremely lean manpower mixture. As a result, in Desert Storm, these units virtually disintegrated on contact with Coalition forces.

because the losses to that division will have overwhelmingly been borne by its infantry battalions. While losses to the entire division may only be 30 percent overall, losses among its infantry battalions may be 60 percent or more. Though it may still have 10–15,000 men available, its shortage of trained infantrymen is acute.<sup>20</sup> That is why the division is considered combat ineffective. The recent offensive in Iraq, by attacking at numerous points, forced Islamic State forces into committing and losing troops it could not afford to lose. Though it has not been on the receiving end of a major offensive in Syria, these units are in action almost constantly. At some point, losses to these units will tell.

### How The Islamic State Ultimately Ends

Ultimately, the Islamic State will fall because at some point it will run short of dependable fighters and it has made too many enemies. Eventually, the number on hand will not be enough to keep its enemies at bay. Sparta was defeated because it ran long on enemies and short of Spartans. Too much ultimately depended on lower-caliber allies, overall combat power suffered and Sparta's enemies overwhelmed it. Islamic State forces are under ground attack from all sides and constant air bombardment as well. The losses are being borne disproportionately by its best fighters. So long as pressure is maintained, and the Islamic State continues to lose able fighters faster than it can replace them, more and more of the burden of combat will fall on units that are not equal to it, and eventually it will be overwhelmed.

None of this is to say that the regime will go down easily. In this case, the end will be bloody. Even when a cause is lost, individuals may continue to fight for a number of reasons, and some of them apply here.

#### **1. Soldiers Believe That They Can Contribute to Their Side's Ultimate Victory or to Winning a More Favorable Settlement by Inflicting Large Numbers of Casualties on the Enemy.**

Most men fight in conflicts because they believe that in so doing, they will help their country or cause prevail. During the competitive phase of any conflict, most of the individuals involved, on both sides, are reasonably confident that their side will win. Very few individuals would actively participate in mortal combat on behalf of a cause they knew in advance was doomed.<sup>21</sup>

In the majority of cases, one side does lose, however. At some point, the war turns significantly against one side. At that point, the goal is not winning, but buying enough time to at least stabilize the situation and, if possible, turn things around. In these instances the level of confidence soldiers have in their leaders is a critical factor. If soldiers believe that this situation has been brought on by incompetent leadership rather than lack of resources or bad luck, and

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<sup>20</sup>Some believe, erroneously, that the 30 percent rule of thumb applies to all combat units. It refers only to larger units. An infantry company, battalion or brigade can sustain 30 percent casualties and function quite effectively.

<sup>21</sup>Indeed, the majority of the Islamic State's fighters enlisted when it was on a winning streak. When its fortunes began to ebb, recruiting fell off sharply.

there is no prospect for better leadership on the horizon, belief in the cause can vanish. In such cases, in addition to simply not believing that their leaders are good enough to win, there are strong feelings of breach of contract. Loyalty, even to a country, is not a one-way street. If a soldier has fought loyally for a country/cause and it has repaid his loyalty by putting him under the command of incompetents who are getting his comrades killed toward no valid end and are likely to eventually get him killed as well, then the country/cause simply has not kept up its end of the bargain. Under those circumstances, soldiers will feel a lot less guilty about finding a safe spot to hide during a battle or even deserting or surrendering, so collapse, rather than stabilization, is more likely. The Islamic State's first-line fighters seem to have a reasonable amount of confidence in their leaders. As a result, when the regime's fortunes reach this point, they will probably continue to fight with dedication. As to the feelings of the many fighters who were attracted by the prospects for loot or women, all bets are off.

Most of the time, a conflict eventually turns decisively enough that victory is no longer attainable for one side. At that point, there may still be something to fight for, so long as most soldiers retain a reasonable amount of confidence in their leaders. If the losing side can make winning a decisive victory costly enough for the enemy, it may be willing to settle for something less.

The end point of any war involves some calculation. It is always possible for the victors to inflict more punishment on their foes. Wars end when the leaders of victorious powers decide that their ambitions have been satisfied to such an extent that they deem the continuation of military operations wasteful. The question is not: "Can we kill more of their soldiers?" The answer to that is always "yes." The real question is usually more like: "Since we have gotten most of what we wanted, can we justify the losses we would incur to get even more?" The winners usually stop attacking when the answer to that question comes up "no."

Hard fighting by the losing side will generally produce a "no" answer sooner than it otherwise would have occurred. One example of this is Finland in 1944. While it rolled across Eastern Europe, destroying armies that had been heavily attrited during years of fighting in the Soviet Union, the Red Army was met at the border by an almost completely intact Finnish Army that immediately began inflicting serious losses on it.<sup>22</sup> In short order, the Soviets decided that conquering Finland would not be worth the cost and concluded a peace on extremely generous terms. It must be pointed out that the Finns satisfied an absolutely critical requirement for this calculus to work in their favor—relatively clean hands. Finland had taken part in Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, but it had contented itself with taking back land that it had lost in 1940. It didn't attack deep into the Soviet Union and had not been involved in atrocities. This allowed the Soviets to be magnanimous. The adversaries of Germany and Japan did not feel that they had that option when dealing with either of those countries. Both had committed too many atrocities to be let off with anything less than unconditional surrender, regardless of what the cost in attaining it was. The "clean hands" requirement isn't usually met in war, so in most cases the losing side ends up suffering a lot more punishment and sustaining a more complete defeat than it otherwise would have. It almost goes without saying that the Islamic State will not be a candidate for magnanimity no matter how hard its fighters resist, and that they know that. Once they see that ultimate victory is impossible, they will need other reasons to fight.

