Holding ISIL accountable: prosecuting crimes in Iraq and Syria

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HOLDING ISIL ACCOUNTABLE

PROSECUTING CRIMES IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

EDITED BY SARETA ASHRAPH, CARMEN CHEUNG KA-MAN & JOANA COOK

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International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY

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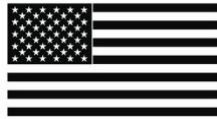
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The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) is an independent think-and-do tank based in The Hague, Netherlands. Since 2010, we have provided research, policy advice, training, and other solutions to support better counter-terrorism policies and practices worldwide based on evidence and compliant with human rights and the rule of law. We also contribute to the scientific and public debates in the fields of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, notably through our publications and events. Visit www.icct.nl for more information.

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About CJA

The Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA) is a United States-based human rights organization dedicated to accountability for torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity and other grave abuses. Using innovative litigation and transitional justice strategies, CJA partners with survivors and their communities to seek truth, justice and redress for atrocity.

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Glossary

ashbal: cubs

caliphate: the rule or reign of a caliph or chief Muslim ruler

da'wa: inviting people to Islam

diwan: department

fatwa: edict

fuqaha': Islamic jurist

ghanīma: war spoils

hijra: migration

hisba: morality police

jizya: non-Muslim tax

kuffār: infidels

maqqars: women's hostels

mujahid/mujahidah: person/people who engaged in jihad

sabiyya/sabāyā: female prisoner-of-war (slave)

shariʿa: Islamic law

shariʿī: legally mandated

tawhīd (also tawheed): monotheism, oneness with God

ulama: scholars

umma: global community

wilayat: administrative division

zakat: Islamic finance term/religious obligation

List of Contributors

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Tore Hamming holds a PhD in political and social science from the European University Institute. Building on years of digital anthropology, field trips, hundreds of primary documents and interviews with high-ranking Jihadis, his book "Jihadi Politics: The Global Jihadi Civil War 2014-2019" analyses the split between al-Qaida and the Islamic State and the ensuing conflict between the two groups. In his current research, Dr Hamming specializes in the Western Jihadi

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Charlie Winter is Director of Research at the conflict intelligence platform ExTrac. He is also an Associate Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism and a member of the RESOLVE Network Research Advisory Council. Dr. Winter studies terrorism, insurgency, and innovation, with a focus on online and offline strategic communication. Winter regularly advises governments and often appears in international broadcast and print media. His work has been published by, among others, the *CTC Sentinel*, *The Atlantic*, War On The Rocks, Jihadology, and the BBC. He holds a BA in Arabic from the University of Edinburgh and an MA in Middle East and Mediterranean Studies and a PhD in War Studies, both from King's College London.
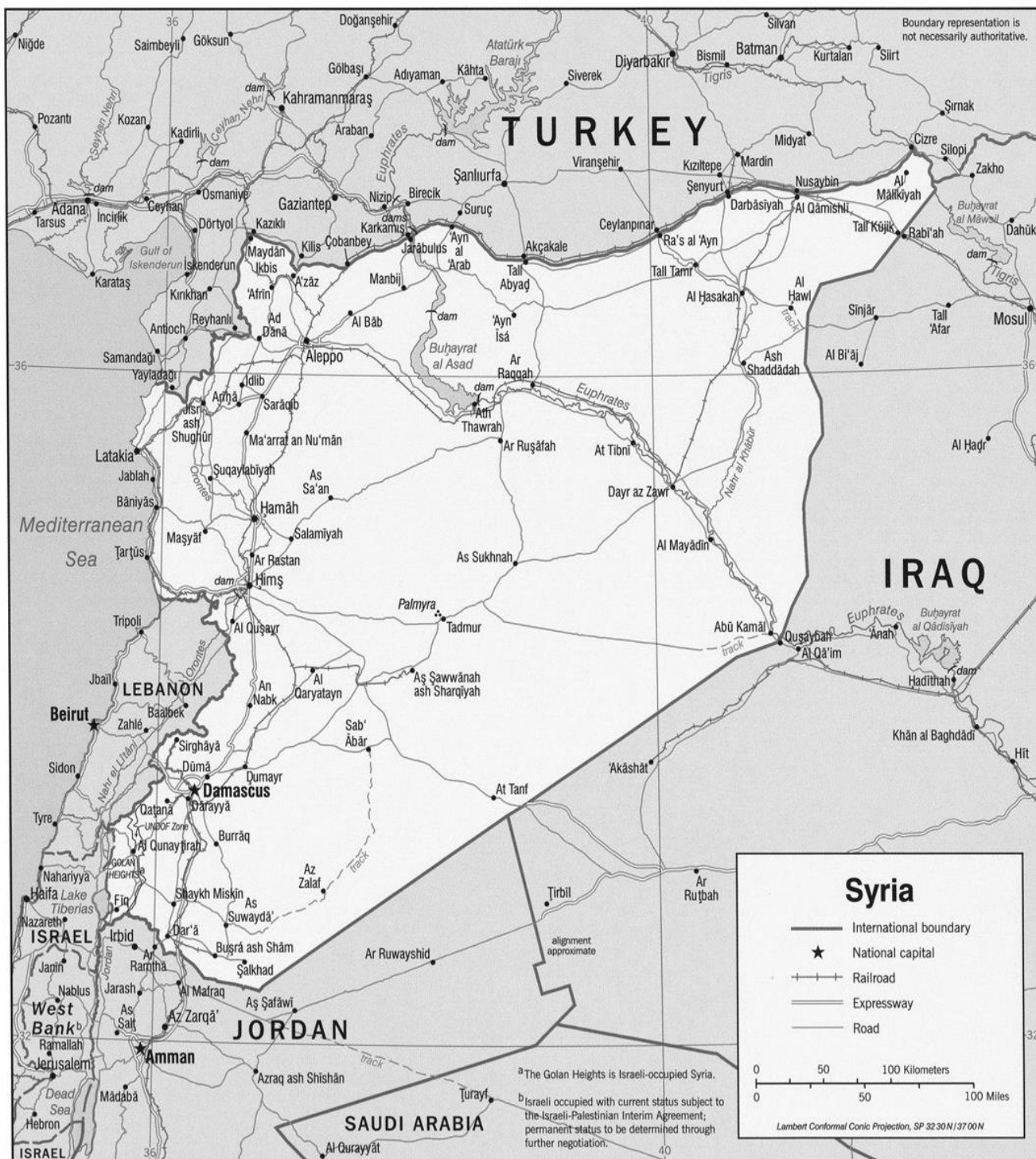
Map of Syria: The University of Texas at Austin, "The Perry-Castañeda Library, Middle East Maps," 2024.

Map of Iraq: The University of Texas at Austin, "The Perry-Castañeda Library, Middle East Maps," 2024.

Introduction

Beyond Material Support: Promoting ISIL Accountability for Atrocity Crimes

Sareta Ashraph and Carmen Cheung Ka-Man

Beginning in 2013 and accelerating throughout 2014, the armed group, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Islamic State, also known by its Arabic acronym, Da'esh),[1] seized large swathes of territory in a relentless campaign across Iraq and Syria.[2] By August 2014, the Islamic State had declared its caliphate, with an estimated ten million people living under its control.

Between 2013 and its territorial defeat in Syria in March 2019, ISIL committed numerous atrocity crimes, including genocide, murder, enslavement, sexual violence, torture, and forced displacement. Thousands of men, women, and children from more than 80 countries travelled to join ISIL during its reign. Many did so willingly, others were trafficked.[3]

Since the collapse of the self-declared caliphate, tens of thousands of suspected ISIL members or individuals linked to ISIL remain in custody in eastern Syria. Many are held without charge in makeshift prisons or camps notorious for substandard living conditions and precarious security. The vast majority of the detainees are women and children. Though ISIL is no longer considered capable of large-scale attacks within Iraq and Syria, its influence remains through its approximately 2,500 to 3,500 members and the risk of radicalization and recruitment within the camps is high.[4]

To address this difficult and dangerous situation and to advance accountability for IS crimes, some NGOs, the UN and some countries have urged the rapid repatriation of foreign detainees to their home countries. Many countries remain

reluctant, however, to bring individuals back.[5] For those countries that have repatriated and, in some cases, prosecuted ISIL-linked individuals, criminal charges have largely focused on terrorism-related offences without addressing the core international crimes–including genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes–committed by the group. Thus, such prosecutions fall short of accountability for the full breadth and depth of ISIL's crimes. Despite significant information relating to ISIL's commission of crimes, investigators and prosecutors seeking to build criminal cases against individuals face multiple challenges, including linking crimes to specific individuals and understanding the why and how of ISIL operations, and the ideologies and systems that made these atrocities possible. It is only by developing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding, that prosecutions of ISIL-linked individuals will render into the evidential and historical records the full dimensions of ISIL crimes.

Recognizing this challenge, the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) engaged in consultations with UN mechanisms, national prosecution units, and other stakeholders to identify specific knowledge gaps, particularly when it comes to proving elements of core international crimes committed by ISIL. From these conversations, CJA put out a call for papers, ultimately engaging eight experts on ISIL across various research disciplines to produce research addressing some of these evidentiary gaps. Each chapter is self-contained and may be read on its own.

The resulting papers, now presented here as a book, examine many aspects of ISIL structure, ideologies, policies, and operations, ranging from its approach to the treatment of religious minorities, women, and children to an analysis of how its sophisticated and complex propaganda machine was used to incite violence. A resource for investigators and prosecutors, the papers aim to support the building of cases that reflect the full scope of the crimes committed by ISIL, beyond terrorism offences, and in so doing, carve a path to justice for victims, survivors, and their families. This book comprises the eight chapters, a brief summary of each follows.

The first chapter is "The Islamic State and its Treatment of 'Out-Groups': A Comparative Analysis." It explores ISIL ideology and treatment of Shi'a, Christian, and Yazidi communities, including the use of forced conversions and enslavement. Additionally, it aims to identify and address misconceptions around these issues, and address instances of problematic and inauthentic evidence. This chapter is authored by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, PhD candidate at Swansea University and manager of the ISIS Archives project in collaboration with Jihadology.

The second chapter, "Cubs of the Caliphate" examines ISIL policy and practices around children, including how the organization recruited, indoctrinated, trained, and employed children and teenagers. It then explores the evolution of ISIS's approach to children and their shifting role as the caliphate gained and then lost territorial control. This chapter is authored by Tore Hamming, Director of Refslund Analytics and Senior Fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization at Kings College London, and Amarnath Amarasingam, Assistant Professor for the School of Religion at Queens University, Canada.

The third chapter, "The Agency and Roles of Foreign Women in ISIS" considers the complex and varied roles of women, from outside of Iraq and Syria, who joined ISIL, with a focus on Sunni women who were considered the "in-group". It examines the agency of the women within this system and degrees of complicity with the atrocities of the caliphate. This chapter is authored by Devorah Margolin, Blumenstein-Rosenbloom Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University, and Joana Cook, Assistant Professor at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University and Senior Project Manager at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

The fourth chapter, "ISIL Propaganda" investigates ISIL's organizational approach towards the production and deployment of propaganda and propaganda-adjacent activities in Iraq and Syria. It provides detailed analysis of ISIL's sophisticated system of managing and controlling the flow of information, the development of messaging, and transmission to the wider world. This chapter is authored by Charlie Winter, Director of Research at ExTrac.

The fifth chapter is "The 'Mujahid's Bag': Digitally Curating the Legacy of Foreign Fighter Training Materials." This chapter discusses foreign fighter recruitment, intake, training, and deployment through an examination of the "military sciences" folder of the Cloud Caliphate, an online collection of training material and records used to prepare ISIS recruiters and foreign fighters. This chapter is authored by Moustafa Ayad from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

Chapter six, "Victory, Violations, and Investment: Inside Islamic States's System of Slavery" examines ISIL's system of slavery of the Yazidi community, including aspects of its organization, implementation, and ideology. Drawing from multiple data sources, it maps the evolution of ISIL' policies and practices of genocide in support of efforts to prosecute ISIL-affiliated persons for crimes that go beyond group membership. This chapter is authored by Gina Vale, Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization at Kings College London.

The final chapter is entitled "The Islamic State's Pillage Economy: The Policy of Confiscations". This chapter explores the structure of ISIL's pillage economy – the large-scale confiscation of the moveable and immoveable property of those killed, detained, or forced out by ISIL. It further examines the use of the assets obtained and the role these assets played in the operation of ISIS's economy. This chapter is authored by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, PhD candidate at Swansea University and manager of the ISIS Archives project in collaboration with Jihadology.

Ultimately, we hope that this collection helps create a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the Islamic State, for those interested in the subject more generally, and particularly for those involved in the prosecution of ISIL members.

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[1] While the term ISIL is the preferred term for this book, each author has chosen their preferred term to reference the group.

[2] BBC News, "ISIS and the crisis in Iraq and Syria in maps", 28 March 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034?bcsi-ac-a70e1c0dc9ec8868=2719437500000002lcqAPPGfXWMs7IoVz6dUv0TbA7sXVQAAAgAA APbTPwGEAwAAEwAAAPDbJQA=

[3] Amnesty International, "Aftermath: Injustice, Torture, and Death in Detention in North East Syria, 13 June 2024, pp. 154-168. https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Aftermath-Injustice-Torture-and-Death-in-Detention-in-North-East-Syria.pdf

[4] K. Robinson, "Defeated and Detained, ISIS Still Poses Extremism Threat" *Council on Foreign Relations*, 31 July 2023. https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/defeated-and-detained-islamic-state-still-poses-extremism-threat

[5] Ibid.

2

The Islamic State and its Treatment of "Out Groups": A Comparative Analysis

Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi

Few external observers would disagree on characterizing the Islamic State as an 'extremist' group as a matter of intuition and instinct, but what exactly does it mean to make such a characterization? Analysis of this question is partly relevant because the Islamic State firmly rejects the notion that it is 'extremist,' and instead defines itself as following a middle path between the laxity of "*Murji'ites*" and the excesses of "*Ḫārijites*."[1] Both of these designations refer to adherents of trends that emerged in the early years of Islamic history.[2] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss those trends in-depth, but the critical point to note here is that for the Islamic State, "Murji'ites" are essentially those seen as having deviated from the correct path in compromising on principles and beliefs, especially in the necessity of takfir (declaring someone or a group of people to be disbelievers) on certain groups that claim adherence to Islam, whereas the "Ḫārijites" are seen as "extremists" in the other direction with a tendency to excessive takfir.

These sorts of distinctions that the Islamic State makes in defining itself have practical relevance and are not merely matters of theory, as the group has gone after those it has perceived as being extremist rivals. For example, in West Africa, the group's official affiliate (the West Africa "*wilāya*"/"province") has repeatedly clashed with a group that was led by Abu Bakr Shekau, who served as the former leader of the Islamic State's West Africa province but was subsequently removed. The West Africa affiliate launched a major offensive against Shekau's group- dubbed "Ḫārijites" and "the people of extremism"- in the Sambisa forest region in 2021, largely taking control of the region and securing the defection of several members of Shekau's group.[3] The Islamic State celebrated this offensive as proof that the organization has remained since its founding "a middle path between the Ḫārijites and the Murji'ites on the prophetic methodology."

