The Islamic State: Terrorists or Millenarian Mass Movement?

by

Lieutenant Colonel Edward R. Sullivan
United States Marine Corps

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Lieutenant Colonel Edward R. Sullivan
United States Marine Corps

Dr. Larry P. Goodson
Department of National Security and Strategy
Project Adviser

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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The Islamic State: Terrorists or Millenarian Mass Movement?

…A rising mass movement attracts and holds a following not by its doctrine and promises, but by the refuge it offers from the anxieties, barrenness and meaninglessness of an individual existence.

—Eric Hoffer[1]

The emergence, growth, and victories of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (IS)[2] serve as dominant features of news programs and government briefings. Popular perceptions paint the group as terrorists who opportunistically seized terrain and who are now trying to make a state out of this land. Moreover, though they have decisively eclipsed Al-Qaeda, most people erroneously view the two groups as having the same ideology.[3] This paper will demonstrate that the activities and successes to date of the Islamic State are better understood as representative of a millenarian mass movement seeking to deliberately and fundamentally reshape society through violent revolution. Millenarianism is "the belief in a coming ideal society, especially in one brought about through revolutionary action."[4] For IS, this involves the violent recreation of God's Kingdom on Earth in keeping with its particular reading of select sacred texts. In this manner IS assumes characteristics common to "cultic" religious militant movements throughout the world, such as Aum Shinrikyo in Japan; "the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord" in the United States (US); or certain Messianic Jewish groups in Israel, all of whom seek or sought to bring down governments and systems they deem unlawful in order to create a utopian society.

The particular revolutionary message presented by IS becomes of foremost importance together with the nature of the message's appeal. Legitimacy of the mission and the message can be everything to a terrorist organization,[5] particularly one

demanding a reordering of society. This necessitates a look at how IS establishes itself

in an Islamic context and how their "brand" is differentiated from the broader jihadist

context. Finally, we will consider how IS propagates its message to target recruits,

before concluding the study with a look to the future.

<div align="center">Using Islam as an Ideology of Social Revolution</div>

> The leadership of mankind by Western man is now on the decline, not
> because Western culture has become poor materially, or because its
> economic and military power has become weak…the Western system has
> come to an end because it is devoid of those life-giving values which
> enabled it to be the leader of mankind. [6]

The above quote is taken from the book *Milestones*, written in prison in 1964 by

Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The book not only played

a large role in bringing about Qutb's execution by the Egyptian government in 1966,[7] it

is a foundational document and source of inspiration for Salafi Islamists the world that

portray Islam as a political ideology able to serve as a direct competitor to capitalism

and communism. Many different "types" of Salafis exist in the world, from

"Establishment Salafis" to "Global Jihadists," differentiated largely by their willingness to

work within non-Islamic systems and their dedication to a militarized revitalization of the

Ummah or community of believers.[8] As they pose the most pressing danger to the

international community, this work is concerned primarily with Global Jihadists,

described by Tareq Abdelhaleem in the book *Global Jihadism* and represented by the

leadership of IS and Al-Qaeda.[9]

These Global Jihadists (simply "Jihadists" going forward) believe the first

generations of Islam were an ideal time of harmony and brotherhood. This spiritual

perfection was soon destroyed by theological innovation and ignorance of Islam's true

path.[10] In Qutb's view, the first half of the profession of faith, "*la ilaha illa allah*" (there is

<div align="center">2</div>

no deity but God), is falsely equated in modern times with the 1st Commandant given to Moses, stating a belief in monotheism.[11] Qutb stressed the point that in the Arabic of the Prophet's time, this "…rejection of false deities…" actually means a literal belief that there is "…no sovereignty except God's, no law except from God, and no authority of one man over another, as the authority in all respects belongs to God."[12]

Jihadists at their core reject all aspects of man-made governance; they reject borders, states, governments, and leaders delineated by anything other than God's law. In another seminal jihadist work, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi argues the theological case in *Democracy is a Religion* that in democracy men submit themselves to the rule of other men who have taken on the role of deities as legislators and creators of laws.[13] It is this belief that drives those Islamists committed to Jihad, to declare anyone believing in democracy to be a polytheist, as they ascribe to other men powers rightfully belonging only to God.

At its core, Islam offers a utopian vision of social justice and equality. Like many utopian visions, significant differences exist between the idea in theory and the idea in practice. Jihadists strive to eliminate such differences, believing that true social justice and equality among men is simply not possible until mankind is united under a flag of Islam, with "…no other name … added to it, and "*la ilaha illa allah*" written on it."[14]

Like other radical ideologies promising a completely new future *if only* man were living by a different set of rules, the revolutionary ideology of Jihadists appeals to a specific type of person. Such a person is often susceptible to radicalization of any sort, regardless of the type of movement (i.e., communism, fascism, socialism, etc…) being pursued. However, in what is increasingly a post-Marxist world, someone today wishing

to fight against globalization and the liberal democratic ideology of the "West,"
essentially has a choice between either anarchy or religious militancy, found here in the
form of jihad.[15]