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<sup>22</sup>The Soviets had already had a bad experience fighting the Finns in 1940.

## **2. Soldiers Don't Want to Let Down Their Comrades.**

It has often been said that soldiers don't fight for their country, but for the guys next to them. That is an overstatement. In fact, there is a significant overlap between fighting for country/cause and for comrades along the conflict's timeline.<sup>23</sup> Soldiers usually enlist for their country/cause. That "guys" they are fighting for usually aren't next to them when they enlist and won't be until they are assigned to a unit. To some degree, they continue to fight for the country/cause so long as they believe that they are contributing something by doing so. By the end of the first battle, or first few battles at most, unit cohesion has developed to the point where, in addition to fighting for a country/cause, they are fighting for their comrades. In a collapsing military cause, belief that their efforts are helping their cause diminishes may disappear completely. This may leave not wanting to let their comrades down as some individuals' main or even sole motivation. If a conflict reaches the point where individuals are fighting solely because they don't want to let their comrades down, this dynamic can work strongly against the country/cause, especially if large numbers of fighters feel that they have been betrayed. If a fighter doesn't want to let his comrades down, and those comrades mutiny, then keeping faith with them means joining the mutiny. A cohesive unit may be less likely to disintegrate after disastrous reverses than one without cohesion, but it is also more likely to mutiny or defect as a unit than a less cohesive one if the conditions are right. At a certain level of adversity, Islamic State units will defect if conditions allow, especially to *al-Qaeda/al-Nusra*.

## **3. Soldiers Fear Retribution by Their Own Side or by Captors.**

The above two motivations deal with the better class of soldiers who are self-motivated. A significant portion of the men who have fought in history's wars have been conscripted. Larger conflicts invariably end up involving a lot of draftees. Obviously, not everyone who is pressed into service is devoid of belief in the cause or of regard for their comrades. However, for many of these individuals, especially those serving particularly brutal regimes, these are secondary considerations. Their continued participation is motivated mainly by fear of their leaders or fear of what will happen to them if they are captured.<sup>24</sup> Even insurgencies tend to have a certain number of people who are serving involuntarily. The Islamic State has begun conscripting individuals in areas it controls. There are also a significant number of fighters who enlisted voluntarily from countries outside Syria and Iraq in response to promises of money, cars and women and are now serving involuntarily after finding out that the promises were largely fraudulent. A few have already been executed to set an example for others attempting to leave.

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<sup>23</sup>Throughout history, most individuals who have fought in wars have fought for a country and its cause. Even some insurgents have fought for a country, though it was not yet recognized as such, as well as a cause. However, *internal* insurgents fight solely for a cause. For example, during the Irish War for Independence (1918–1921) the Irish Republican Army fought for Ireland (i.e. to eject British forces from it). In the Civil War that followed, die-hard I.R.A. men fought Irish government forces because they wanted full a Republic, not Free State status within the English Commonwealth. They were fighting solely for a cause.

<sup>24</sup>When a British diplomat remarked approvingly of Soviet soldiers' courage in attacking in the face of massive German punishment in one battle, Stalin explained to him that soldiers who didn't attack had more courage because in doing so they were virtually guaranteeing their deaths.

Leadership through intimidation is fatally flawed as a doctrine. Intimidation can work for a while, often a long while. However, men who are compelled to serve primarily by fear of their leaders will give up, run away, or even shoot their leaders if they end up facing something that scares them more than their leaders. Given the opportunity, many of the individuals currently serving the Islamic State will bolt when faced with annihilation in battle.

Many soldiers continue fighting, rather than surrendering, because they fear maltreatment or murder by the enemy if captured. This is one of the reasons that Western nations generally abide by the Geneva Conventions even if their opponents do not. Doing so makes surrender a legitimate alternative for enemy soldiers who would fight to the death if they thought that they would be tortured or shot out of hand.<sup>25, 26</sup> On this score, the Islamic State's behavior has given it something of an advantage. While mass surrenders by its enemies are largely a thing of the past due to the massacres it has perpetrated, its fighters must strongly suspect that as a result of those massacres they can expect little mercy if captured.<sup>27</sup> Essentially, the Islamic State's policies regarding prisoners have made this largely a fight to the death for its fighters, whether they were involved in massacres or not.

Slowly but surely, the Islamic State is going to start running out of true believers. More and more, the forces fighting against it in Iraq and Syria will encounter individuals who aren't true believers. Some will be fighting for their friends in the unit. Most will be held in line only by fear of punishment or retribution. Because those fears are justified, the regime's units will more or less hold their shape but will be ground down by attrition until the Islamic State's army is no more.

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<sup>25</sup>This comes with the caveat that the "clean hands" requirement tends to operate on the micro level as well as the macro. Western armies *generally* abide by the Geneva Conventions. However, in dealing with organizations that have serious blood on their hands and are characterized by fanaticism, like the Imperial Japanese Army, the Waffen S.S. or Hitler Youth anti-tank squads (that would destroy a tank, then immediately attempt to surrender), compliance has tended to be left to the sound discretion of unit commanders. For members of organizations like these, trying to surrender could be more dangerous than fighting.

<sup>26</sup>American ground forces paid the price for the liberties their government took with regard to maltreatment of prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan. Once word of that maltreatment began to circulate, some insurgents became more inclined to fight it out than surrender.

<sup>27</sup>Foreign fighters, if captured, would face at best, extradition to their countries of origin. This would be no picnic, as they would almost certainly be facing long prison sentences.