There is, thus, the need for a concrete understanding of what constitutes 'extremism' or an extremist worldview. In the existing literature, problems have arisen in defining extremism, often marred by relativism and the political context in which the literature is written. For instance, there has been a tendency to equate extremism with mere political radicalism in the sense of calls for revolutionary action and overhauls of the existing political and social system, but there is no single accepted political system in the world, and what would constitute a radical change in one place would not necessarily be seen as such elsewhere. In other words, it is not sufficient to deem the Islamic State as extremist simply because it calls for the eventual replacement of all existing political systems in the world with its concept of a "caliphate on the prophetic methodology," concisely defined as a system of rule in which the ruler- the caliph- is chosen through a process of consultation among those qualified to choose the caliph, and rules in an absolute sense by "God's law" that is embodied in the legal rulings of Islam.

Instead, this summation of the Islamic State's political manifesto needs to be placed in a broader context. A useful framework in which to view this call for action and which allows us to formulate more clearly why the Islamic State is extremist is the two interlinked dichotomies of the in-group versus the out-group and the crisis versus the solution: dichotomies based on the concepts of identity and providing certainty about how the world works (i.e. a system of meaning).[4]
It is normal for individuals to define themselves by one or more characteristics that may be shared by other individuals, which can form the basis of one or more in-group identities as opposed to other individuals who do not share those characteristics (out-groups). Some familiar examples include notions of citizenship, nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation and political affiliation. It can also be normal for members of in-groups to compete with each other, one example being how political parties might compete with each other for votes in a democratic system. While such competition may be intense and involve some personal animosity, it need not be inherently so. It is perfectly possible, for example, for candidates of different parties to compete against each other without the need for hostility.

However, in some cases, an in-group identity may be defined in such a way that its existence and continuation are premised on the idea of never-ending hostility to the out-group. This hostile dichotomy is, in turn, linked to the dichotomy of a crisis and solution. That is, the in-group versus out-group dynamic is tied to a problem that faces the in-group and is caused by the out-group, which must be resolved through a solution that entails hostile action against the out-group. This hostile action might be simple spite, separation, and hostility, but in more severe cases entails violence. It is in this sort of framework that an extremist worldview should be understood.

It can be seen how this conception of extremism fits the case of the Islamic State. Membership of the Islamic State constitutes an in-group of some sort, but the Islamic State also claims to represent the interests of a broader in-group that it defines in various ways, even as it seems to acknowledge that only a minority of people from that broader in-group will ever join the ranks of the Islamic State in the sense of becoming actual members. Designations of that broader in-group include simply "the Muslims" and the "camp of faith." This conception of the in-group is set against a broader out-group that can be defined as those the Islamic State does not perceive as being Muslims for various reasons. In other words, those who adhere to "disbelief" (Arabic: kufr) in its various forms. This out-group is presented through designations such as the "camp of disbelief," "the group of the disbelievers" and the like.

The relation between these groups is presented as one of inherent hostility, taking on an eternal, cosmic dimension that goes back to the beginning of the world, as the in-group represents the cause of truth (Arabic: *haqq*) and the out-group represents the cause of falsehood (Arabic: *bāṭil*). This outlook was made clear in a speech by the group's former leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, from September 2017,[5] in which he outlined how Satan (*Iblis*) refused to prostrate before Adam as God had commanded, and while Satan gained respite from God's reckoning, he vowed always to be lying in wait for Adam and his descendants, seeking to lure them away from the true path. As Baghdadi then elaborated: "From that time, the spark of the conflict between truth and falsehood has been lit, and creation in its entirety has been divided into two groups with no third beside them: the group of the believers and the group of the disbelievers."

Thus, even the mere existence of the camp of the disbelievers (the out-group) is portrayed as some crisis facing the believing in-group, as it is seen as inherently at odds with the in-group and always scheming against it. This crisis is seen as having become particularly acute today, as the Muslim populations are divided according to nation-states ruled by people the Islamic State deems to be disbelievers and representing the interests of other disbelievers. This is to be contrasted with the Islamic State's solution to this problem: namely, uniting Muslims as a single entity in the form of a caliphate and then working to subjugate the entire world under its dominion. It is therefore necessary for the in-group to be hostile towards the out-group, not only in the form of simple enmity but also in the form of violent action embodied in jihad in order to realize the vision of the caliphate.

Thus, there is a straightforward system of meaning for understanding the world and one in which its adherents are given certainty about how the world works. If the in-group adopts the correct posture towards the out-group and pursues the solution prescribed by the Islamic State, it will ultimately realize success. If the

in-group deviates and gives up on the solution, it will experience degradation and humiliation.[6] Any apparent setbacks, meanwhile, are simply explained as an act of God's testing of the believers to purify their ranks and steer them to the ultimate final victory that will come- which only entails steadfastness and persistence on the path, no matter how intense the hardships might appear to be.[7] However, while there is this basic system of meaning that highlights the conflict between belief and disbelief, it is also true that the out-group is not necessarily seen as a monolith. Indeed, all types of disbelievers are seen as ultimately hostile to the in-group, necessitating hostility to them, but some types of disbelievers are seen as worse than others. This has practical implications for the Islamic State in terms of according priority to fighting certain out-groups and how the Islamic State should deal with those out-groups. It is an analysis of these distinctions that constitutes the burden of this chapter, and it is hoped that illumination of these distinctions will help prosecutors to understand better whether Islamic State policies evidence international crimes, notably identity-based crimes such as persecution and genocide. From the outset, it should be emphasized that these policies are intimately linked to the group's ideology.

This chapter will specifically examine how the Islamic State views and has dealt with three different religious groups: the Yezidis, Christians and Shi'a. Each of these groups is representative of a specific kind of out-group from the Islamic State's perspective, and accordingly, the policies for dealing with each of them differ to a certain extent, in particular on the status of adult males as opposed to the status of women and children. This chapter will analyze each group one by one.

The methodology of this chapter primarily relies on internal documents, literature, and propaganda produced by the Islamic State itself in order to elucidate the group's positions on these religious groups. This is to ensure that the information on the Islamic State's positions in theory and practice is as reliable as possible. While new interviews could have been conducted with members of these religious groups, in general, it was not felt that those interviews would have added new information beyond what can already be concluded and inferred from internal documents, literature and propaganda, and already existing interview data from prior reports. Interview data from prior reports are drawn upon when the other primary source data do not provide a clear picture.

The Yezidis: Plain Original Disbelievers

The Islamic State's treatment of the Yezidis- an ethno-religious community whose primary homeland has been the Sinjar area of west Ninawa province in Iraq near the border with Syria- attracted worldwide attention in 2014, as the

group's seizure of Mosul and other towns in Ninawa province provided an ample basis for the group to move on the poorly defended Sinjar area. The group's treatment of the Yezidi community was most recently recognized by Germany's Bundestag in January 2023 as genocide.[8] Five years prior to this recognition, the Armenian parliament had recognized the Islamic State's policies towards Yezidis as genocide.[9]

What, then, was the view of the Islamic State of this community as an out-group and could its approach based on that view constitute genocide? To answer this question, there is a considerable amount of literature and documents on the matter from the Islamic State itself. The Islamic State broadly categorizes out group into two types of disbelievers: "original disbelievers" and "apostates." Original disbelievers are people who were originally born in a religion outside of Islam, while apostates are people who are considered to have entered into Islam but have then left the religion, whether by openly declaring their abandonment of the religion or through espousing ideas that are deemed so deviant and heretical as to take the one who professes them outside of Islam, even if that person claims to be a Muslim.

In turn, however, "original disbelievers" are divided into two types: the "People of the Book" (i.e. followers of previous scriptures considered to have been revealed but corrupted, and thus entailing Jews and Christians at least) and disbelievers outside this framework. In the Islamic State's propaganda and literature, the view of the Yezidis is an unambiguous one: they constitute original disbelievers of the latter type. Indeed, the Islamic State's Research and Fatwa-Issuing Department (Arabic: *Diwān al-Buḥūṯ wa al-Iftā'*), which was created following the announcement of the Caliphate on 29 June 2014, was very quick to make clear the group's ruling on the Yezidis as the Islamic State moved on the Sinjar area. Its eleventh fatwa, dated August 9, 2014, and signed by the head of the department at the time (the Bahraini cleric Turki Bin'ali),[10] dealt with the question of whether the Yezidis constitute original disbelievers or apostates as follows (the ruling is quoted in full):

> "The Yezidis are original disbelievers and not of the People of Book. They do not have the doubt of a book, but rather they are idolaters. Some contemporary studies have opined that their origin is Islamic, but this has not been established through an authentic record of evidence. Even if we were to suppose for the sake of argument that this origin has been proven, in this case, they have nonetheless converted from apostasy and heresy to idolatry, and the predominant opinion among the people of knowledge is that the one who moves from a lower religion to a higher religion undergoes that conversion.

The Yezidis are unlike the Rafidites [Shi'a],[11] for the Rafidites claim affiliation with Islam and articulate the contracting of it while committing a number of its nullifiers.[12] Therefore, the latter are apostates. As for the Yezidis, they do not claim affiliation with Islam anyway, and they do not articulate the contracting of it, but rather they claim to be an ancient religion.

The fact that the Yezidis have some rituals that resemble the rituals of the Muslims is not something that influences the ruling on them, as many paths and religions- whether heavenly or earthly in origin- have ritual resembling the rituals of the Muslims, but that has not led us to ascribing these paths and religions to apostasy.

Therefore, we consider that the rulings of the original disbelievers are to be applied to this idolatrous sect, as one expects them to be clarified from the books of the jurisprudence. And God knows best."

Before dealing with the practical consequences of this opinion, a couple of clarifications should be made. First, "they do not have the doubt of a book" here means that the Islamic State does not consider the Yezidis to have what might be considered to be a previously revealed sacred book from God like the Torah and Gospel, such that they could be considered People of the Book and not like other original disbelievers. Second, "they do not articulate the contracting of it [Islam]," means that the Yezidis do not make the Islamic declaration of faith (the *šahāda*), such that they could be dealt with as though they have entered into Islam.

Yezidi Men and Older Boys: Conversion or Death

As a result of this ruling, Yezidis are ultimately not allowed to be afforded toleration as Yezidis under the Islamic State and thus have no rights to life or property under its authority. Since the Islamic State's ambitions are ultimately global, one of the Islamic State's logical end goals would be ending the existence of the Yezidi community as a community with its own Yezidi identity and religion throughout the world, or at least in areas over which the Islamic State holds power. This properly fits the definition of genocide in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, where genocide was defined as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."[13]

So, what practically does the Islamic State's genocidal approach mean? For the men and older boys (pubescent and older) of the Yezidi community in particular, there are only two choices that face them: conversion to Islam or death. Indeed,

there are a number of reports attesting to mass executions of Yezidi men and boys over the age of 12. For example, in their demographic documentation of the Islamic State's attack on the Yezidi village of Kojo (/Kocho), Sareta Ashraph and Valeria Cetorelli noted that the Islamic State commander who led the group's entry into the village had the village's remaining Yezidi population of 1,200 people gathered in the village school, with the women and children kept upstairs and the men and adolescent boys kept downstairs.[14] The men and adolescent boys, who did not convert to Islam, were subsequently removed from the school in contingents, and it would appear that the majority of them were executed by gunfire in different locations.[15]

In contrast, if Yezidis convert to Islam, then they are supposed to be afforded protection as Muslims. Indeed, it would seem that some Yezidis opted for this path when the Islamic State took control of the Sinjar area, and the group advertised what were effectively forced conversions in a video release from its "*Wilāyat Ninawa*" ("Ninawa province") media office, entitled "Entry of hundreds of the Yezidis into Islam."[16] The opening of the video contains a description of the Yezidis, stating from the outset that they are a "sect of the original disbelievers." The description includes some familiar charges against the Yezidis by outsiders, most notably the claim that they worship Satan, though it should be noted that this claim by itself does not make the Yezidis worse in the eyes of the Islamic State than other original disbelievers who are not considered People of the Book.

Speaking from inside the Sinjar area, an Islamic State fighter is asked about how the group dealt with the Yezidis of Sinjar, in response to which he says:

> "We invited the Yezidis to Islam before the conquest of Sinjar and before the conquest of Tel Afar, in exchange for which they would have security and we would provide them everything they need as far as we can. But they insisted on fighting us. This is what I have seen with my own eye, so this is their state of affairs in the mountain. But here I give you glad tidings that there are many families who have converted to Islam and I have met with them, including women, children and elderly, and they are joyful about entering into Islam, and they have said: 'You have come late.'"[17]

Asked also about his message to the Yezidis who had not yet converted to Islam and were remaining on Mount Sinjar, he said:

> "We advise and indeed implore the Yezidis to come down from the mountain and to convert to Islam. First, in order to be kept away from the Hellfire in the Hereafter. Second, if they remain on the mountain,

they will die of hunger and thirst. As for the help of the Western and Crusader states, this is a lie. Every day they say: help us. Hours later they say: they have died because of such-and-such. This is so if they stay on the mountain, which is not in their interest. But if they come down from the mountain and convert to Islam, this is in their interest. First, we will offer them everything they need, we will secure their life for them, indeed we will defend them, and we will be killed for them as we will not allow anyone to approach them, and they will life a good and happy life with refuge, housing, residency, and other aspects of livelihood. If they enter Sinjar or any other town after converting to Islam, we will defend them and offer them all the help they need."[18]

The rest of the video consists of a busload of Yezidi men who are taught the declaration of faith, thereby becoming Muslims, in addition to being taught the ritual of Muslim prayer. Speaking in Arabic and Kurdish, some "former" Yezidis declare their joy about entering into Islam, claim they are being treated justly and advise the other Yezidis to do the same.

In religious terms, the Islamic State justifies its approach in the video as being in accordance with a saying (ḥadīṯ) attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, who, according to two collections of ḥadīṯs generally deemed the most reliable in Sunni Islam (Bukhari and Muslim), said: "I have been commanded to fight the people until they testify that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, establish prayer and give zakat. If they do that, they have guaranteed from me security for their blood and wealth except in what concerns the right of Islam,[19] and their reckoning is upon God Almighty." It also portrays its actions as not driven by some cruelty for its own sake but rather as part of a divinely-mandated mission to bring people out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of Islam. Regardless of this Islamic State gloss, however, the group's approach still amounts to an effective choice of conversion or death for Yezidi men and older boys, which constitutes a crime of genocide.

It should also be noted that a declared conversion to Islam did not necessarily ensure full protection against other forms of abuse at the hands of the organization. For example, the UN has documented that some Yezidis who declared conversion to Islam and were allowed to live with their families were settled in villages in the Tel Afar area that had been previously inhabited by Shi'a Turkmen. Yet rather than being left alone, these converted Yezidis were forced to engage in labor for the Islamic State, building tunnels and performing agricultural work without a salary.[20] In addition, in some instances the group may have doubted the sincerity of conversions and thus executed some Yezidi men and older boys who had declared conversion. The UN reports that in April-May 2015, the group emptied out three villages inhabited by Yezidis who had declared

conversion to Islam, separating the men and older boys from their families.[21] These men and older boys have subsequently not been heard from again. Unfortunately, no internal documents or propaganda items have been unearthed that could attest to their fate, but it is reasonable to suppose that the group had decided that they were really still Yezidis at heart and thus merited death.