IS appeals to and attracts fanatics. But as Roger Griffin describes in his book
Terrorist Creed, 'fanatic' in this case more accurately describes someone with
unshakeable beliefs, displaying a calculating and single-minded, 'rational' vision,
incapable of self-doubt.[16] He argues that in a desperate fight to avoid *anomie* men
create *nomos*, a "cosmic order" establishing the bounds of normative behavior that
"predates humanity itself."[17] It is the belief that there are particular rules greater than
ourselves that govern the way in which life works. Within this construct, a "*nomic crisis*"
occurs when this belief system appears to be under attack by the forces of modernity.
Exported through the mechanisms of globalization, democratic liberalism is today
breaking down more traditional cultures, transitioning populations from environments of
well-defined moral choices to ones with an overabundance of decisions and a near
absence of moral absolutes.[18] Overwhelmed by the possibilities stemming from this lack
of clarity, and feeling defenseless against what is seen as an attack on their culture,
many people welcome the order, clarity, and discipline provided by militant religious
groups.[19]

Such an attraction exists regardless of the religion a person claims because it
offers a way to fight back against globalization and feelings that old systems of order
have broken down. Jessica Stern in her book *Terror in the Name of God* writes,
"Although we see them as evil, religious terrorists know themselves to be perfectly
good. To be crystal clear about one's identity, to know that one's group is superior to all

others, to make purity one's motto and purification of the world one's life work – this is a kind of bliss."[20]

It is unlikely that everyone joining the Islamic State leaves their home and starts their journey believing fully in the cause of Jihad. Many may come to IS because it shows itself to be the most capable platform of anti-Western resistance in the world. Money and personal status can be drivers, though lower level fighters are normally not paid very well.[21] Others pursue jihad as a "fad," because it is seen as "cool" among Muslim youth.[22] Jihad is becoming the 'great adventure' and defining element of an Arab generation beset by chaos, warfare, and revolution. These young people see their world under attack and in turmoil, with the "Western" world to blame.

In such populations, the search for noble purpose and moral clarity above all else becomes quite common. Popular views of Islamic radicals often center around poor, disenfranchised, and undereducated youth from the slums, but that is frequently not the case. In his book *True Believer*, Eric Hoffer posits that it is the middle class that more commonly recognizes fault and threat in the world, and seeks a reordering of society.[23] Seeing a lack of purpose in what potential recruits interpret as a sea of ambiguous social choices and potential outcomes often drives a person to value fraternity and community above individual freedoms.[24]

Hoffer's analysis may account for the appearance that IS has the most impact in "middle income" parts of the Middle East versus either of the economic extremes.[25] It helps to explain why it has taken hold in Syria and Iraq, supported by fighters from Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco instead of Sudan or Qatar, and why it is more common in middle economic states of Europe rather than Scandinavia or the Mediterranean

periphery.[26] Hoffer notes, "It is not actual suffering but the taste of better things which excites people to revolt…Our frustration is greater when we have much and want more, than when we have nothing and want some."[27]

In Syria, the civil war exploded over demands for greater democracy and inclusiveness within the existing system, not from a desire for complete governmental change. In Iraq, mass violence did not occur until Sunnis determined that the paths to social mobility in that State had opened, but not for them. Hoffer concludes that in the contest to gain the support of those individuals open to radicalization, the group arriving first with the most complete and "…perfected collective framework" wins.[28] The challenge for such groups is making themselves stand out from competitors.

Establishing Legitimacy

"The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq."[29] This quote refers to *Dabiq*, a town in the countryside near the Syrian city of Aleppo, and it appears at the start of every magazine published by the Islamic State, acting as the title of the publication itself. It refers to the story of the apocalypse in Islam, wherein Jesus (*'Isa Ibn Maryam*) returns to lead the Muslim Armies against the armies of Rome – representative of "the West" – in northwest Syria.[30] Through the broad use of social media, online magazines, and internet forums discussed later in this paper, IS spends significant effort to establish its 'rightful place' as the vanguard of this millenarian revolution.[31]

While IS and al-Qaeda share many common origins and doctrinal sources, IS demonstrates itself to be less a pure terrorist organization and more of a revolutionary movement. While Al-Qaeda focuses on a global jihad, IS turns almost all of its attention

to securing the Arab World first (the near enemy) before shifting to enemies abroad (the far enemy).[32] Both seek the recreation of an Islamic Caliphate,[33] but differ in the method and timing of the state's establishment. One of the more influential works in Jihadist literature is a book called *Millat Ibrahim* by Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi, which purports to lay out the correct path to establishing Islamic governance.[34] In al-Qaeda's interpretation, the fight against corrupt regimes (*taghut*/*tawaghit*)[35] appears less focused, targeting governments around the world and believing that once they are defeated a state will be declared and a leader chosen from among the faithful.

IS attacks this assertion directly, maintaining there can be no revival of the faith with the people living under a corrupt regime, and therefore a state with a just leader must be declared so the people are free to live under God's laws as they fight their oppressors.[36] They draw much of their argument from the nature of the Meccan period in Islam, when the Muslim community was just starting out and found itself an outnumbered and unfavored minority. Mohammed served as the charismatic leader and exemplar to this early community, encouraging its migration to Medina and the establishment of a unified community under Islamic laws. Absent his leadership, had they fought the stronger tribes before consolidating their beliefs and religious practice in their own enclave, perhaps the community would never have risen to prominence. Reinforcing such connections, soon after declaring the establishment of the Islamic State in ash-Sham (the Levant) in late June/early July 2014, their leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, took the name of the man to whom God originally gave leadership of the faithful, and became known as Caliph Ibrahim (Abraham of the Bible).[37]