Younger Yezidi Boys: Recruited into Islamic State

For the Yezidi boys younger than twelve but older than seven, it would appear that the group primarily took them to be 're-educated' and brought up as Muslims, bringing them into the system of the training camps and preparing them to become future fighters for the group. Here, no internal documents or literature have been surfaced to attest to these practices, but they are documented in reports by the UN and elsewhere.[22]

Moreover, there is an Islamic State propaganda video that attests to its recruitment of Yezidi boys into the training camps and use of them as military personnel. The video is entitled "So follow their guidance" and was released by the Wilāyat Ninawa media office in February 2017.[23] The theme of the video is to highlight how those who were previously 'astray' have seen the path of truth and thus joined the Islamic State and became 'guided', eventually serving as suicide bombers for the group. Thus, among those documented are former members of Syrian "apostate" insurgent factions and an Iraqi who used to be a Sufi (another trend deemed heretical and "apostate" by the Islamic State). Around 17:30 minutes or so into the video, the narrator then describes how God has made human nature naturally "sound" (i.e. that it would be naturally inclined to correct monotheism/Islam and ethics), with the implication being that it is the upbringing of the child that can make him/her a disbeliever. The narrator then continues, with apparent scenes of Yezidi boys receiving lessons in Islam and participating in training camp sessions:

> "So here are the Yezidis, about whose fate the hireling media bleated, since they were turned over by the grace of God alone to the Islamic State, as the Šariʿī schools were opened for them, calling to the methodology and guidance of truth. So God blessed them with guidance and entry into Islam, and they rejected what they used to worship besides Him, and the Exalted granted them a further blessing, in that He made them mujahidin in the ranks of their brothers, and He caused the hastening of those of them who hastened to perform martyrdom operations. How excellent they are thanks to God, who bestowed them as arrows in the quiver of Islam."

The video then features the testimony of two Yezidi boys who carried out a suicide bombing for the Islamic State: one dubbed Abu Yūsuf al-Sinjarī/Amjad al-Sinjarī (implying he is from Sinjar), and the other called Asʿad/Abu Ḫaṭṭāb. Both boys speak in Kurdish, further suggesting they were, in fact, originally Yezidis. Abu Yūsuf explains how they used to "worship Satan" and were initially living "in *Jahiliya* [pre-Islamic ignorance] and did not think of *halal* or *haram* [what is permissible and what is forbidden according to Islam]." They then saw the difference between the Islamic State and the Yezidis, in that in the case of the latter, they would not punish the offspring of a high-rank member of the community for fornication, whereas the Islamic State would consistently apply the *hadd* punishment mandated by God.

On seeing the Islamic State, they entered a Šariʿī institute where they studied Islamic doctrine, and then they were taken to a training camp in Syria, and after the camp course, they gave allegiance to the Islamic State's caliph and transferred to the "Anas bin al-Naḍr Battalion" (a battalion named after a companion of the Prophet, renowned for his bravery and his willingness to die fighting). Abu Yūsuf then says that he and his brother enlisted in the registers of would-be "martyrdom operatives." He then adds: "Exalted be god, we want to plunge into the enemies of God and carry out [the martyrdom operation] among them, even if they are our parents." This highlights how the Islamic State sought to break all links for young Yezidi boys with the religion and community of their upbringing, to the point of turning them actively against the Yezidi religion and community and inculcating the same genocidal mindset.

The Taking of Sabī: A Further Aspect of Genocide

While the men and adolescent boys faced an effective choice of conversion or death, the Yezidi women and girls aged nine and above who did not surrender in conversion to Islam faced a fate that perhaps horrified the world even more: namely, enslavement, which would allow for these women and girls to be exploited for domestic and/or sexual purposes by their owners.[24] The Islamic State produced a substantial amount of literature justifying this practice, which only makes sense if the group were actually engaging in enslavement of these women and members had questions on how to deal with their female slaves. Other documentary evidence also attests to the practice of buying, selling and transfer of female slaves among members of the Islamic State. Conversely, there is no evidence to suggest that the wider Muslim populations who lived under the Islamic State were intended to be given access to these female slaves.

The immediate justification for this practice of taking Yezidi women as captive is the concept of *sabī*. According to a treatise discussing rulings and issues

associated with the concept of sabī and issued by the "Research and Studies Office"[25] of the Islamic State,[26] sabī is defined as taking the women and children of a "warring people" as captives, while the Arabic term *asr* is applied to taking men of such people as prisoners or captives.[27] The book also explains that while sabī is technically distinct from the actual practice of enslavement following captivity (Arabic: *istirqāq*), in practice, the former has become synonymous with captivity and enslavement at the same time for both women and children.[28] The woman who is taken captive and enslaved is thus known as *sabīya*, while the plural is *sabāya*.

It should be noted that the term "warring people" here applies to any original disbelievers who are considered to be "at war" with the Islamic State in the sense that they do not have a pact of protection with the group. It has already been noted that for the Yezidis, there is no entitlement to any tolerance under the Islamic State as a community preserving its religion and identity, and thus, the Yezidis, so long as they do not convert to Islam, are considered "warring people" of the original disbelievers. Hence, their women have no protection against enslavement except in two circumstances: (i) they convert to Islam prior to being taken captive and enslaved, in which case they would be afforded protection as Muslims, or (ii) the "Imam" (i.e. the Caliph) makes a decision that the women should not be enslaved but rather should be dealt with 'benevolently' or held as captives for ransom only.[29] It is likely that the desire to protect the women and children from enslavement partly prompted some Yezidi families to declare conversion to Islam to gain protection as Muslims. Conversely, there is no evidence that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made exceptional allowances for Yezidi women not to be enslaved or only held for ransom.

Some evidence suggests that the security guarantee that was supposed to be afforded to the Yezidi families who declared conversion to Islam was not always adhered to. In 2019, "Abu Muslim al-Iraqi"- a person who claimed that he had once served as an *amni* (security official) in the Islamic State- published testimony of his experiences inside the Islamic State,[30] and there is strong reason to believe in the authenticity of the accounts he has published and that he is who he says he is. According to Abu Muslim, the Islamic State made clear that the men who converted to Islam would be spared and that the women who converted would not be taken as sabāya. This pact was supposedly guaranteed by al-Hajj Abdullah, who would later become the caliph Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, who succeeded Baghdadi following the latter's death in 2019. These Yezidis who converted were allowed to reside in the village of Kojo. Later on, per his testimony, most of the original sabāya in had fled from Islamic State hands, and the prices for them had increased, and thus there supposedly arose a pressing need for more sabāya. Thus, in one instance by order of Baghdadi's Iraq deputy al-Hajj Mu'tazz, a unit was formed in which Abu Muslim participated,

and a Yezidi family was taken from Kojo, ostensibly to return to its original village. However, on return to the village, the family's seven daughters were taken and distributed as sabāya to a select group of people who had agreed on the act. While complaints were raised to the Islamic State's judiciary system about the matter, those who were questioned about the matter simply noted they had acted on the order of al-Hajj Mu'tazz, and so they were not held accountable.

Internal documents also point to the practice of distribution, sale, and ownership of sabāya among Islamic State members and their families. Most notably, a set of directives issued by the Delegated Committee[31] in August-September 2015 made clear that the sabāya were *not* to be sold to the "masses" (meaning the general population living under Islamic State) or to their original families, such that the one who did sell a sabīya to such parties would have the entire sum of the sale confiscated.[32] This indicates that the group only intended for sabāya to be circulated among its own members and their families. Moreover, personnel rosters were often kept in order to track living and deceased members' personal and familial circumstances, which would be important in determining the salaries and payments to which members or their families were entitled. Some of these rosters keep a note of whether members had any sabāya and children of sabāya, since the addition of such members to one's family would entitle the member to a larger salary.[33]

One document attests to two administrative bodies of the Islamic State involved in the trafficking and treatment of sabāya: one being the Department of War Spoils and Booty (*Diwān al-Ġanāʾim wa al-Fayʾ*) and the other being the Department of Judiciary and Grievances (*Diwān al-Qaḍāʾ wa al-Maẓālim*).[34] The former, it would seem, was the initial body under whose authority the sabāya would initially come and would regulate the initial distributions and divisions, while the latter authorised and regulated all transactions involving the distribution and transfer of sabāya among Islamic State members. The same documentary evidence also attests to women's ownership of enslaved Yezidi women and girls. These women would almost certainly have been spouses of Islamic State members.

Besides this evidence attesting to the distribution and circulation of sabāya, the group's literature justifying the enslavement also detailed regulations on the treatment of the sabāya in the possession of Islamic State members.[35] This literature sanctioned using sabāya for sexual relations outside the bond of marriage- in other words, sanctioned rape. But this sexual exploitation was not without its own limits: for instance, if the slave-woman was actually owned by the wife in the household of an Islamic State member, then the latter would not be allowed to have sexual relations with the woman, as she would be considered the possession of the wife and thus not lawful to the husband.[36] Similarly, if a

sabīya were owned by two or more people, then it would not be permitted to have sex with her, as it would only be permitted in the event of one individual's having complete ownership of her.[37] Moreover, whereas it was permitted to have intercourse with the virgin enslaved woman immediately after taking possession of her, one would have to ensure the womb of the widow or divorcee is empty, which would mean not lying carnally with her if she were already pregnant and waiting until after she has given birth, or otherwise waiting for her to have a period in the event of her not being pregnant.[38]

The benefits that the Islamic State ascribed to the practice of enslavement should also be viewed within the framework of genocidal thinking since those benefits were seen as contributing to the elimination of disbelief/idolatry and growth of Islam. In other words, as noted, slavery was seen as another practice that would contribute to wiping out the Yezidi community. These ideas are most apparent in the Research and Fatwa-Issuing Commission pamphlet entitled: "Among the points of wisdom of the Creator in sabī and istirqāq."[39] The pamphlet listed the benefits of enslavement, including (i) the spreading of Islamic monotheism in that the enslaved women would be in an environment conducive to eventual conversion to Islam, (ii) glorification of Islam and Muslims and the humiliation of disbelief and disbelievers, and (iii) increasing the numbers of Muslims through the enslaved women's becoming pregnant and bearing children in their sexual relations with their masters, since in Islam religion is considered to transmit through the paternal line, and thus a child born to an Islamic State member and a Yezidi enslaved woman would be considered Muslim.[40]

In summary, then, it can be seen that the Islamic State's approach to the Yezidi community is one of genocide, as it is predicated on destroying a religious community that cannot be tolerated. This destruction comes about through the choice of conversion or death for the men and older boys and the imposition of enslavement on the women and girls who do not initially convert, with the result of such enslavement being that either the women or girls will eventually convert to Islam or they will die out along with their disbelief. Preferably for the Islamic State, these enslaved women and girls will bear children through sexual relations with their owners, and these children will be Muslim and not Yezidi. Yezidi male children, meanwhile, are eventually taken away to be brought up as Muslims.

The Christians: 'Tolerated' Original Disbelievers

As alluded to in the preceding section, the Islamic State distinguishes original disbelievers from the out-group in terms of plain original disbelievers and 'People of the Book.' Although there have been disagreements among Islamic scholars and authorities as to how wide the net of 'People of the Book' should extend,

there is no disagreement among them that Jews and Christians come under this category. The Islamic State similarly adopts this view, and thus some kind of 'toleration' can be afforded to Jews and Christians under its caliphate, whereby they would be classified as ḏimmis (Arabic: *ahl al-ḏimma*). Effectively, a three-way choice is supposed to be offered to them: conversion to Islam, subjugation as ḏimmis whose status is essentially that of second-class citizens, or death. The traditional Qur'anic basis for imposing this three-way choice is 9:29 (the twenty-ninth verse of the ninth chapter, called *Sūrat al-Tawba* - "The Chapter of Repentance"), which is worth quoting in full:

> "Fight those who do not believe in God or the Last Day and do not prohibit what God and His Messenger have prohibited, and do not profess the religion of truth, from among those who have been given the book, until they give the jizya by hand, subdued as they are."

Of course, there are no known Jewish populations who have come under the Islamic State's rule,[41] and it would seem that the organization does not expect Jews worldwide will convert to Islam or accept coming under its rule as ḏimmis. Thus, the group put out a call recently for its members and supporters worldwide to kill Jews wherever they can do so.[42] However, in the case of the Christians, there are real examples of where Christian communities have come under the group's rule: most notably, in the Ninawa area of Iraq (Mosul and its environs) and parts of central and eastern Syria (Raqqa and the greater Homs desert area extending across central and eastern Syria).

Thus, in the Raqqa area in February 2014, before the announcement of the Caliphate, what was then the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Šām (the predecessor to the Islamic State) announced the imposition of a ḏimmi pact on the Christians residing under its rule,[43] which quotes Qur'an 9:29 and is presented as a pact of "security for their lives, wealth, children and the rest of their descendants in Wilāyat al-Raqqa," granted by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (though it would appear that the signing of the pact was done on his behalf by someone else, whose signature is deliberately obscured in the pact). At that point, the Islamic State had largely consolidated its control over the province, expelling rival Syrian insurgent factions and besieging isolated military bases held by the Syrian government, which the group would then overrun in the summer of that year.

The ḏimmi pact continues by outlining that the Christians' churches should not be destroyed or harmed, nor should their wealth or lives be harmed, nor should they be compelled to follow Islam. Yet the pact also specifies numerous regulations that underline the second-class status in subjugation. These restrictive measures include a prohibition on renovation of churches or monasteries, a prohibition on displaying the Cross or Christian scriptures on the roads or in the

markets of Muslims, prohibiting the use of sound amplifiers for performance of prayers and other rituals, a prohibition on making Muslims listen to the recitation of their books or the sounds of their bells, not engaging in any Christian rituals outside their churches, a prohibition on blasphemy against Islam. Most importantly, the ḏimmi pact is made conditional on every adult male paying a poll tax (*jizya*) in two instalments per year. This tax is set in gold dinars (with each dinar defined as 4.25 grams pure gold equivalent), with the "wealthy" required to pay four dinars per year, those of average wealth status required to pay two dinars per year, and the poor required to pay one dinar per year. Besides this jizya tax, Christians were also liable to pay the ʿ*ušr* tax (a 10 percent tax) in the event of bringing goods from outside the borders of the Islamic State for the purpose of business. If the Christians did not wish to abide by the pact, then there would be no pact for them, and they would be dealt with as the "people of war and stubborn enmity"- effectively a license for the Islamic State to kill them and seize their property.

Other regions in which it is known or likely that the ḏimmi pact was imposed include the town of al-Qaryatayn in the Homs desert and Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zūr province. The town of al-Qaryatayn was overrun by the Islamic State in the summer of 2015 as part of its wider offensive in the region that also saw the group capture Palmyra. After capturing al-Qaryatayn, the group publicized in its propaganda a document issued in the name of the Department of Judiciary and Grievances, which replicates the ḏimmi pact imposed in Raqqa in February 2014.[44] While the imposition of such a pact was not similarly advertised for Dayr al-Zūr province (which mainly was overrun by the Islamic State in 2014, with the exception of part of Dayr al-Zūr city and nearby military bases held by the Syrian government), an interview published in November 2020 with the group's head of covert operations units in the al-Ḫayr (Dayr al-Zūr) region of Syria quotes the interviewee- identified only as Abu Mansur al-Ansari- as saying that when the Islamic State ruled, one could remember how the "Muslims and ḏimmis would traverse the steppes and towns night and day in security for their lives and wealth."[45] This suggests that some Christians were residing in areas of the group's control in the province.

Conversely, in Iraq, there is no evidence that any Christian populations decided to remain under the Islamic State as ḏimmis. Instead, it would appear that the group decided to make an exception to the threefold choice, giving the Christians in the Ninawa area, in particular, the opportunity to leave the Islamic State's territory. This is attested in a document issued in the name of the judiciary department in July 2014,[46] in which it is stated that the heads of the Christian community failed to attend an appointment with the Islamic State on the group's status, but the caliph had decided to give them a deadline by which to evacuate the Islamic State's territory.