The Islamic State as an organization is not new. They follow a lineage beginning more than a decade ago under the leadership of Abu Mus'ab az-Zarqawi (AMZ) in western Afghanistan. Following the invasion of Iraq by US-led forces in 2003, AMZ shifted his operations from Afghanistan to Kurdish areas initially before moving to western Iraq and al-Anbar Province.[38] Though initially under different names, the group was widely known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) until late 2006, when in October it declared itself the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) under Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi, following the death of AMZ months earlier.[39]

In the initial issue of *Dabiq* magazine, IS devotes seven full pages to describing how it arrived to the present day by faithfully adhering to a plan for reestablishment of the Caliphate as laid out prior to 2004 by AMZ. Put in English terms, AMZ laid out a five phase plan: 1) emigration of fighters to a safe haven; 2) creation of fighting groups; 3) destabilization of existing regimes through creation of chaos; 4) consolidation of areas under group control; 5) establishment of a Caliphate.[40] In recounting the plan within *Dabiq*, its importance is made clear by stating in separate bold text, "This has always been the roadmap towards *Khilafah* for the mujahidin."[41] In this regard at least, they are not simply rewriting history to suit events as they happen. The US military captured a February 2004 letter from AMZ to Al-Qaeda Senior Leadership (AQSL) laying out the plan in some detail and making clear that AMZ's group offered to *cooperate* with AQSL, acting as a "vanguard" or "bridge" toward realizing the caliphate.[42] Within the letter, AMZ states that if AQSL agrees with his plan, "…we will be your readied soldiers, working under your banner, complying with your orders, and indeed swearing fealty to you publicly and in the news media…"[43]

Such communications are at the heart of the IS argument that they are the true leaders of the Global Jihad and that Al-Qaeda has lost its way. By early February 2014, AQSL took the unprecedented step of publicly repudiating ISIS, stating the two groups shared no connections after allegations became public that ISIS was broadly refusing to heed direction from AQSL.[44] By December 2014, IS devoted the majority of Issue 6 of *Dabiq* to direct ideological attacks on Al-Qaeda.[45] Contradictions in statements by Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and key regional subordinates form the basis of a long article in which AQSL figures were made to appear theologically ignorant and lacking the clarity of thought and devotion to the cause displayed by IS leaders, while a second and equally substantial article is a personal testimony of a former al-Qaeda fighter regarding the group's ineptitude and failures in Waziristan.[46] Throughout the publication, IS works hard to paint Al-Qaeda as a group overly willing to accept compromise and leniency for the sake of military expediency in the cause of jihad, and also paints al-Qaeda as a group lacking any plan other than fighting a global terrorist campaign.[47]

When seeking to ground their arguments in theology, next in importance to Muslims after the Koran are the *Hadith,* a collection of verified eyewitness accounts of what the Prophet Mohammed said and did regarding various topics.[48] Hadith, however, are not all treated equally, with particular hadith chosen from two authors known as the *Sahihain* typically given the greater weight. In the first installment of *Dabiq*, IS uses direct Koranic verses and hadith from the *Sahihain* almost exclusively, attempting to make its case for establishment of the State more difficult to assail on theological grounds alone.[49] IS consistently establishes its ideological position using only the most solid theological arguments it can muster within communications such as *Dabiq*. As

Graeme Wood argues in a March 2015 article for *The Atlantic* magazine, "…the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very* Islamic...the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam."[50]

As a result of these and other factors, the group now rules a de facto state carved from Iraq and Syria. IS controls significant territory, provides a range of government services,[51] mints its own currency,[52] and operates a military apparatus that aspires to have a monopoly on the use of violence within its borders – which is far more state-like than anything Al-Qaeda has achieved. Though no foreign governments have recognized IS, the group regularly trumpets pledges of loyalty from jihadist groups around the world. In fact, *Dabiq: Issue 5* is titled simply, "Remaining and Expanding," containing statements and photos of loyalists in "new *wilayat* (provinces)" in Egypt (Sinai), Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Libya, Indonesia, Nigeria, and the Philippines, among others.[53] The Islamic State is enjoying undeniable success in establishing its legitimacy among jihadist elements, placing it at the forefront of a jihadi mass movement of social revolution. On the most basic level "success breeds success" and since the fall of the Iraqi city of Mosul in the summer of 2014 nearly all jihadists traveling to Iraq are joining with IS.[54]

Spreading the Message

> The time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect – the time has come for them to rise.[55]

The words above, attributed to Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, proclaim the arrival of a "new era" in the inaugural issue of *Dabiq* magazine. While such verbal imagery is used by both Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in their media products, striking

contrasts exist between both the production quality and content associated with the two

groups. IS production values are top-notch, and the speed with which they incorporate

recent events into their products is impressive. Al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine remains

closer to a how-to manual for aspiring jihadists, where *Dabiq* seeks to educate, justify,

influence, and inform.[56] Both groups study marketing, actively injecting "game theory"

into web forums complete with levels, points, and associated privileges to encourage

more active participation.[57] IS goes a step further, producing jihadist video games that

capture the allure and themes of popular online games such as "Call of Duty" and

"Grand Theft Auto."[58] In terms of their media operations, one RAND analyst stated

succinctly, "…Al-Qaeda is like AOL. The Islamic State is Google."[59]

The element of theater plays a large role in propagating messages of terror.

Video beheadings of captives, disturbingly commonplace by the end of 2014, are an

excellent example. The clean production values, the choice of an executioner with a

British accent, apparently well-kept prisoners being killed through beheading with a

small knife versus a sword – all are calculated efforts to terrorize the West and

embolden potential recruits.[60] It is entirely about sending a message rather than just

committing an act tailored to strike at the core of Western fears.[61]

Of all of the messaging platforms, it is the videos – or more accurately excerpts

from those videos – with which people in the West are familiar. Most people in the

developed world do not normally stumble onto jihadist web forums or peruse IS

publications, but if the group can make an action horrific enough, yet of high quality, the

nightly news will show it to everyone on their behalf. Poor quality audio or video might

get only a verbal description at best, versus being shown to the target audience with only a small pixilated section hiding the carnage.

This was perfectly demonstrated by the February 2015 release of a much longer than normal video showing captured Jordanian pilot First Lieutenant Muath Al-Kaseasbeh being burned alive inside of a cage. For days preceding the release of the video, news networks around the world tried to discern the extent of negotiations between IS and the Jordanian government, and the story ran regularly on multiple channels. When it looked as though a deal may be possible, IS released a 22-minute cinematic quality production targeting Arabs rather than the West, which guaranteed through its savagery that it would dominate the news for days if not weeks. Perhaps beheadings had become too commonplace, or perhaps IS sought to put extra stress on the Jordanian regime, which already was facing a hostile public due to the war, but within ten minutes of the public release, IS distributed talking points justifying their use of fire on a captive.[62] For days every news program showed the moments before and after the pilot was killed, and some posted the entire video unedited for those wishing to view it on their computers – it was exactly the reaction IS sought.

IS justified its actions against the pilot by again referencing scriptural examples citing immolation as a legitimate method, concluding that if done in *mumathala* (reciprocity) it was acceptable.[63] The choice of the execution site at a building previously bombed by the coalition, the trapping of the captive inside of a cage, his death by fire, and the subsequent piling of building rubble upon his corpse were all specifically chosen to depict "just" retribution for "innocent civilians" caught inside buildings, burned and buried by coalition airstrikes.[64] Immediately after the capture of the pilot IS launched a

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twitter campaign under the title #SuggestAWayToKillTheJordanianPilotPig that received thousands of responses, and among them was burning him alive and burying him under rubble.[65] The solicitation of new methods of execution, the tailored extended video production, and the sheer brutality of the murder gave IS exactly the publicity they desired. It is likely that in their calculations, what they lose in popularity through this act will be trumped by what they gain through continued violence and fear.[66] They require shock value to keep their video messages at the forefront, and that means a continual escalation of barbarity in future killings simply to keep the world's attention.[67]

More traditionally, the IS magazine *Dabiq*, mentioned earlier, is a monthly publication first distributed online early in July 2014. All the issues are of very high quality, with complex text and photo layouts and top-notch graphics. Most, though not all, of the language used is either written or proofed by native English speakers to ensure clarity and deflect criticism.[68] The titles of the issues act as the guiding themes and show a logical progression of their messaging:

- Issue 1: "The Return of Khilafah," devotes its content to supporting the creation of the Islamic State today as well as its overall plan of action moving forward.

- Issue 2: "The Flood," focuses on the choice to support and participate in the Islamic State, or risk being swept away in a new cleansing of the earth.

- Issue 3: "A Call to Hijrah," explains why Muslims must migrate from foreign lands and make their homes in the State in order to normalize life and state administration.

- Issue 4: "The Failed Crusade," shows the IS flag in St. Peter's Square in the Vatican. The most overtly military of the issues to date, it focuses on "failed" US strategy in the region as well as signs of the Armageddon.

- Issue 5: "Remaining and Expanding," details the establishment of new Provinces throughout the Islamic world, supported with photos and individual statements of loyalty.

- Issue 6: "Al-Qaeda of Waziristan," dedicates its content to lengthy and detailed denunciations of Al-Qaeda as a jihadist organization.

Among other features, each issue contains a section of at least two pages entitled "In the Words of the Enemy," using statements by US political and military leaders and prominent scholars to bolster the image of IS. As an example, the first issue utilizes excerpts from a scholarly article written by prominent policy analysts Douglas Olivant, former Director for Iraq at the US National Security Council, and Brian Fishman, former Research Director at the US Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, who are both identified in the article by those descriptors. From this article, IS highlights the statements: "ISIS has created a multi-ethnic army; almost a foreign legion, to secure its territory" and "the group does not have safe haven within a state. It is a de facto state that is a safe haven."[69] Later issues incorporate quotes by President Barack Obama and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, among others. Taken collectively, the use of well-chosen public statements builds a case for the legitimacy of the Islamic State, demonstrating in effect, "look what our enemies say about us – we are real."