There was, however, an implicit catch in this permission to depart: the property of the departing Christians would be confiscated. The confiscation of Christian property in the Ninawa area is attested in other documents. For example, some documents recovered by Rukmini Callimachi of the New York Times detail rental contracts whereby the Islamic State would rent out land 'owned' by its "Real Estate and Land-Tax Department" (*Diwān al-ʿAqārāt wa al-Ḫarāj*) to locals for the purpose of farming in exchange for rental fees or a percentage of the farmer's harvest.[47] Some of these lands are listed as having previously been owned by the Mar Behnam monastery, which was also previously renting out lands to some locals. In effect, the same arrangements as before were continuing, only now the Islamic State had confiscated these lands. Similarly, houses owned by Christians who had left would have been confiscated by the group, potentially to be rented out to locals.

As noted, when Christians do not have a 'pact' with the Islamic State, then their status is that of "warring" original disbelievers, just like the Yezidis. This makes property liable to confiscation and for the men of the community to be subject to the choice of conversion or death. It also makes the women and children liable to be enslaved after being taken captive. Yet it has been seen that it is not mandatory for the Islamic State to follow these paths when it captures Christians. Those taken prisoner can be offered benevolence or held for ransom only, and it would appear that the group generally decided on this latter option for any Christians it took captive in Iraq and Syria. This is most notable in the case of Christian hostages taken in the Khabur Valley region of northeast Syria in early 2015. The hostages refused calls for their conversion and were instead held for ransom.[48] The hostages were then released around a year later in exchange for sums of money paid in ransom- money that was raised in part through Assyrian/Syriac Christian diaspora fundraising.[49]

The more brutal reality of the Islamic State's approach towards Christians who are deemed as being "at war" is to be found in Africa, where the group routinely boasts of attacks and massacres it carries out against Christians, emphasizing the Christian identity of the victims of its attacks. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the group boasted in January 2023 of a bomb attack on a church in the eastern Beni region, which resulted in "dozens of disbelieving Christians being killed and wounded," intended as a message of defiance against the "Congolese forces and their allies."[50] Similarly, in June 2022, the group released an infographic on its operations in Mozambique over the course of 17 days, killing "23 disbelieving Christians," burning more than 250 homes and nine churches, and displacing more than 11,000 Christians from their villages.[51] There are many other examples of this conduct that could be documented from Africa, going by the group's official propaganda alone.

Theoretically, Christian communities can be afforded 'toleration' in the form of a 'protection pact,' but this pact imposes numerous restrictions on freedom of worship and other rights, and is, in truth, tantamount in this day and age to mafia-type extortion. Outside this limited 'tolerance,' the group has engaged in crimes of unlawful killings, massacres and kidnappings against Christians, as well as confiscation of Christian property.

The Shi'a: Ineligible In-Group

Despite the group's atrocities against Yezidis and Christians, these original disbelievers within the out-group are not in fact the worst sort of out-group in the eyes of the Islamic State. The worst disbelievers are the so-called "apostates," among whom the Shi'a are numbered. The apostates can be classed as an ineligible in-group because they are deemed to have been at some point part of the in-group but have since gone outside its fold and become part of the out-group.[52] Thus, apostasy is deemed worse than original disbelief, since it is considered a greater evil to have known the truth, professed adherence to it and then abandoned it, than to have not known the truth at all. In the basic outline of its creed, the Islamic State makes clear that since apostasy is a greater evil than original disbelief, then fighting the apostates has greater priority than the original disbelievers: "The disbelief of apostasy is worse by consensus than original disbelief, thus fighting the apostates is of greater priority in our view than fighting the original disbeliever."[53] This sort of approach is justified partly by historical precedent, in particular the "apostasy wars" that were waged in the Arabian Peninsula by the Prophet's first successor and caliph, Abu Bakr following the former's death. These wars- waged against Arabs who were deemed to have apostatized- were given more immediate priority over the wars with the Christian Byzantines and the Zoroastrian Persians (original disbelievers).

However, it would seem that not all members of the Islamic State had a clear idea of the group's official conception of Shi'a as apostates rather than original disbelievers. It is possible that some members adopted an intuitive line of reasoning that since most Shi'a today are not new converts to their faith but rather have been born in succeeding generations to parents who were Shi'a, then they become original disbelievers rather than apostates. To address this notion, the Islamic State's Office of Research and Studies published a treatise entitled "Ruling of the Shari'a on the Shi'a Sects," outlining the reasons why various sects of the Shi'a should be considered apostates and not original disbelievers.[54] This chapter will not regurgitate the treatise's reasoning in depth, but simply note the crux of the treatise's argument. Per the treatise's reasoning, by claiming affiliation with Islam but committing "nullifiers" of Islam (e.g. disparagement of the Prophet's companions such as his wife Aisha, and alleged deification of

humans), the people of the Shi'a sects are apostates, even if they were born to Shi'a parents and prior generations of Shi'a and thus were never raised as Sunni Muslims. The claiming of affiliation with Islam as the key aspect of apostasy is the reason why the sole exception in this treatise is made for some members of the Druze community who identify as Druze but do not claim to be Muslims- such Druze, in this case, are considered original disbelievers and not apostates.[55]

The same treatise also makes clear that the distinction between apostates and original disbelievers is not some academic exercise but rather has real practical consequences. If the Shi'a are incorrectly regarded as original disbelievers, then there are many false inferences that can be drawn, according to the treatise.[56] The most notable supposed false inferences include (i) that they cannot be forcibly compelled to Islam, (ii) that it may be possible to treat them as _dimmis_, (iii) that it is permissible to enslave their men, (iv) that their captives can be held for ransom or be shown benevolence as a matter of choice, and (v) that it is impermissible to kill the person among them who proclaims acceptance of Islam after power is gained over him/her.

In other words, like the Yezidis, the Shi'a do not have rights of property and life as Shi'a under the Islamic State, but their options are also more limited than those of the Yezidis. If the Islamic State gains power over Shi'a communities, then the latter do not have the option of declaring conversion to Sunni Islam as a means of protecting themselves. Rather, it appears that the repentance of a person from among the Shi'a is only accepted before the Islamic State has gained power over that said person.

In this regard, the Islamic State has claimed and advertised as its own a few individuals who had originally been Shi'a and then declared renunciation of their original faith and their conversion to Sunni Islam outside the Islamic State's areas of territorial control. Perhaps the most well-known example is that of Man Haron Monis, who had been born an Iranian Shi'i but declared on his website that he used to be a "Rafidi" (Rafidite) but was now a Muslim while also announcing his allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He then carried out an attack on a café in Sydney, and was subsequently eulogized in the Islamic State's English-language magazine _Dabiq_, which praised his "repentance" and hailed him as a "mujāhid in the path of Allah,"[57] though it also acknowledged that he had acted alone and had not coordinated with the group. Even so, his renunciation of his prior faith and declared allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were sufficient for the group to count him as one of their own. In contrast with Monis who had never travelled to the Islamic State in Iraq or Syria, the al-Naba' newsletter published the story of an Islamic State 'martyr' known as Abu ʿAzzām of Ahwaz (i.e. originally from the Ahwaz region of western Iran).[58] According to the biography, he converted from Shi'i Islam to Sunni Islam, renouncing his past life and heading on a perilous

journey through Iran and Turkey to join the Islamic State in Syria, where he died fighting.

Yet it seems most implausible that masses of Shi'a are somehow going to renounce their faith willingly before the Islamic State gains power over them, and so the only options facing Shi'a communities and military personnel under attack from the Islamic State are to fight or flee, as capture will mean certain death for the men at least. Perhaps the most ghastly testament to this reality is the Camp Speicher massacre of Iraqi air cadets near Tikrit in June 2014, celebrated by the Islamic State as a "slaughter of the Rafidites" and a massacre overseen by its senior official Abū al-Muġīra al-Qaḥṭānī, who was subsequently dispatched by the group to Libya where he was killed.[59] In cases where Shi'a have fled areas seized by the Islamic State, there is no doubt that the group has systematically worked to erase traces of their presence, destroying Shi'a shrines and places of worship and confiscating Shi'a lands and homes. Just as the group confiscated lands of the Mar Behnam monastery to rent out to locals under its rule, documents recovered by Callimachi also show how the Islamic State confiscated lands in Ninawa that had belonged to Shi'a, and then rented them out.[60]

However, a somewhat more complex issue is the Islamic State's treatment of Shi'a women and children. While the earlier mentioned treatise makes clear that Shi'a men who are captured must be killed, it does *not* say that deeming it permissible to enslave Shi'a women and children is a false inference. This is because the question of whether it is permissible to enslave the women and children of the apostates is somewhat complicated. The Islamic State literature on the matter acknowledges that Islamic scholars to whom it lends credence have differing views on the issue. For example, Ibn Taymiyya - one of the scholars whom the group most likes to quote - is quoted in the group's treatise on issues of enslavement as inclining to the permissibility of enslavement of apostate women.[61]

Nonetheless, the treatise prefers to side with what it sees as the "pronouncement of the majority": namely, that it is not permissible to enslave the apostate woman, because to do so would be tantamount to allowing people to remain in apostasy- an approach the group views as contradicting the force of the ḥadīt attributed to Muhammad: "Whoever changes his[/her] religion, kill him[/her]."[62] Thus, since the Shi'a are deemed apostates, then by this logic it should not be permissible to enslave their women, but rather the choice they face should be the same as that facing the men: conversion to Islam (before power is gained over them) or death. The treatise makes clear that this choice it believes should face the apostate woman.[63]

Yet an apparent Islamic State document would seem to contradict this view. Specifically, an alleged fatwa of the "Fatwa-Issuing Centre" of the "Wilāyat al-Raqqa," which states that it is permissible to enslave the women of the Shi'a.[64] There are reasons however to doubt whether this document should be given any weight as evidence for enslavement of Shi'a women. First, at the time when this document first appeared (autumn 2015, when compilation and analysis of internal Islamic State documents were still relatively new enterprises), the researcher Cole Bunzel had suggested that this fatwa and others put out in the name of this "Fatwa-Issuing Centre" could have just been the work of a lower-level functionary, who gave what he thought to be condensed versions of the rulings of the greater commission/office. Stylistically, the language of the other fatwas attributed to this center could support that conclusion. In such a case it is possible that the writer simply erred and committed the fallacy of supposing the Shi'a to be original disbelievers rather than apostates.

Alternatively, however, we may just suppose that the fatwa and other such fatwas attributed to this "Fatwa-Issuing Centre" are forgeries on the grounds of error in content and style, as well as the fact that no other corroborating evidence has emerged for the existence of "fatwa-issuing centers" in the Islamic State's provinces. Indeed, the existence of such centers and the authenticity of the documents were denied to this author by the Telegram contact for "Knowledge Heritage Foundation"- a body of dissenters-turned-defectors from the Islamic State and their supporters.[65] Some of these dissenters-turned-defectors had originally been linked to the Office of Research and Studies, and the Foundation published the complete archive of works of the office.

Despite the Office of Research and Studies' literature that would suggest it is not permissible to enslave Shi'a women, there is the testimony of some Shi'a Turkmen women from the Tel Afar area who say that they were taken captive and subjected to forced marriages and sexual abuse by members of the Islamic State, and it seems difficult to dismiss this testimony.[66] It is possible, for instance, that the Islamic State decided to deal with Shi'a women taken captive outside the formal frameworks in which the Yezidi women were dealt with. That is, they may not have been handed over to the war spoils department and the judiciary to be trafficked and bought and sold in transactions among fighters, but they faced an ordeal tantamount to enslavement and sexual abuse in being forcibly married off to Islamic State fighters.

It should also be noted that in the end, the Office of Research and Studies' view on the permissibility of enslaving apostate/Shi'a women is only an inclination towards a viewpoint it believes to be the majority among scholars and *not an absolute pronouncement* that it is forbidden to enslave them. For if it had adopted an absolute pronouncement and clear view on the impermissibility of enslaving

Shi'a women, why was that not stated in the treatise on the Shi'a sects? Amid such lack of firmness and clarity, it is plausible to see how members of the group may have decided it was acceptable to force Shi'a women into some kind of slavery, even if there were no formalized procedures as existed for Yezidi women.

Regardless of whether the fate of the Shi'a women who fell into the group's hands was execution or forced marriages, it is clear that, as is the case with the group's treatment of the Yezidis, the group's policies towards Shi'a should also be understood in the framework of genocide, as they are all based on ending the existence of the Shi'a as Shi'a, who are not to be afforded any toleration as apostates. The only effective way for them to save their lives is to convert to Sunni Islam before the Islamic State should gain power over them.

Conclusion

This has examined the Islamic State's approaches towards three different groups of those who are or are deemed by it to be non-Muslim, and has highlighted not only the differences that exist according to the specific categorization of the disbeliever, but also the commonalities. Ultimately, the Islamic State's behavior towards all three groups is representative of the group's extremist mindset in dealing with them, as the organization believes that communities of original disbelievers outside the framework of the People of the Book (in our case study, the Yezidis) and communities of apostates (in our case study, the Shi'a) should ultimately be wiped out as they cannot be tolerated under its state project that intends to rule the entire world.

The Christians, by contrast, are allowed to exist as Christians under the Islamic State, but it is in a framework of second-class status and humiliating subjugation, still rooted in hostility to Christians and their religion and intended to remind the out-group of the in-group's supremacy over it. This can hardly be seen as tolerance in the modern sense of having equal rights under the law and fostering mutual respect. With regard to all three groups, there is evidence of Islamic State war crimes in the form of unlawful killings, kidnappings, enslavement and violations of property rights.

This comparative analysis should also serve as a guide for understanding how the Islamic State might deal with other communities it deems non-Muslims, such as remaining Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, who, like the Yezidis will be considered to original disbelievers outside the framework of the People of the Book and thus the targets for international crimes, including genocide.

[1] "This is our ʿaqīda and this is our manhaj," al-Himma Library, p. 3.

[2] For a historical study of Murji'ites, see e.g. Saleh Said Agha, "A viewpoint of the Murji'a in the Umayyad period: evolution through application," Journal of Islamic Studies, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January 1997), pp. 1-42. In brief, Murji'ites are seen as adherents of the concept of Irjāʾ, which is a word that means "postponement." In the negative sense, Irjāʾ is portrayed as the notion that judgement on a person's faith is ultimately left to God, that faith is not tied with deeds, and that a declaration of faith alone is an obstacle to being declared a disbeliever. On Hārijism, see Nelly Lahoud, "The Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction," (Hurst, London, 2010), pp. 57-96.

[3] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Report in Islamic State's al-Naba' Newsletter on Destroying Abu Bakr Shekau's Group," *aymennjawad.org*, July 2, 2021, https://aymennjawad.org/2021/07/report-in-islamic-state-al-naba-newsletter-on.

[4] This discussion draws in particular on J.M. Berger, Extremism, (MIT Press, 2018) and Haroro J. Ingram, "Deciphering the Siren Call of Militant Islamist Propaganda," ICCT, September 2016 (accessed here: https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2016/09/ICCT-Ingram-Deciphering-the-Siren-Call-of-Militant-Islamist-Propaganda-September2016.pdf.

[5] "Your Lord has sufficed as guide and helper," al-Naba' issue 99, pp. 8-11 (September 2017).

[6] For a representative example of this line of thinking, see "Jihad is jihad oh people of Ethiopia," al-Naba' issue 394, p. 3 (June 8, 2023), which explains that whereas the first generations of Muslims followed the path of the Prophet and waged jihad against the disbelievers and thus attained success and conquest, later generations deviated from this path and thus God imposed the disbelievers on them. The editorial urges Muslims in Ethiopia protesting mosque demolitions to adopt this worldview and wage jihad.

[7] E.g. "This is what God and His Messenger have promised us," al-Naba' issue 53, pp. 8-9 (transcript of a speech by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi); "Glad tidings for those who endure," al-Naba' issue 159, p. 8, December 6, 2018.