Every issue also includes scenes of battlefield victories, captured equipment and munitions, and smiling fighters working to help the newly loyal populace. They show

scenes of communities being rebuilt, enemies being either punished or forgiven, and thieves and drug runners being brought to justice. Issue 5 announces the issuance of a new mineral-based currency "…in order to disentangle the [State] from the corrupt interest-based global financial system…"[70] The topic is then reinforced in issue 6 by an article from captured British war correspondent John Cantlie citing arguments about the impending collapse of dollar-based international markets from articles written by former US Representative Ron Paul.[71] The clear message is that the steps the Islamic State is taking are *real and concrete* – that its money is made of gold or copper and has intrinsic value – versus an unsecured dollar standard. The Islamic State want readers to believe that the current world order is all a chimera, set to come crashing down, and the only place to find protection and relief from the ensuing chaos is in the Islamic State.

While IS controls the content of *Dabiq*, it has far less control over internet forums that typically distribute the magazines. These forums are an open space in which news and information regarding jihad is exchanged. Photos, video clips, and audio excerpts, together with original articles and opinions, are traded freely together with news updates from various portions of the battlefield. In much the same way as users accrue followers, and thereby status, on Twitter, so too do those posting material to jihadist web forums gain status by "likes" and "shares" of their content.[72] Accrual of certain point levels moves one's postings to a different status, seen by more people and displayed more prominently.[73] As with any media forum, sensationalism is rewarded, and the more radical the author, the more likely (s)he is to gain a following. At the highest levels, one can even be rewarded with administrator status, or be given direct e-mail contact with

key jihadist leaders, but reaching such levels requires years of jihadist study and near-constant dedication to the forums.[74]

More recently, IS forums contained video productions featuring John Cantlie together with scenes and graphics straight out of "Call of Duty," resulting in comments such as, "This is our Call of Duty and we respawn in Jannah (heaven)."[75] In other locations, forums feature legitimate video games parroting the gameplay of Grand Theft Auto, with an IS fighter performing all manner of incredible military acts to the accompaniment of jihadist music.[76]

Repetition of key themes is important to getting potential recruits to take the step of traveling to the Islamic State, or to act on their own against the "enemies of Islam" wherever they may live. As IS becomes larger and more successful, keeping messages consistent and under central control may become increasingly difficult. IS leadership, through its official media organizations, puts out solid products supportive of its cause and unified around consistent themes. The potential access of every group member to the internet, however, jeopardizes overall messaging as the organization becomes accountable for any messages or footage posted to the web in its name.

Highlighting the dangers of such communications access, throughout January 2015 various Twitter accounts regularly released execution videos and comments regarding the fate of Western captives that appeared to contradict leadership statements and lead to significant confusion.[77] In the days preceding the release of the al-Kasaesbah execution video in early February 2015, this mounting confusion was punctuated by the appearance of Caliph Ibrahim in a short video online with spokesman Mohammed al-Adnani to clarify that only four Twitter accounts were authorized to speak

on behalf of IS, in what appears to be an effort to regain control of organizational

messaging.[78]

Millenarian Social Movement or Opportunistic Terrorism?

> O crusaders, you have realized the threat of the Islamic State, but you
> have not become aware of the cure, because there is no cure. If you fight
> it, it becomes stronger and tougher. If you leave it alone, it grows and
> expands.[79]

It has been the intent of this paper to distinguish the Islamic State from its

competitors in the Jihadist – and more broadly terrorist – realms. Rather than being

directed and guided by a command structure, it appears that the low-technology Jihadist

attacks occurring throughout 2014 outside of the Middle East and claimed by IS, were

instead inspired by its message. For Muslim youth, IS provides order and sanctuary

from apparent chaos, together with an opportunity to resurrect the glory of the early

Islamic Empire. IS pushes the message that death in the service of jihad is worth 60

years of prayer[80] and "…saves 70 family members who were destined to go to the fires

of hell.[81]" Death in Jihad offers immediate salvation for those with an imperfect – or

criminal – past.

The most consistent factor scholars cite as responsible for militant religious

violence is an individual's yearning for order and a sense of belonging. For non-Muslims

searching for a way to lash out against the anomie of the modern world, unsatisfied with

the surfeit of choices and potential possibilities of failure ahead of them, Jihad is the

leading anti-western movement available today. Reasons for taking up arms in Jihad

vary tremendously. Many young soldiers of IS are likely fighting for reasons closer to

nationalism than religion, yet they go along with the organizational leadership, aping

their statements and actions, in order to remain part of the group. Such differences in

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the commitment to and the understanding of the doctrines involved are likely resulting in internal conflict. *Dabiq: Issue 6* lectures IS soldiers and officials to follow orders and to moderate their behavior toward the public. Such admonishment came just weeks before reports of infighting and large-scale desertions following battlefield setbacks in both Kobane, Syria and Ninevah, Iraq.[82]

In the fight against IS, the United States and its allies face two challenges: 1) Defeat of a semi-functioning outlaw state with a moderate military capacity, and 2) Defeat of a spiritual ideology. The Islamic State will face ever-growing challenges brought about by the sheer weight of governance as time passes. Its ability to sustain itself without formal sources of income is suspect, as its black-market sources are unlikely to suffice without additional resources seized in conquest. Military stalemate and growth of governance responsibilities brings the added friction of simple boredom, which can be devastating to the revolutionary spirit required to keep things going. But as much as the existence of the state provides a target absent in other groups, the state forms the lesser of the two threats.