[8] Bundestag, "Bundesag erkennt IS-Verbrechen an Jesiden als Völkermord, [Federal government recognises IS crimes against Yazidis as genocide]", January 19, 2023 (accessed here: https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2023/kw03-de-jesiden-927032).

[9] "Armenia recognizes IS Massacres of Yezidis as Genocide," *Eurasianet*, January 23, 2018https://eurasianet.org/armenia-recognizes-is-massacres-of-yezidis-as-genocide.

[10] Fatwa no. 11 issued by Diwān al-Buḥūṯ wa al-Iftāʾ, August 9, 2014.

[11] "*Rafidites*" is a derogatory term for Shiʿa partly based on their supposed 'rejection' of true Islam (at least in the Islamic State's eyes).

[12] "Nullifiers of Islam" (Arabic: *nawāqiḍ al-Islam*) is a concept first formulated by Muḥammad bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, according to whom certain pronouncements, actions and opinions will 'nullify' one's Islam and therefore take that person outside the faith. The concept of the nullifiers serves as an important basis for takfir and was taught by the Islamic State to new recruits as part of its basic course on Islamic monotheism. See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Islamic State Training Camp Textbook: "Course in Monotheism"- Complete Text, Translation and Analysis," *aymennjawad.org*, July 26, 2015, https://aymennjawad.org/17633/islamic-state-training-camp-textbook-course-in.On the relationship between Wahhabi theology and the Islamic State, see Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," Brookings, March 2015,

https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf.

[13] "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," United Nations General Assembly, December 9, 1948.

[14] Valeria Cetorelli and Sareta Ashraph, "A demographic documentation of ISIS's attack on the Yazidi village of Kocho," *LSE Middle East Centre,*, June 2019, pp. 9-18, https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/report/a-demographic-documentation-of-isiss-attack-on-the-yazidi-village-of-kocho/Cetorelli_Demographic_documentation_ISIS_attack.pdf.

[15] Ibid.

[16] "Entry of hundreds of Yezidis into Islam," Wilāyat Ninawa Media Office, August 2014.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] That is, if, for example, the person commits a crime for which Islam mandates the death penalty, then being a Muslim is no protection for that person against the death penalty.

[20] "A Call for Accountability and Protection: Yezidi Survivors of Atrocities Committed by ISIL," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq- Human Rights Office (August 2016), pp. 4-12, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMIReport12Aug2016_en.pdf.

[21] ""They came to destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis," *Human Rights Council*, 32nd session, Agenda Item 4 (June 15, 2016), p. 9 ()

[22] e.g. Jennifer Bell, "Kidnapped by ISIS, brainwashed and turned into a child soldier: a Yazidi's story," al-Arabiya, April 14, 2021, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/04/14/Kidnapped-by-ISIS-brainwashed-and-turned-into-a-child-soldier-A-Yazidi-s-story-); and ""They came to destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis," p. 19.

[23] "New video message from the Islamic State. So from their guidance, take an example-Wilāyat Nīnawā," Jihadology, February 14, 2017 (. All translations from the video are my own.

[24] As documented by the UN, it would appear that the age of nine was the minimum age at which a Yezidi girl might be sold separately, whereas those below the age of nine would be moved and transferred together with their mothers. See ""They came to destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,", pp. 9-18. However, no internal Islamic State documents or literature attest to this distinction by age.

[25] The successor body to the Diwān al-Buḥūṯ wa al-Iftā', which in late 2014 was renamed the Hayʾat al-Buḥūṯ wa al-Iftā' and then the Office of Research and Studies in 2015. While this name change might suggest that the institution had been 'downgraded' in its authority, the institution, in fac,t retained its same functions.

[26] "Sabī: Rulings and Issues," Office of Research and Studies (al-Himma Library, 2nd printing, July-August 2015), pp. 4-5.

[27] Theoretically, as alluded to in the treatise, there is the possibility for men of the original disbelievers to be taken captive and enslaved, including those men who are not of the People of the Book, since scholars offered differing views on the matter. It is also theoretically possible for such men to be held for ransom. Yet the treatise does not take a firm view on the matter, and there is no evidence for the enslavement of Yezidi men by the Islamic State, or for

their being held for ransom. Rather, the choice applied to Yezidi men was two-fold between conversion and death.

[28] "Sabī: Rulings and Issues," pp. 4-5. Yezidi male children who were initially captured however generally appear to have been taken to be re-educated and brought up as Muslims, rather than confined to slavery with the females. See e.g. Jennifer Bell, "Kidnapped by ISIS, brainwashed and turned into a child soldier: a Yazidi's story," al-Arabiya,   April 14, 2021, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2021/04/14/Kidnapped-by-ISIS-brainwashed-and-turned-into-a-child-soldier-A-Yazidi-s-story-.

[29] E.g. Ibid., pp. 12-14.

[30] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Opposition to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: The Testimony of a Former Amni," aymennjawad.org, May 21, 2019, https://aymennjawad.org/22715/opposition-to-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-the-testimony.

[31] A committee authorized by the Islamic State's caliph to oversee the functioning of the group's departments and sectors.

[32] See Specimen 25J in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents," *aymennjawad.org*, : https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/09/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-2.

[33] See e.g. Specimens 40Q and 40R in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents," *aymennjawad.org*, https://aymennjawad.org/2017/08/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-3. The documents list personnel who had been killed fighting in a primarily Caucasian unit called the Qadisiya Battalion. That said, none of the personnel on those lists are recorded as owning sabāya or children of sabāya.

[34] Ibid., Specimens 44B and 44C.

[35] e.g. "Question and Answer on Sabī and Slaves," al-Himma Library (October-November 2014).

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] "Among the points of wisdom of the Creator in sabī and istirqāq," Research and Fatwa-Issuing Commission, (undated, but perhaps late 2014 or early 2015).

[40] Ibid., pp. 4-14.

[41] Only handfuls of Jews likely remain in Iraq and Syria at most. See e.g. Salam Faraj and Sarah Benhaida, "On Passover 2021, Iraq's Jewish community dwindles to fewer than five," AFP, March 28, 2021, https://www.timesofisrael.com/on-passover-2021-iraqs-jewish-community-dwindles-to-fewer-than-five/ and "Jews in Islamic countries, Syria," Jewish Virtual Library, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-syria), which estimates a population of just four as of 2022.

[42] "Kill the Jews," al-Naba' issue 376, p. 3, February 2, 2023.

[43] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham's dhimmi pact for the Christians of Raqqa province," *Syria Comment*, February 26, 2014, https://aymennjawad.org/14472/the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-ash-sham-dhimmi.

[44] "Establishment of God's ruling on the Christians of the town of al-Qaryatayn," Wilāyat Dimašq Media Office, August 2015.

[45] "Interview with Shaykh Abu Mansur al-Ansari (may God protect him): amir of the covert units in al-Khayr in Wilāyat al-Šām," al-Naba' issue 261, pp. 9-11.

[46] Specimen S in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents," *aymennjawad.org*, https://aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents.

[47] These documents were reviewed as part of the author's work on the "ISIS Files" project of George Washington University's Program on Extremism. See ISIS Files 07_000537 and ISIS Files 07_000542 cited in Devorah Margolin et al., "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to the Islamic State's Governance Strategy," George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2021, pp. 22 and 52, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/downloads/765371328?locale=en.

[48] Lori Hinnant, "Ransomed: The Freeing of 226 Christians from Islamic State," *Associated Press*, December 2, 2016, https://www.ap.org/explore/a-savage-legacy/ransomed--the-freeing-of-226-christians-from-islamic-state.html.

[49] Ibid.

[50] "Dozens of killed and wounded from among the disbelieving Christians in an explosion carried out by the soldiers of the Caliphate inside a church in the Beni region in eastern Congo," Wilāyat Waṣṭ Ifrīqiya, January 15, 2023.

[51] "Operations of the soldiers of the Caliphate in Wilāyat Mozambique," al-Naba' issue 344, p. 12.

[52] For discussion of the concept of the ineligible in-group, see JM Berger, "A Paler Shade of White: Identity and In-Group Critique in James Mason's Siege," *RESOLVE Network*, April 2021, p. 20, https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2022-05/RSVE_REMVE_Berger_April%202021_1_.pdf.

[53] "This is our ʿaqīda and this is our manhaj,", p. 5.

[54] "Ruling of the Shariʿa on the Shiʿa Sects," Office of Research and Studies, (undated, but probably 2014-2015).

[55] Ibid., p. 4.

[56] Ibid., p. 27.

[57] Dabiq issue 6, al-Hayat Media Centre (December 2014-January 2015), pp. 1-5.

[58] "Ḥaydara Ahwāz (Abu ʿAzzām)," al-Naba' issue 12, p. 6, January 5, 2016.

[59] "The noble amir Abū al-Muġīra al-Qaḥṭānī: steadfastness until death," al-Naba' issue 24, pp. 8-9.

[60] These documents were reviewed as part of the author's work on the "ISIS Files" project of George Washington University's Program on Extremism. See Margolin et al, "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to the Islamic State's Governance Strategy," pp. 22 and 52.

[61] "Sabī: Rulings and Issues," p. 21.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Archivist: Unseen Islamic State Fatwas on Jihad and Sabaya," *Jihadology*, September 25, 2015, https://aymennjawad.org/17879/the-archivist-unseen-islamic-state-fatwas-on.

[65] Conversation, 2020.

[66] See e.g. Lizzie Porter, "Ordeal continues for Turkmen women kidnapped by ISIS," *The National News*, August 12, 2019 https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/ordeal-continues-for-shiite-turkmen-women-kidnapped-by-isis-1.897568.

3

Cubs of the Caliphate

Tore Hamming and Amarnath Amarasingam

In the context of war, children are often thought of as innocent, lacking agency and victims of others' decisions. In the public discourse on children, especially boys (under age 10) and male youth (aged 11 to 15), associated with the Islamic State, this has slightly changed and been replaced with notions of fear and violence. While not entirely unique for the Islamic State, this change in perception and framing is arguably the product of the centrality of boys and male youth in the group's performative propaganda output. As part of the Islamic State's utopian state building project, children and youth were, from its very inception, central actors. For the Islamic State, boys and male youth, or cubs (*ashbal*), were seen as its present and future, a critical component to ensure its resilience and continuation while they also proved useful to project its global threat of terrorism.

This chapter intends to contribute to this ongoing debate by sharing insights on the role of boys and male youth in conflict and especially in the context of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. It covers how the Islamic State recruited, indoctrinated, trained, and employed boys and male youth through various mechanisms and in numerous roles to strengthen its own narrative and resilience. Uncovering the evolving involvement of boys and male youth over time, the chapter also describes which roles they were forced to take on as the caliphate project developed.

While the Islamic State's organizational focus and governance structure involved girls and female youths, referred to as the "pearls of the caliphate", this chapter consciously focuses on boys and male youth till the age of 15, which follows the Islamic State's own typical definition of the transition from childhood to adulthood.[1] This analytical delineation and distinction is important because as Vale argues, "Within IS' ranks, roles afforded to children (and adults) were highly gendered."[2] The motive for this choice is the scarce data available specifically on girls and female youth in the caliphate and to keep the chapter's scope focused and realistic. The occasional mentioning of girls and female youth is thus by no

means intended to provide exhaustive information on their situation but to offer perspective to the situation of boys and male youth.

Analytically, boys and male youth in the ranks of the Islamic State can be divided into three categories: (1) boys and male youth of local Islamic State members, (2) of foreign fighters travelling to join the Islamic State, and (3) from local families opposed to the Islamic State who ending up joining the group. These groupings will be operationalized throughout the chapter whenever possible to ensure precision and nuance in the analysis and conclusion. It is important to state that age has great importance in terms of how meaning of events is created and their later impact on the mind. Age comes with a greater risk of deeper indoctrination and socialization that implies a stronger commitment to ideology and from which it may be harder to rehabilitate.

The chapter begins discussing the broader literature on children in conflict. It then proceeds to document and analyze the life and involvement of boys and male youth that ended up in the Islamic State in the period 2014 till now, but with a main focus on the 2014 to 2019 period when the group controlled vast territory in the Levant. This includes an examination of recruitment, schooling, military training, indoctrination, and children as objects in propaganda. The chapter ends with a brief discussion on agency to help provide a more nuanced understanding of boys and male youth involvement in the Islamic State including as perpetrators of violence. Methodologically, it builds on an examination of primary and secondary literature detailing the conditions for boys and male youth in the Islamic State. This includes the Islamic State's internal documents and its own propaganda on children and youth in general. To complement this data, the authors have conducted a number of virtual interviews with representatives in Syria with direct experience working with children and families living in Islamic State controlled territory.

Existing Research on Children in Violent Conflicts

Until recently, the academic literature on children in violent conflicts (CVC) was sparse and primarily written by and for think-tanks and civil society organizations. Now though, there is a diversity of research from anthropology, law, political science, economics, psychology, and sociology, among other disciplines. This section of the chapter will offer an overview of the existing literature on CVCs and make further note of key debates and knowledge gaps. Notably, most research still focuses on one or a limited number of cases.[3] This means that there is little comparative perspective or generalizability. Moreover, much of the existing literature concerns cases in Africa, Latin America, and South

America, leaving a hole in our understanding of CVCs in Middle Eastern contexts.[4]

This section will begin by explaining some notable differences in defining and conceptualizing CVCs and approaching the study of child soldiers. Next, it will broadly consider the different roles children take on in armed conflict, before exploring in more detail how they are recruited by terrorist and rebel groups. It will then outline what children generally do in terms of tasks and roles in these groups. Finally, this section will discuss what the research says about the mental, social, and physical consequences children face as a result of their involvement, and the efficacy of existing programs to assist CVCs.

First, it is important to note that the definition of a child is far from universal, and is largely constructed by cultural, social, and political contexts. For instance, across sub-Saharan Africa, young people frequently complete a rite of passage into adulthood at approximately fourteen years old.[5] Overall though, the United Nations (UN) *Conventions on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and *Optional Protocol to the UNRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* (2000) both define the age of reaching adulthood as eighteen. In a similar manner, the term "child soldier" is also very fluid, since many children associated with armed groups serve as laborers, spies, cooks, or sex slaves, as well as fighters.[6] As such, we have adopted the broader category of CVCs in this chapter, but may sometimes use "child soldier" interchangeably, referring to any child associated with armed groups.

The existing literature on CVCs can be divided into two broad positions: the caretakers and the free-rangers.[7] Caretakers view children as "vulnerable, innocent, and irrational" actors who require protection and guidance.[8] Critics of this position argue that caretakers eliminate the agency and independence of children. Free-rangers, on the other hand, argue that children are capable of "rational, politically-informed self-understanding," which thus means they have sufficient agency to justify their engagement in violence.[9]

The Role of Children in Armed Conflict

Children take on a wide variety of roles in armed conflict. As discussed above, they can be combatants, laborers, spies, sex slaves, or cooks. In these positions, they frequently take on the "norms and values of their militant environment" and can become more aggressive than their adult counterparts.[10] While they have been associated with armed groups throughout history, anecdotal evidence suggests that the prevalence of children in these settings has increased in the modern age.

In 2004, boys and girls were fighting in almost every major conflict, in both government and opposition forces.[11]

Some scholars argue that this increase can be explained by general and systematic factors.[12] Examples of these factors include the increased proliferation of small weapons, widening inequality in low-income countries, and the abundant supply of children (considering in particular that Africa is the world's youngest continent).[13] In response, other scholars criticize these systemic justifications for failing to acknowledge the individual agency of the children. Instead, they support supply and demand side explanations that focus on trying to understand the significant variation in child soldiers across time and space.