Jihad as espoused by Sayyid Qutb and embraced by IS provides an appealing anti-Western message that gives purpose to the lives of the susceptible. Scripture-based defenses against negative media portrayals already exist: "If your people fight you, accuse you of the worst of accusations, and describe you with the worst of all traits, then know that the people of the Prophet fought him, expelled him, and accused him with matters worse…"[83] However, though this is an ideology based on Islam, it is a version of the religion most akin to a cult, defined by Colin Campbell as a "parallel religious tradition of disparaged and deviant interpretations and practices that challenge

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the authority of prevailing religions with rival claims to truth."[84] The idea that IS follows a deviant or discredited interpretation of Islam presents the biggest opportunity to effectively counter the ideology of the Islamic State.

IS is now a big organization, and as of January 2015 it is still growing, with estimates stating it has more foreign fighters today than were in Afghanistan at the height of the war against the Russians.[85] Almost all of the fighters can and do link to the internet via smartphones. It is apparent that many statements and videos attributed to IS are not being released and sanctioned by its central authorities. Instead, they likely originate from young fighters and commanders wanting to show how shocking or terrifying they can be. Such actions drive the admonishments and instructions IS published in *Dabiq* and via online videos in early February. Violence without support of religious justifications damages the legitimacy and standing of IS to aspirants. Anything eroding the appearance of unity and moral certitude reduces the appeal of the organization to those recruits searching for the very same as an escape from their present lives. Likewise, failure to govern effectively or signs of infighting and desertion should be prominent on major networks.

As with any cult, some people joining IS are going to discover the group does not live up to the message they sought, and they will want to leave. Just as people can be "de-programmed" from cults, so too can many of them be "de-radicalized" from IS. Many young fighters are going for the adventure and the danger. They simply do not understand what else they are buying into, and they need a way out. The way out, however, should be through government authorities and well-founded coordinated

programs of counter-radicalization consisting of *prevention* up front and *de-radicalization* of those who have already decided upon jihad.[86]

When Islam first emerged in the Arabian heartland, the major empires of the day, the Romans and the Sassanids (Persians), had exhausted themselves from years of warfare in the region. Rome had withdrawn from the Levant and placed in their stead puppet Arab rulers to keep the peace. Persian forces remained a threat both from the east and from the south, where they ruled over Yemen. The Arabs were in a time of chaos, and Mohammed emerged as a messenger from God, whose message brought order, purpose, and fraternity. The result exploded across the world with lightning speed and formed the basis of the Islamic Empire. That situation is not dissimilar to today, and IS knows it. By drawing upon the same elements today as existed in the time of the Prophet, IS believes it can completely redefine the social order and very nature of governments through revolutionary violence in order to bring about a perfect society. That is not 'simply' terrorism, but evidence of a millenarian social movement with an organized, developed plan to reorder the world.

Making the shift to see IS as a millenarian mass movement is more important than it may at first seem. Military defeat of the group is important, but secondary to discrediting the ideology. IS is not random: though its message deviates from that accepted by mainstream Islam, it rests on core Islamic teachings, while its grievances against the West enjoy broad-based support throughout much of the world. While time may eventually cause IS to collapse upon itself, the governments of the world would do better to cooperate in actively countering the ideology and the networks – both physical and cyber – that drive the group, while aggressively eliminating key leadership through

military means. A failure to take the threat seriously, and as more than just a regional

problem, may indeed result in a far bigger conflict than is presently realized.

Endnotes

[1] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer, Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper and Collins, 1951), 41.

[2] From the beginning, the group has been known variously as "Tawhid wa al-Jihad," "Al-Qaeda lil-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidain (QJBR), al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the Mujahidin Shura Council, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and the anglicized version of the Arabic acronym "D'aesh" representing "The Islamic State in the region of al-Sham (Levant)." As the group itself abandoned any reference to locations in its name as of late 2014, throughout this paper it is referred to interchangeably as either the Islamic State or IS.

[3] Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," The Atlantic online, March 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/ (Accessed 25 February, 2015), 3.

[4] *Millenarianism* as defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/millenarianism (Accessed January 21, 2015).

[5] Terrell E. Arnold, *The Violence Formula, Why people Lend Sympathy and Support to Terrorism*, (Lexington, MA: Heath and Company, 1988), 151.

[6] Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, (USA: SIME Journal, 2005), 1 (Introduction).

[7] Ibid, 2 (Foreward).

[8] Dr. Tareq Abdelhaleem, "The Counterfeit Salafis: Deviation of the Counterfeit Salafis," in *Methodology of Ahlul Sunnah L/al Jama'a*, (Dar Alargam, 2004), as cited in Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 26.

[9] Brachman spends considerable time differentiating "Global Jihadists" from other Salafi schools of thought, making a precise definition here problematic. In general, they were originally inspired by the Al-Qaeda "Brand identity" created by Osama Bin Laden and share a more or less common set of seven characteristics in their religion and worldview. It is Brachman's view however that the word "global' was inappropriate prior to 2003. Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice,* 39-48.

[10] Indeed Salafis get their name from the Arabic for "forefathers" or "predecessors" and in regular usage the name refers to the time of the companions of the prophet; meaning those who were alive during the time of Mohammed and the first four successors.

[11] Qutb, *Milestones*, 21.

[12] Ibid, 14.

[13] Abu Muhammad 'Aasim al-Maqdisi, *Democracy, a Religion,* pdf, http://www.kalamullah.com (Accessed 5 December, 2014), 11-12.