Recruitment of Child Soldiers

In terms of existing research, recruitment methods are the sub-topic with the largest amount and diversity of content. Relating to the caretaker versus free-ranger debate, the research is also in disagreement regarding whether children can engage in "voluntary" recruitment to armed groups. This is in contrast with forced recruitment. Typically, those who argue in favor of the existence of voluntary recruitment are free-rangers who also believe in children's agency and rationality.[14] On the other hand, those in the opposing camp argue that when children are regularly exposed to social and political pressures to engage in violence – such as during an armed conflict – it is impossible to assess the extent to which recruitment can be voluntary.[15] In the case of the Islamic State's use of child soldiers specifically, recruiters want children to *believe* that they possess agency, which again eliminates the possibility of voluntary recruitment.[16] This argument is supported by research done by Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, who suggests that children do not *opt* into conflict, but rather *grow* into it:

> "Conflict structures the information they see and the choices they make. It pulls and pushes them in many directors. Conflict erodes their relationships. It exacerbates their needs and exposes them to untold risk. Conflict shapes their identity and heightens their need to find meaning in their lives. Ultimately, the forces of conflict narrow the paths available to children."[17]

This issue will be further discussed at the chapter's end. It is also necessary to note that the academic literature on child soldiers broadly agrees that the reasons children join armed groups are multifaceted and complex. It is incorrect to simplify these narratives along a single dimension, such as violent extremism, ideology, or radicalization.[18] In practice, the reasoning can involve ideological

reasons (such as supporting an armed group's mandate), practical reasons (such as physical and food security or survival), and social reasons (peer and family networks), among numerous other factors.[19] The push and pull factors that lead to "voluntary" recruitment will be discussed in more detail below.

Before considering children's perspectives in relation to joining armed groups, there is a more pressing question that needs to be tackled: why do armed groups want to recruit children in the first place? At face value, recruiting children does not appear to be a good business model. Children are undisciplined and harder to control, physically weaker and less skilled at fighting than adults, and lacking in tactical and strategic judgement.[20] But, despite this, evidence suggests that using children in battles can positively affect an armed group's fighting capacity.[21] In other cases, armed groups recruit children because they are facing troop shortages and need to fill their ranks, or as proof of the universal character of their cause.[22] There are also strategic reasons for recruiting children. They are more malleable, adaptable, and obedient than adults.[23] In the case of the Islamic State specifically, indoctrinating and recruiting boys and male youth is believed to provide the organization with "transgenerational capability."[24] In other words, they are attempting to create a terrorist group that can outlast its territorial defeat.[25] Similarly, the Islamic State is known to abduct and integrate children of their enemies, such as pre-pubescent Yazidi boys. While this is again done with the goal of creating a sustainable fighting force, it is also done to eliminate their opposition's ability to provide long-term resistance to the group.[26]

When recruiting children into armed groups, there are a variety of methods used by the organizations. Almohammad draws comparisons between the Islamic State's methods of recruitment with that of pedophiles.[27] He cites two strategies – predatory and structural – based on which all other decisions, including enlistment, indoctrination intensity, and future tasks are determined. In the case of the Islamic State, recruiters often employ an extra-familial grooming process over an extended period of time, which involves coercive and manipulative actions that isolate boys from their family.[28] While in some cases children were forcibly abducted from their homes, in others, they were targeted according to their level of vulnerability. For example, children living in single-family households, experiencing domestic abuse or neglect, or those who have less adult supervision were all targeted.[29] Similarly, orphans and children living in refugee camps were also targets for ISIS recruitment.[30] This method was easier due to the Islamic State's ability to operate with impunity in territories it controlled and the resulting levels of access they had to child recruits.[31]

While much of the existing literature generally agrees that in many situations, it is impossible for children to remain unaffiliated with armed conflict, there are a variety of factors that motivate their decision to join, even if it is not wholly

voluntary.[32] Some of these appear relatively mundane, such as physical and food security. In fact, class is often an important determinant when it comes to child soldier recruitment. Wealthy parents can send their children away from areas of conflict, while poorer families are more vulnerable – in a multitude of ways.[33] This also explains why financial and economic benefits can incentivize children to join.[34] Other children join armed rebel groups to enact revenge on enemy forces for lost parents or destruction of their homes.[35] Relatedly, children frequently find a surrogate family relationship in the armed group. In the unstable setting of armed conflict, "the collapse of the state and the demise of traditional family coping structures have left a gaping social void."[36] It is easily filled by military forces. In certain cases, children enjoy the freedom and empowerment of being in an armed group. This image of military life could also be shaped by cultural factors wherein boys are raised to revere the "glamour and prestige of a military uniform."[37] Finally, it is impossible to ignore the fact that many child soldiers are kidnapped and abducted from their homes and forced to join the armed group.[38] In the case of the Islamic State, children who refuse to join are beaten, tortured, and raped.[39]

General Tasks and Roles of Child Soldiers

Unsurprisingly, the work and tasks of child soldiers vary considerably. Generally, they can be combatants, laborers, spies, cooks, or sex slaves, among other roles. In some settings, boys are used as executioners and are forced to kill members of their families and village members.[40] This binds them to the armed group and prevents them from being able to return home. Young girls are frequently treated as sex slaves and are married off to commanders.[41]

In the case of the Islamic State specifically, some research suggests that recruited children are typically divided into four groups: locals (Syrians and Iraqis), Middle Eastern and North Africans (MENA), foreigners, and orphans.[42] Children of MENA and foreign fighters are separated from the two other groups for them to be taught Arabic.[43] All boys undergo approximately a month of combat training, wherein they are brutalized and manipulated. Aside from this, the Islamic State also runs a number of specialized camps, such as ones that train children on manufacturing IEDs.[44] Following their training, many children begin their work as spies, and are urged to chapter on family and community members who do not oblige to ISIS' rules and practices.[45] Others are trained to spy on the enemy. The boys who are considered the least talented are often coerced or manipulated into conducting suicide attacks.[46] Like in other armed groups, young girls perform support roles and are often coerced into marrying Islamic State fighters and local commanders.[47]

Consequences of Involvement

There is broad consensus in the research literature that when children are surrounded by armed conflict and spend their formative years engaged as soldiers, it has severe and long-term effects on their health, well-being, and ability to peacefully rejoin society. As soldiers, children are exposed to extreme violence and trauma.[48] Many of them have lost family members and friends, either due to death or separation. It is common for them to have experienced beatings, torture, and sexual abuse.[49] They miss out on years of education and moral development.[50] The militaristic discipline and abusive settings that child soldiers lived in also means that many never developed healthy concepts of autonomy or control.[51] Simply, former child soldiers "had not learned how to be adults in peace time, yet they were also not prepared to return to the role of children."[52]

Existing research demonstrates the wide-ranging impacts this combination of factors can have. Many experience severe mental health issues, others are physically disabled because of the armed conflict, and some were forced to become addicted to drugs and illicit substances by their military superiors.[53] Frequently, this results in the hallmark symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Some scholars disagree with this diagnosis though, and instead argue that cultural considerations should be applied before using PTSD as a starting point for diagnoses.[54] In order to facilitate the best chances of recovery and healing, former child soldiers would ideally be able to return to a situation close to peacetime normality, but this is often impossible on several levels. After the signing of peace agreements, countries and regions are still deeply unstable. Similarly, many former child soldiers would not be welcomed by their old communities if they returned because of their actions while with the armed forces.[55]

The Islamic State's Cubs: Institutionalizing Extremism

> "Raising Mujahid Children. This is the most important role women can play in Jihad – raise their children to be brave and loving, courageous and sensitive, and fearing none other than Allah. Raise them as such not only in spirit, but also in terms of physical ability and training. And raise not only sons as such, but daughters as well. The key is to start instilling these values in them while they are babies. Don't wait until they are seven to start, for it may be too late by then."[56]

Boys and male youth have featured centrally in the Islamic State's caliphate narrative and actions. Considered a cornerstone of the present and the future, cubs were exploited and promoted to make the caliphate more terrifying and resilient.

Arguably, following the argument of Benotman and Malik, their central role as poster boys and perpetrators of violence was in fact *because* they were children.[57] While the Islamic State's zenith only lasted a limited number of years, from 2014 to 2017 – in some places until 2019 – the group succeeded in its strategy to integrate children into its structure and practices through pre-defined roles of exploitation that would see them grow up to become essential parts of the state project. While the previous part looked more generally at children in conflict, this part moves the focus more to conditions and roles of boys and male youth within the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Boys and male youth in the ranks of the Islamic State can be divided into three categories: (1) children of local Islamic State members, (2) children of foreign fighters travelling to join the Islamic State, and (3) local children from families opposed to the Islamic State who ending up joining the group. The following sections look at selected key features of the Islamic State's institutional efforts aimed at boys and male youth and, when possible, discuss the importance of the distinctive categories identified above. These include recruitment, schooling, military training, socialization and indoctrination, and propaganda. This examination sheds light on how comprehensive and strategic the group's efforts to indoctrinate and radicalize boys and male youth were and lays the ground for the ensuing discussion of their agency. As will become evident, all these elements feature and overlap in the Islamic State's efforts to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize children within and outside their territorial control.

Recruitment

Building a state for the future, the Islamic State from the outset realized that a necessary component of its state building project involved integrating children and preparing them for a number of roles within the caliphate. For that to happen, *recruitment* of children became a focal point for the group in its activities. In terms of child recruitment, the Islamic State enjoyed several privileges. Because a large number of local and foreign families joined the group, the group had easy access to a massive pool of children whose parents not only supported the group and its ideology, but also the idea that their children should follow in their footsteps. Children of local members and migrating foreign fighters were immediately integrated into the Islamic State's formal and informal structure including its school system, military training, dawa activities[58], and media production. Additionally, as the sole formal authority the Islamic State had exclusive control to define legislation, set up institutions, and manage the media, which provided it with enormous hard and soft power to manipulate children and youth.

The discussion on membership of the Islamic State, including in the context of children, typically distinguishes between *voluntary* and *involuntary* membership.[59] While this issue relates to a more general discussion on agency that we come back to in the end of this chapter, there is an argument to be made that the Islamic State's child recruitment was mainly involuntary, yet through mechanisms that might conceal joining as voluntary. This is obvious in the context of Islamic State member families, yet is more obscure in terms of local children from non-Islamic State member families.

Highlighting the Islamic State's holistic approach to recruitment, the group has attempted to recruit entire families to enable synergies and to strengthen the socialization process, playing especially on the mother-child relationship. Zeiger et al. report how the Islamic State "distributed books clearly instructing mothers on ways to bring up their children, encouraging them to recite bedtime stories on topics such as martyrdom and other stories that underlined and highlighted ISIS values."[60]

Schools were, as the following section explains in further detail, an important venue for recruitment, indoctrination, and socialization. One interviewee in Raqqa explains how the Islamic State employed a particular technique that proved effective to recruit children of non-Islamic State members. Mobile media points would visit the schools screening violent, yet appealing, Islamic State videos and play the group's a cappella (*anashid*) songs through the loudspeakers directed mainly at male students. Besides conveying the ideology of the Islamic State, the various propaganda products promoted the social bonds and camaraderie and the military adventure that came with joining. This proved an effective method to intrigue substantial numbers among especially the male youth to feel attracted to the group and eventually subscribe to its ideology.[61] Parents have also narrated how children felt attracted to join the Islamic State after exposure to propaganda videos as part of formal and informal education, for instance in the mosques where videos were regularly screened.[62]

Another recruitment activity was through its public outreach engagement which, among other things, featured events focusing on children. Typically taking the character of festivity, these events involved contests and games and handing out sweets coupled with a religious *dawa* (proselytization) component.[63] At these events, the state attempted to portray itself as a caring institution, exploiting the children's interests to make it appear attractive, yet with an underlying objective to recruit and indoctrinate. During these communal outreach activities, exemplary boys who had undergone the state's religious and military training would feature and speak in a show of symbolism that children among the audience could take example from and aspire to become.

The group has also relied on more coercive methods including kidnapping and forced recruitment targeting Muslim communities and religious and ethnic minorities alike. While girls were typically enslaved or forced into marriage, boys were enlisted at the military camps where, in addition to military training, they went through an indoctrination process. Whereas the Islamic State viewed the parents as unbelievers (*kuffar*), they considered the children as easy prey that through its institutional socialization and indoctrination would align with the organization's theology and political objectives.[64]

Schooling

The Islamic State's education system has arguably been its most effective tool to recruit, radicalize, and indoctrinate children and youth within its territorial domain. Immediately after taking control of territory in Iraq and Syria, the group began to reform the education sector, but with the primary objective not being to educate children in any conventional sense but to "produce resolute and unwavering soldiers of the caliphate" and instill a "self-reproducing system."[65] Morris and Dunning argue that its aim was "to incentivize and emotionally justify violence by children, commonly through fostering sentiments of heroism and in-group superiority,"[66] but in fact the objective was even broader with the aim "to instill its norms, values, and 'system of meaning' in children."[67] While precise data is hard to come by, boys had a much higher enrolment rate than girls, likely because their socialization into Islamic State ideology and its *system of meaning* and their going through military training as part of the school system was considered more decisive. This was particularly the case in the Syrian provinces of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zour and reportedly less so in Iraqi-controlled provinces.[68] A rough estimate is that approximately 150,000 children attended schools administrated by the Islamic State between 2014 and 2017.[69]

The Islamic State started to control territory in the Levant from early 2014, yet it was not before the announcement of the caliphate in late June 2014 that it embarked on implementing a comprehensive school system for all children within the borders of the caliphate. This process began with the formation of the Ministry of Education and Teaching (*Diwan al-Tarbiyya wa al-Ta`lim*) in July followed by the drafting of an entire textual corpus by the so-called Curriculum Office (*Mudiriyyat al-Manahij*) comprising as many as 400 officials over a nine-months period, essentially forming the caliphate's new school curricula.[70] The first textbooks were released in October 2015 and focused on teaching for grades 1-5.[71]

Prior to the capture of cities like Raqqa and Mosul, a large number of the provinces' urban school facilities had been bombed since Islamic State fighters used them as bases and camps. While this left a weak educational infrastructure for the newly created caliphate to exploit and in places like Raqqa and Deir ez-Zour, the group never prioritized to invest in and rebuild schools.[72]

According to official Islamic State policy, the school system was divided into three sections with primary school starting at the age of six and lasting five years, followed by secondary school lasting for two years, and ending with high school lasting for another two years.[73] As a girl, you could only go to school between the age of six and 11. Besides disposing a number of courses such as arts, sports, and philosophy, the most revolutionary element of the Islamic State's schooling reform was the adoption of an entirely new Islamic State produced textbook corpus. The scope of the task meant that the new textbooks were only ready for the start of the school year in 2015. Unsurprisingly, the two most important classes in the primary school were creed (*aqida*) and Qur'anic studies. To ensure that teachers taught the proper creed and Qur'anic interpretation (ijtihad) as dictated by the Islamic State, the group forced teachers to undergo a two-month training.[74] Both male and female teachers were expected to attend a shari'ah session,[75] with reports of the Islamic State killing teachers not following the curriculum.[76] Besides its own narrow interpretation of Islam, no other religious education was allowed. In a video issued by Amaq News Agency on March 10, 2016, the Ministry of Education burned a large pile of "Christian instruction books" in an act of resistance against the regime.