[14] As we clearly see with the Islamic State today. They have abandoned earlier versions of their flag to emulate exactly the kind of banner Qutb describes. Qutb, *Milestones*, 17.

[15] Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 11.

[16] Roger Griffin, *Terrorist Creed* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan , 2012), 19.

[17] Ibid., 35.

[18] Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God, Why Religious Militants Kill*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2003), 69.

[19] Ibid., 69.

[20] Ibid., XXViii.

[21] Ibid., 5.

[22] Ibid.

[23] "For men to plunge headlong into an undertaking of vast change, they must be intensely discontented yet not destitute, and they must have the feeling that by possession of some potent doctrine, infallible leader or some new technique, they have access to a source of irresistible power." Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer,* 11.

[24] Ibid., 33.

[25] Peter R. Neumann, "Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s," The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence online, http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/ (Accessed January 26, 2015), 1-2.

[26] Within the article the per capita rate per one million in population for participation with the Islamic State is at 15 for Qatar and 100 for Sudan, as opposed to 1,500-3,000 for Tunisia and 1,500 for both Jordan and Morocco. For Europeans, I contrast Italy and Sweden with 80 and 150 respectively, with 500-600 for Germany and 440 for Belgium. Ibid, 1-2.

[27] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*, 29.

[28] Ibid., 41.

[29] *Dabiq: Issue 1 – The Return of Khalifah*, online, Ramadan, 1435, http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf (Accessed September 16, 2014), 2.

[30] Ibid., 4.

[31] Harleen K. Gambhir, "Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State," August 15, 2014, *Institute for the Study of War*,

http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Dabiq%20Backgrounder_Harleen%20Final.pdf (Accessed Sept 16, 2014).

[32] Fawaz Gerges as quoted by Scott Shane and Ben Hubbard, "ISIS Displaying a Deft Command of Varied Media," *New York Times online*, August 30, 2014, http://www.nyti.ms/1qQ8tQD , (Accessed February 8, 2015), 3.

[33] A Caliphate or *Khilafah*, is an Islamic Government led by a Caliph, a successor of the Prophet Muhammed as both the political and religious head of state. The battle between who may be the Caliph and what the qualifications for the position are, itself forms a key element of the fundamental schism between Shia and Sunni Islam.

[34] The book itself can be found using the following information and link, Abu Muhammed 'Asim Al-Maqdisi, "Millat Ibrahim (The Religion of Ibrahim) and the Calling of the Prophets and Messengers, and the Methods of the Transgressing Rulers in Dissolving it and Turning the Callers away from it, (2nd ed.)," (at-Tibyan Publications, date not given, but early to mid-1990s), pdf file, online, http://www.kalamullah.com/al-maqdisi.html (accessed 5 December, 2014).

[35] Corrupt regimes in this case refers to any forms of government other than a properly formatted Islamic theocracy. Chief sins of the tawaghit include democracy, idolatry, nationalism, and polytheism by virtue of the embrace of democracy.

[36] Author not Given, "Part 3: The Concept of Imamah is from the Millah of Ibrahim," *Dabiq: Issue 1*, 24.

[37] Harleen Gambhir, "Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State," 5.

[38] Author not Given, "From Hijrah to Khilafah," *Dabiq: Issue 1*, 36.

[39] Brian Fishman, "Fourth Generation Governance – Sheikh Tamimi defends the Islamic State of Iraq," March 23, 2007. *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, Journal article, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/fourth-generation-governance-sheikh-tamimi-defends-the-islamic-state-of-iraq (Accessed Sept 16, 2014).

[40] Author not Given, "From Hijrah to Khilafah," *Dabiq: Issue 1*, 36-40.

[41] Ibid, 38.

[42] Abu Mus'ab az-Zarqawi, "February 2004 Coalition Provisional Authority English translation of terrorist Musab al-Zarqawi letter obtained by United States Government in Iraq," online, http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/31694.htm (accessed 10 January 2015).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Liz Sly, "Al-Qaeda disavows any ties with radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq," Washington Post online, February 3, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/al-qaeda-disavows-any-ties-with-radical-islamist-isis-group-in-syria-iraq/2014/02/03/2c9afc3a-8cef-11e3-98ab-fe5228217bd1_story.html, (Accessed February 22, 2015).

45 *Dabiq: Issue 6 – Al-Qaeda of Waziristan*, online, Rabi' al-Awwal, 1436, http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-issue-6-al-qaeda-of-waziristan.pdf (Accessed 10 January 2015).

46 Abu Maysarah as-Shami, "The Qa'idah of Adh-Dhawahiri (Zawahiri), Al-Harari, and An-Nadhari,and the Absent Yemeni Wisdom," 16-25. And Adu Jarar ash-Shamali, "Al-Qaeda in Waziristan: a Testimony from Within," and 40-55, *Dabiq: Issue 6 – Al-Qaeda of Waziristan*.

47 Abu Maysarah as-Shami, "The Qa'idah of Adh-Dhawahiri (Zawahiri), Al-Harari, and An-Nadhari,and the Absent Yemeni Wisdom," *Dabiq: Issue 6 – Al-Qaeda of Waziristan*, 16-25.

48 Harleen Gambhir, "Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State," 6.

49 Ibid., 6.

50 Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," 5.

51 Aaron Zelin, "The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Has a Consumer Protection Office," The Atlantic online, June, 2014 http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-syria-has-a-consumer-protection-office-372769/, (Accessed 8 October 2014), 1-3.

52 Author not given, "The Currency of the Khilafah," *Dabiq: Issue 5 – Remaining and Expanding*, online, Muharram, 1436 http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-issue-5-remaining-and-expanding.pdf (Accessed 10 January 2015), 18.

53 Author not given, "Remaining and Expanding," *Dabiq: Issue 5 – Remaining and Expanding*, 22-33.

54 Scott Shane and Ben Hubbard, "ISIS Displaying a Deft Command of Varied Media," 2.

55 Abu-Muhammed al-Adnani al-Shami, *Dabiq: Issue 1*, 9.

56 "Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State," 1-2.mk

57 Jarret Brachman and Alix Levine, "The World of Holy Warcraft, How Al-Qaeda is using online game theory to recruit the masses," *Foreign Policy online*, April 13, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/13/the_world_of_holy_warcraft , (Accessed December 4, 2014).

58 Terrence McCoy, "The Islamic State's 'Call of Duty' Allure," The Washington Post online, October 28, 2014, http://washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/10/28/the-islamic-states-call-of-duty-allure , (Accessed December 5, 2014).

59 Colin Clarke, as quoted in Josh Kovensky, "ISIS's New Mag Looks Like a New York Glossy-with Pictures of Mutilated Bodies," *New Republic Online*, August 25, 2014, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119203/isiss-dabiq-vs-al-qaedas-inspire-comparing-two-extremist-magazines , (Accessed October 8, 2014).

60 Robert D. Kaplan, "Terrorism as Theater," *Stratfor Global Intelligence online*, August, 27, 2014, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/terrorism-theater/ ,(Accessed September 16, 2014), 1.

[61] Ibid, 1.

[62] Duncan Gardham and John Hall, "Was Jordanian Pilot Burned Alive after sick twitter campaign among ISIS supporters to name his method of death?" *Daily Mail Online*, February 4, 2015, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2939196/was-jordanian-pilot-burned-alive-sick-twitter-campaign-ISIS-supporters-method-death.html , (Accessed February 8, 2015).

[63] The idea of "Qisas" or retribution, is put forth in Koranic verse 16:126, though IS more regularly refers to the idea of mumathala. Terrence McCoy and Adam Taylor, "Islamic State says immolation was justified, Islamic Scholars say no," Washington Post online, February 4, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/02/04/the-chilling-reason-the-islamic-state-burned-a-jordanian-pilot-alive/ , (Accessed February 22, 2015).

[64] Duncan Gardham and John Hall, "Was Jordanian Pilot Burned Alive after sick twitter campaign among ISIS supporters to name his method of death?"

[65] Ibid.

[66] Hassan Hassan, "ISIS has reached new depths of depravity. But there is a brutal logic behind it," theGuardian online, February 7, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/08/isis-islamic-state-ideology-sharia-syria-iraq-jordan-pilot , (accessed February 8, 2015).

[67] Ibid.

[68] In addition to English, versions are also available translated into Arabic, Russian, French, and German.

[69] Douglas Olivant and Brian Fishman, "The Reality of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," as quoted in *Dabiq: Issue 1*, 32-33.

[70] Author not given, "The Currency of the Khilafah," *Dabiq: Issue 5*, 18.

[71] John Cantlie, "Meltdown," *Dabiq: Issue 6 – Al-Qaeda of Waziristan*, 61.

[72] Jarret Brachman and Alix Levine, "The World of Holy Warcraft."

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Terrence McCoy, "The Islamic State's 'Call of Duty' Allure."

[76] Ibid.

[77] Catherine Herridge, "ISIS Leader Warns Unauthorized Tweets Don't Speak for Caliphate," FOXNEWS online, February 2, 2015, http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/02/02/listen-to-me-isis-leader-warns-unauthorized-tweets-don't-speak-for-caliphate/ , (Accessed February 8, 2015).

[78] Ibid.

[79] Abu-Muhammed al-Adnani al-Shami, "Indeed Your Lord is Ever Watchful," Arabic-language Audio Message posted to Hanin Network Forums by Al-Furqan Establishment for Media Production (dated September 21, 2014), Translation done by al-Furqan, and posted by OSIS.gov as TRR2014092201178788.

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[81] Jeffrey B. Cozzens, "Approaching Al-Qaeda's Warfare: Function, Culture, and Grand Strategy," (Draft) in *Mapping Terrorism Research*, ed. Magnus Ranstorp (London: Routledge, 2006), received directly from the author via e-mail and cited as page 16 of Chapter 7, within the larger work.

[82] Tim Lister, "For ISIS, Tough Times as it Seeks to Regroup," CNN online, January 28, 2015, http://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/28/opinion/lister-bad-month-for-isis/index.html , (Accessed January 28, 2015), 4.

[83] Abu-Muhammed al-Shami, "Indeed Your Lord is Ever Watchful."

[84] Colin Campbell as quoted in Jeffrey B. Cozzens, "Approaching Al-Qaeda's Warfare," 2.

[85] Peter R. Neumann, "Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000."

[86] Jessica Stern, "Deradicalization or Disengagement of Terrorists: Is it Possible?" in *Future Challenges in National Security and Law*, ed. By Peter Berkowitz, http://www.futurechallengesessays.com , (Accessed February 8, 2015), 1.