It has been reported that the Islamic State made it mandatory for children to attend its school, but interviewees tell another story, saying that the decision was left to people themselves.[77] Based on interviews with some of the women in detention camps in northeastern Syria, they often kept their children at home out of fear of drone strikes and other attacks. Over time, however, and after realizing the true content of the Islamic State's educational reform, a large number of families opposed to the group decided to take their children out of school and, in some instances, send them to regime-controlled territory to continue their education.[78] In the latter cases, when this was detected the Islamic State called on students to repent and subjected them to two-weeks shari'i sessions.[79] This aligns with other reporting that many classrooms were eventually left empty.[80]

Military Training

For children coming from Islamic State families or those who decided to join the group, military training became a natural extension of, and in some cases replacement for, education in the schools. A testament to how the Islamic State

viewed children and the contemporary and future roles within the caliphate, boys were expected to also take on militant roles if not immediately then at least in the future as they grow up.

Defining for the group's perverted view of children and childhood, the Islamic State considers boys and male youth as agents of violence partly as a contribution to its insurgency and as a mechanism of desensitization to violence. Similar to the schooling system, between 2014 and 2017 the Islamic State introduced a relatively formal system for military training under the administration of *Idarat al-Mu'askarat*, that likely was part of the *Diwan al-Jund* (Department of Soldiers),[81] in addition to the physical training and combat exercises that were part of the school curriculum. The precise procedure for receiving military training appears to have differed depending on the location and time and also the extent to which it complemented or replaced schooling.

In families where parents were part of the Islamic State, boys would typically replace school with military training around the age of twelve to thirteen, where they would live and train in a *muaskar* (military training camp).[82] One example is al-Farouq Institute for Cubs in the city of Raqqa, which the Islamic State detailed in a February 2015 video.[83] Here boys as young as eight-years-old were trained in various military techniques, including gruesome tactics such as beheadings and assassination.[84] The Islamic State also abducted boys from schools, sending them to undergo military training. According to UNAMI and OHCHR, in 2015 the group abducted as many as 900 boys between the age of nine and fifteen from Mosul and forced them to go through religious and military training.[85]

The military camps were considered a transition from boyhood to adulthood despite the children's young age. Not only did they learn military skills and were taught to become agents of violence, but they also left home for extended periods of time to immerse in the training and the ideological indoctrination. This was also the case for non-Sunni boys and male youth who were occasionally kidnapped and forced to undergo even more intense indoctrination schemes. As Zeiger et al. report, the Islamic State's approach to Yazidi boys and male youth between the age of eight and fourteen was to separate them from their families, move them to different parts of Islamic State controlled territory, and force them to undergo military and ideological training.[86] That way the group managed to isolate the boys in an environment conducive to extreme manipulation and socialization. Whereas for some the training at the camps provided them with basic military skills useful for a future as an infantry for the Islamic State, others were selected for specialized training preparing them for special roles including snipers, suicide operations, and special operations.

For parents being members of the Islamic State, the decision to send their boys to a military camp followed naturally from their own support to the group ideology and its militant activities. In addition, they had an economic incentive to let their boys join the military since these implied higher monthly payments from the 'state'.[87] Yet it was not exclusively boys from Islamic State families that took part in the military training of cubs. Boys and male youth, including orphans, who were either recruited or enslaved also underwent training.[88]

Socialization and Indoctrination

In addition to its educational system and military training, the Islamic State promoted and developed several mechanisms to socialize and indoctrinate boys and male youth living under its rule with extensive focus on adaptation to its religious creed and desensitization to violence. These efforts were part of a process to reengineer their mentality, effectively changing their norms and their perception of reality.

As Vale shows, the Islamic State encouraged boys and male youth to follow in the footstep of their fathers or important male relatives who, functioning as instructive role models, guided their own trajectory through violence and radicalization. For boys whose parents or extended family had joined the Islamic State, this was an effective strategy as it involved some degree of automation. Not only was family symbolizing a role model, but they were also often performing as teachers, or instructors, enabling boys and male youth's introduction to extreme violence. These actions, she writes, are "symbolizing a rite of passage into manhood and militancy."[89]

As the quotation above illustrates, the group and its supporters understood the importance of influencing children at an early age. Besides the formal school system and military training, a number of digital applications were developed targeting children. Arguably the most well-known is the *al-Huroof* (alphabet) application helping children to learn the Arabic alphabet and vocabulary. The app teaches letters and words through militant and extremist concepts and references such as *sayf* (sword) to learn the letter 's' or *midfa'* (cannon) to learn the letter 'm'. Highlighting an understanding for adapting to children's mindset and preferences, supporters in the Islamic State ecosystem (known as *munasirun*) also developed smartphone games playing on references to well-known Western action figures such as Captain America. While violence is not an unusual feature of children's games, the striking thing about the games the Islamic State developed is that they take place in an Islamic State inspired universe promoting the group's unique worldview and ideology.

Another mechanism was through exposure. Vale writes that "By infiltrating private and public spaces to broadcast its images and messages, IS seeks to 're-program' children to disregard normal behaviors, judgements, ethics and values, and instead adopt those that will equip minors to become brutal fighters themselves."[90] One interviewee residing in Raqqa explains that it was common for parents to bring their children to witness public acts of violence such as hudud[91] punishments, including public beheadings that regularly took place at Raqqa's al-Naim square. Although the children might not sympathize with the Islamic State's ideology, witnessing such explicit brutal acts of violence normalized their view of violence, even its extreme expressions, as a method to handle social and political conflicts.[92]

Establishing a strong degree of in-group loyalty, especially among children and youth, is key for the Islamic State to ensure its future existence. Time and again in Islamic State propaganda, this has been identified as a central task for mothers to form children's identity and prepare them to become militants.[93] While such degree of loyalty through indoctrination and socialization might seem straightforward in families where parents are members of the Islamic State, it is more challenging dealing with children whose families oppose the group. Yet, interviewees shared accounts of children, whose parents opposed the Islamic State, who ended up reporting on their own families.[94]

Objects of Propaganda

For the Islamic State, the reliance on children as agents of violence was not sufficient. They had to show it to the outside world in order to prove how comprehensive its state-building project in fact was and as a symbol to instill fear. The Islamic State's focus on and employment of children in its propaganda can be divided into two overlapping periods. The first mainly covers the years of territorial expansion and state creation from 2013 to 2015 and utilizes children and youth to promote the narrative of a prosperous, well-functioning, state. The second, beginning in 2015 and lasting until the present day, focuses on boys as agents of war and perpetrators of violence.

In June 2015, the Islamic State for the first time issued a propaganda video showing a boy beheading a captive.[95] Six months prior, in January, a boy featured for the first time in the role of executioner and in January 2016, the group escalated its use of young boys in its propaganda with the just four-year-old Isa Dare, labelled the *Junior Jihadi*, detonating an IED, allegedly killing four.[96]

The employment of boys for military purposes and to strike fear in its propaganda escalated over the years with children featuring ever more frequently and in new

roles. One interviewee recalled the story of a 10-years-old boy who was convinced to cut the head of a captive to be used in a propaganda video after Islamic State fighters had told him that the captive was responsible for killing the boy's brother.[97] A series of videos from 2015 highlight the transition from the first to the second phase. Titled "Cubs of the Caliphate" and issued by the Islamic State's media offices in Raqqa and Diljah provinces, they show boys as institutionalized agents attending school classes and receiving ideological education, followed by their military training and dressed in military fatigues.[98] In July, the same year, the group shared a terrifying video from the world-renowned amphitheater in Palmyra showing 25 male youth executing Syrian soldiers taken captive.[99]

Following this trend, a number of videos portraying children and youth as perpetrators of violence were published over the coming years.[100] In August 2016, a video showed five youth killing Kurdish prisoners execution style.[101] The following year, a ten-year-old American boy, Yusuf, was seen in the propaganda film *Fertile Nation* where he threatened the U.S. President saying "My message to Trump, the puppet of the Jews: Allah has promised us victory and He has promised you defeat. This battle is not ever going to end in Raqqah or Mosul, it's going to end in your lands. By the will of Allah, we will have victory, so get ready, for the fighting has just begun."[102] If possible, an even more brutal vide as issued by the Islamic State supporter network *Hadm al-Aswar* in March 2021 titled "The Terrifying Generation" that showed showing a male youth beheading a captive in front of two small boys who had been instructed to encourage the assassination.[103]

This emphasis on the youth is reproduced in other geographical areas outside of the Levant. On January 18, 2022, the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP) published a propaganda video titled "The Empowerment Generation" (*jil al-tamkin*) that showed a large group of male youth doing military and physical training and receiving religious education.

This type of propaganda material serves several purposes. For the external audience, its aim is to cement the terrifying nature of the Islamic State to the outside world by employing innocent boys and male youth as dangerous perpetrators fighting based on their support to the group's ideology. For an internal audience, the propaganda serves as a driver of recruitment highlighting how boys and male youth can obtain agency and play important roles in the caliphate's jihad rather than act as passive subjects.

Besides the violence, boys and male youth feature as central actors in the Islamic State's visualizations of its public outreach activities. As part of the *dawa* convoys, they are showcased as happy and pious youth that are experiencing a joyful childhood in the caliphate.[104] This is intended to show a soft side to the role

as perpetrators of violence and speak to the idea of peaceful life dedicated to immersing oneself in the religion.

Children in the Camps in Northern Syria

From 2017, and more intensively since 2019, the detention camps in northeastern Syria have become central in defining the situation for a large number of boys and male youth associated one way or another with the Islamic State. Al-Hol and al-Roj, the two largest camps in the region, together hold around 56,000 individuals which includes as many as 37,0000 foreigners. What is particularly worrying is that over half of the camps' population are children, with another 850 boys held in prisons in the region. With abysmal conditions and little jurisdiction defining life in the camps, children and youth are at risk and it is regularly being reported that a child has died or been killed.[105] Children, especially girls, are also at risk of sexual violence.[106]

With a large number of children currently remaining in camps, the Islamic State is reported to be actively attempting to recruit among the boys and male youth either through its supporters in the camps or by smuggling them out to indoctrinate and train them. Because children in the camps are particularly vulnerable as a result of their social, mental, security, and health conditions, they should be considered at serious risk for recruitment.[107]

Despite the loss of territorial control and the de facto end of its governance structure, including its formal education system, the educational indoctrination has continued in the camps, where some mothers are seen arranging informal courses for the children to keep them in the radicalization loop.[108] The continued lack of a formal education system is only making the situation worse since there is a real risk that other children find such informal education appealing because it might resonate with their lived experience.[109]

The militarization of boys is also continuing within the camps. In addition to ideological education, mothers are teaching their children, both boys and girls, courses in military training in their captivity, and also teaching their children that the Kurdish guards at the camp were the ones who killed or detained their fathers.[110] Media reports also note that the Islamic State is actively attempting to smuggle out boys from the camps to provide them with military training in preparation for conducting terrorist attacks.[111]

Testament to their dedication to Islamic State ideology and the group's survival, it has been reported how incarcerated women in the camps in northeastern Syria are coercing male youth to impregnate them. This exploitation is done to ensure

a continued stream of children growing up and being indoctrinated as a form of investment in future human resources. While boys and male youth, already from the age of ten to twelve, are typically relocated from the camps and moved to prisons, there have been reports that Islamic State sympathetic women are forcing them to wear niqab as a trick to hide their identity.[112]

Conclusion

In the contemporary context with a large number of children and youth imprisoned in camps across Syria and Iraq awaiting repatriation or prosecution, there is considerable debate on their experience in the caliphate and what potential threat they might pose. Having examined the roles and involvement of boys and male youth in the Islamic State, this chapter contributed to this debate through a discussion on children's agency in joining the Islamic State and carry out activities on the group's behalf.

In the literature on child-soldiers, the debate on agency ranges from the caretaker position viewing children "as lacking appropriate agency to engage in political violence" and the free-ranger position that considers children as "capable of rational, politically informed self-understanding, and thus possess agency which can be used to justify engagement in violence."[113] While the former position emphasizes armed groups' 'exploitation and abuse' of children, the latter stresses children's 'informed decision-making' and the importance of context.

During the zenith of the caliphate in the Levant from 2014 to 2017, the Islamic State employed boys and girls in a variety of roles: preparing them to become future fighters, as role models, executioners, sex slaves, and objects of propaganda. In doing so, the Islamic State changed the conventional structure of childhood by enforcing a system defining clear, but limited, subject positions that turn children into victims and involuntary perpetrators.

In addition to any potential future "threat" these children might post, we would be remiss to not discuss the very real struggles these children experienced under the Islamic State and after. With the fall of Baghouz, women and children were transported to a series of open-air camps in north-eastern Syria with al-Roj and al-Hol being the most prominent. Life in these camps can only be described as an emergency situation. What is most shocking about al-Hol is the number of children one sees when visiting the camp. Around 34,000 (56 percent) of the camp's residents are under the age of seventeen, with 30 percent of them being between the ages of five and eleven.

All of these children have experienced a host of challenges while living under the Islamic State as well as after entering the camps: from interrupted education, to

witnessing the death of a parent or sibling; early exposure to violence (including executions, drone strikes, and beheadings); as well as repeated displacement. UNICEF and Save the Children have repeatedly called for restorative justice, repatriation, and mental health support for these children to little avail.[114] Many of these children have been through immense trauma and continue to undergo many challenges. The only way to ensure a return to normalcy in their lives is through proper psychosocial and community support.

[1] Authors' interview with interviewee A and B; Authors' discussion with Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi.

[2] Gina Vale, "You are no longer cubs, you are now lions": examining the constructed masculinities of Islamic State child executioners and their victims", *Critical Studies on Terrorism,* 15:4, (2022) 827.

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4

The Agency and Roles of Foreign Women in Islamic State

Devorah Margolin and Joana Cook

The foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) phenomenon discussed today began with the flow of an estimated 53,000 individuals from 80 countries who traveled to join jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, including the Islamic State (known as IS, ISIL, ISIS or Daesh).[1] These individuals left their home countries to travel to support jihad for a variety of reasons, and often with varying levels of agency and roles in relation to Islamic State.

While much of the research on the FTF phenomenon has focused on adult men, a 2019 report estimated that women and minors made up 36 to 42 percent of those who traveled to join Islamic State from Western Europe, 46 to 54 percent of travelers from Eastern Europe, and an estimated 27 to 39 percent of U.S. travelers.[2] This project highlighted that foreign travelers to Syria and Iraq were men, women, and minors, illuminating an often under-examined aspect of the FTF phenomenon - the diversity of roles and actors that joined and how these contributed to the goals and aims of IS. Moreover, this research accounted for an increasing number of minors who were born in the conflict zone or in detention to at least one foreign parent. For Islamic State, the group that the majority of these individuals traveled to be a part of, the creation of its so-called caliphate was a vital part in its recruitment strategies aimed at families, and the central role they saw men, women, and minors play in their state building ambitions.

The language used to discuss this flow of individuals also has had gendered policy implications. In fact, the term FTF insinuates that all of these individuals were not only associated with a designated foreign terrorist organization, but were also engaged in fighting.[3] For those who study jihadist groups and their ideology, it is clear that this in turn emphasizes adult men, and their contributions to these

violent extremist groups. To solely focus on men and men's contributions, however, would be a misunderstanding of what these jihadist groups are seeking to achieve and an underrepresentation of women's (and children's) contributions to these movements. Moreover, once in-theater, the agency that was once present for many adults in the decision to travel was sometimes removed or limited due to a number of circumstances. This was often further compounded by age and gender-based factors.

Gender-based biases have led to the difficulty in understanding women's experiences under Islamic State and in prosecuting women for their roles associated with the atrocities of the group.[4] While countries like the U.S. have advocated for the repatriation of foreign Islamic State-affiliated women, European governments have often been reluctant and highlighted the difficulties related to women's prosecutions.[5] Despite these limitations, 2022 saw an increase in repatriations from countries long resistant to doing so (including France and Australia) and also saw several successful cases prosecuted. For example, a Swedish court sentenced Lina Ishaq to six years for crimes associated with Islamic State, a move applauded by UNITAD.[6] Moreover, high-profile U.S. cases, including that of Allison Fluke-Ekren, also set important precedents.[7] Canada also saw two women return in 2022, one of whom faced four criminal charges, including participating in a terrorist group, leaving Canada to do so, and making property or services available for terrorist purposes.[8] When looking at the repatriation of adults, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of the cases being repatriated - and thus prosecuted - are adult women.[9] This imbalance in accountability stands out when exploring Islamic State's gendered system of control, which often relegate women to auxiliary roles.

While every country is bound by their own legal system and definitions of terrorism, terrorist organization, and terrorism-related offenses, primary source documents coupled with personal testimonies and international investigations have been a vital part of these efforts to ensure that the inner workings of Islamic State are known and Islamic State-associated individuals are held accountable. Moreover, recent efforts have turned to the use of international law to aid in the prosecution of these individuals. German courts have now convicted three Islamic State members of genocide for their crimes against the Yazidis, the second two of which have been brought against women.[10] In 2022, German courts convicted a woman, only identified as Jalda A., of aiding and abetting genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes for her role in the Islamic State, and enslavement and abuse of a young Yazidi woman.[11] Germany delivered its third genocide conviction against an Islamic State member to Nadine K. in June 2023.[12] To date, German courts have also convicted five Islamic State-affiliated individuals, all women, of crimes against humanity and war crimes.[13]

To aid in these pursuits of accountability, this chapter responds to the question, "What was the agency and roles of foreign women in Islamic State?" In doing so, we hope to better define the diverse roles foreign women held in different parts of Islamic State's so-called caliphate.[14] This will be done in a methodical manner that reflects both Islamic State's ideology and its day-to-day governance. To answer this question, we examine foreign women who Islamic State considered to be part of the "in-group," i.e., women who actively joined the group traveling from their countries of origin to Syria and Iraq. This chapter will also discuss the experiences of local Syrian and Iraqi women in cases where they interacted with foreign Islamic State-affiliated women. This will be done in order to highlight the overarching day-to-day life of in-group foreign women under Islamic State. In doing so, we hope to present a nuanced understanding of foreign Islamic State-affiliated women's experiences, better shaping prosecutions and reintegration policy aimed at these individuals.

Methodology

This report is based on research conducted by the authors since 2013 in relation to this topic. This research is drawn from academic, open-source reports, primary source documents, interviews, and five trips to Iraq between 2018 and 2022 - one specifically focused on this report. The following has provided extensive examples and sources to support the statements made and opinion provided. All views are our own and do not represent the views of our past or current employers. It is written in our personal capacity alone.

This chapter will triangulate the information around the roles and agency of foreign Islamic State-affiliated women from multiple sources. After addressing the academic and gray literature from rebel governance and terrorism studies, this will include:

- Islamic State primary source documents, including files held by George Washington University, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, and private collections, including jihadism archivist Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi.
- Court cases of female Islamic State members in select countries, including the United States, the Netherlands, and Germany.
- Fieldwork and interviews in Iraq with two main groups. First, men and women from Islamic State-affiliated families and second, with practitioners who work on the issue of Islamic State's role in Iraq, rehabilitation, and reintegration.[15]

This project draws these sources together and provides a detailed discussion and analysis of the implications and considerations from these findings. This chapter is a starting point for those engaging on the topic. This chapter seeks to present information vital to a nuanced understanding of women's roles and agency under Islamic State and the diversity of their experiences.

This chapter is made up of five sections. Following the introduction, Section I considers key information to better understand women's roles, who joined the group from abroad, and their motivations to do so, and why looking at this issue via a gender lens is important. Section II addresses the background on women in jihad, and Islamic State's ideological conceptualization of women's roles. Section III looks at the various roles women played under Islamic State between 2013 and 2019. This explores the different institutions women contributed to, as well as women's roles in both public and private life. This utilizes internal Islamic State documents, interviews and field work carried out by the authors, academic and gray literature, as well as court cases documenting women's cases. This focuses on an examination of what other external factors may have impacted women's agency - specifically the ability to make a decision and transform that choice into an action. Section IV addresses detention and life for women after the fall of the Islamic State's caliphate. Finally, Section V presents the conclusion.

Understanding Women's Roles and Why They Joined Islamic State

It is important to first highlight several caveats to be clear about what Islamic State is and how it has evolved. Islamic State has been a terrorist organization which engaged in guerilla tactics, a political and state-building project,[16] and even a social movement.[17] At times it even reflected a conventional army,[18] though since its territorial defeat in January 2019, it has reverted to an insurgency within Iraq and Syria.[19] Islamic State has been a constantly evolving, multi-faceted entity.

Under its so-called 'caliphate' Islamic State held and administered territory in Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2019. Based on the pronouncement of Islamic State as a group in 2013 by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the declaration of the 'caliphate' in 2014, this report largely focuses on the period between 2013 and 2019 when those who traveled to Iraq and Syria were more likely to have gone with an intent to join this specific group.

Islamic State and its 'caliphate' evolved significantly throughout this time and as such the shape and scope of it as an organization, the activities it and its individual members engaged in, and the persons drawn to it, have also evolved along the way.[20] For example, in 2014 al-Baghdadi, the leader of Islamic State, announced

it was establishing a caliphate; in Islamic State propaganda the 'caliphate' was presented as an obligation for Muslims to travel to, and as an ideal Islamic state to live in.[21] In this period, there was a sharp increase in foreigners, including women and whole families, who traveled to Syria and Iraq for the purpose of living in and supporting this 'caliphate', even as news reports increasingly reported on the atrocities being committed by Islamic State and its members. Those who traveled later, particularly after the atrocities were well documented, and Islamic State had conducted several international terror attacks, may have been more likely to join with the intent to take up violent or defensive roles within the organization.[22] This suggests that those drawn to the organization in different periods were highly diverse, had distinct motivations, and may have also held different roles in relation to the organization at different points in time.

It is further important to note the distinctions between foreign women and local Syrian and Iraqi women when discussing roles within the organization, particularly in terms of motivations and intent. Foreign women were more likely to travel to Syria and Iraq with the aim to take up (at least) one of the roles described below. For local women, this is more complex with a higher likelihood that they may have been coerced or otherwise forced to take up some role within the group, or simply to live as 'citizens' under the governance implemented by Islamic State as it took over increasing amounts of territory (otherwise referenced as 'coerced civilians').[23] Some local women may have also joined the group as a survival or protection mechanism in this period or to attain power or influence. While local Syrian and Iraqi women are not the focus of this chapter, it is a vital distinction that must be made.

Women and Agency

Conversations on women's participation in Islamic State often center on women's agency. Agency in this chapter is understood as a "thing or person that acts to produce a particular result."[24] Specifically, women and their ability to make a decision and transform that choice into a desired outcome. For the women who joined Islamic State from abroad, the question of agency is rarely black or white. Women's agency in the public sphere is bound to the situation and state in which she lives, often under the umbrella of patriarchal governments and organizations. In the private sphere, women's agency can be affected by the men in her family and home. Thus, women's agency to travel and join Islamic State was often tied to their age, family status, and country of origin. For example, a single adult woman from the U.S. would have a different level of agency in her decision to travel compared to a teenage girl from Russia or even a married woman from Morocco.

Moreover, once in theater, the agency that was once in place to make the decision to travel could be removed or tied to the new social structure women were now in - specifically Islamic State's gendered system of control that severely limited women's freedom of movement. This will be explored further below.

Thus, it is important that the case of each woman be fully assessed on an individual basis. Thousands of foreign women from around the world traveled to join Islamic State.[25] This is still believed to be a significant underestimation of the number of women who traveled and is due to the lack of data available from many countries around the world. More recent evidence has highlighted that many youths, particularly young teenage girls, were also trafficked by Islamic State into, or within, Syria.[26]

Women were also less likely to return to their home countries of their own volition in the 2013-2019 period, due to the numerous restraints limiting their freedom of movement under Islamic State. As the remaining population of women currently detained in Iraq and Syria (under Syrian Democratic Forces - SDF - custody) demonstrate, a notable number of those who traveled to Iraq and Syria remained there until the end of Islamic State as an entity which held territory. For some women, this was a choice as they were highly invested in the group and its ideology. For others, they were unable to leave, often due to reasons such as the difficulty of traveling as a woman without a male guardian, with children in a conflict zone, or coercive partners. Some women have now spent several years in the region (if they departed in 2014 after Islamic State declared its 'caliphate', though many arrived prior to this) and have since had multiple children and spouses in this period.[27] Furthermore, their status within the organization or the roles they may have taken have also evolved over this period.

Who Joined, and why?

Women from around the world joined Islamic State and local interviews with women in Iraq who lived near Mosul during Islamic State reign confirmed knowledge of travelers from France, the United States , Britain, the MENA region, Turkey, Japan, China, and others.[28] Some of these individuals were born to Muslim families, while others were converts.[29] Some of these women traveled alone, while others traveled with foreign family members. Islamic State ideology prioritized marriage and motherhood, so once in-theater, those who arrived without husbands were often quickly married off. Moreover, over time if a woman's husband were killed in battle, they were required or pressured by the group to remarry. Marriage of unwed women served a dual purpose for the group,

as they wanted supporters to quickly marry and procreate - creating more future members, as well as to remove the burden of responsibility for these women from the group and onto supporters.[30] One interviewee discussed an American woman she knew whose American husband died, and she went on to marry an Iraqi national.[31] Interviewees noted that in some cases foreign women were married to foreign men, and in some cases were married to local men. This is a crucial point where complexities around nationalities of children became significantly impacted, specifically the issuance of legally recognized documentation.

Often, women each had a unique motivation and pathway to join the group, intent on arriving in Iraq and Syria, and experience over the period of time they were in the conflict zone and may have held multiple roles throughout the duration of their time there. For example, they may have been taken as a young female child, and subsequently become a bride, mother, and even a widow before their 18th birthday. Some women were ideologically committed to the organization and intended to (and did) support Islamic State with whatever means were available to them, while others appeared to be more passive, coerced, or simply appeared to follow their families (largely male heads of household) to Iraq and Syria. Some understood the brutality and violence carried out by the group and sought to join and support Islamic State regardless, even participating in the violence. Others may have perceived a religiously correct 'Islamic State' where they could fulfill what they perceived to be their religious obligations to live under the 'purest' form of *sharia* law (Islamic jurisprudence). They may have thus sought a shared community, or to practice their faith free from restraint as some had felt they experienced in their home nations.

Others may have observed the violence and hypocrisy of the group upon arrival and immediately regretted their decision to travel and attempted to avoid any participation in, or relationship with, the group. Some initially arrived not as highly radicalized individuals, though the experience of living in a conflict zone, being exposed to Islamic State violence, and the loss of loved ones including spouses and children may have changed their perception and participation in diverse ways over time. Cook and Vale generally identified several push and pull factors to describe women's motivations to travel which additionally included "feelings of discrimination, persecution or those of not belonging to their society, seeking independence, and grievances related to foreign policy." Pull factors included "efforts by IS to portray women's empowerment in IS, fulfillment of a perceived 'obligation' to make hijra (migration) and live under strict Islamic jurisprudence and governance, supporting IS' state-building project, seeking adventure, seeking a husband, or traveling to join one already in theater, traveling with family (whether willingly or not), and even seeking free healthcare or education."[32]

Each woman must therefore be assessed on their individual experiences and trajectory to determine the level of agency and involvement they had in their potentially diverse roles related to the organization over this extended period of time. The possibility of mental, sexual, or physical abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and diverse coercive means such as threats and intimidation of some women who became affiliated with Islamic State should also be assessed. As such, when discussing the roles of women, this report references roles that very different women were recorded to take throughout this period. However, at no time should it be assumed that all women took on all of these roles. The diverse roles held by each woman, and the level of agency and involvement of each, must be assessed on an individual basis.

Why Gender Matters in Assessing Women's Roles

Misconceptions surrounding gender continue to plague our understanding of women's participation in violent extremism and terrorism. These may include ideas that women were coerced or forced into a movement, that they play minimal or no roles within these groups, or indeed that they were largely fighters, or conversely largely victims. While these points may be true to differing extents in each case, women's roles and agency in relation to these groups should be understood as occurring on a spectrum (from no/limited role to active role; or from no/low agency to high agency), where many of these features may exist and overlap. For example, a woman may be coerced into a movement and a victim, while also a perpetrator in her household if detaining a slave. A woman may not have picked up a gun but may have encouraged her male family members to fight, helped them prepare for conflict, or even trafficked weapons or goods to assist them. A woman may have also followed a husband and her children for fear that she may never see them again, or even willingly traveled to join the group, bringing along her own children, and then done her utmost to protect these children and exit the conflict zone. In some cases, women who took their children to the caliphate have seen convictions of charges such as neglecting her duties as a parent.[33]

These misconceptions surrounding women's participation in violent extremism are often rooted in long-standing narratives around the absence of female agency in the political sphere and the idea that women are 'pulled into' extremism because of their relationship with men, including boyfriends, husbands, sons, fathers, or brothers.[34] Academics Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry neatly summarized this as women being viewed largely as mothers (of terrorist actors), monsters (deviant characters), or whores (girlfriend or wife of terrorist actors).[35] This belief stems from deeply held cultural norms that assert that women are naturally more 'compassionate and loving' and less interested in politics and

nation-building than men.[36] However, over two decades of research on gender and extremism has shown this line of thinking to be stereotype-laden, problematic, and dangerous.[37]

This discourse surrounding women's involvement in violent extremism often remains reductive and outdated, providing a false view of why women participate in movements like Islamic State. This is often seen in the rhetoric around so-called 'Islamic State brides' often emphasized in the media and political rhetoric. This term often refers to young women (and teenage girls) who left their countries of origin to travel to Syria and Iraq; they are often viewed as "brainwashed fools that arrogantly rejected their position as 'western women' (and, therefore, as 'equals of men') supposedly with the primary goal of marrying Islamic State members and embracing a life of violence and perceived subservience."[38] While early rhetoric on 'Islamic State brides' emphasized their naïveté, more recent rhetoric has highlighted their evil and conniving nature, even in cases referring to underage girls. In both instances, the rhetoric dehumanizes these women and ignores the nuanced aspects of their participation.[39]

These gendered narratives can also affect the criminal justice system and the ability to hold women accountable. Gendered frames in court can result in more lenient sentences for women for terrorism-related offenses.[40] Often "a variety of practical and extra-legal factors weigh upon criminal justice decision-making, creating greater leniency for female than male offenders."[41] This "chivalry theory," often focuses on women as caregivers and less culpable than men. However, when women are perceived as having "committed a double offense: breaking the law and violating gender roles in society," they can be "singled out by the criminal justice system and incur stiffer sentences than men."[42] Thus, in order to not be labeled as "evil woman," female defendants and their legal representation will often emphasize women's roles as mothers and caregivers while deflecting agency and accountability for their actions.

A better comprehension of this phenomenon and the complexities within can help prosecutors and practitioners better understand the roles and agency of women in relation to these movements. Ill-informed perceptions of women's contributions to violent extremism and terrorism can have serious ramifications, including overlooking or underplaying their roles in investigations, deferential treatment in courts, insufficient intervention or rehabilitation programming, and failure to prevent future involvement in violent extremism.

What we thus emphasize in this section is that it is crucial to move past tired stereotypes of women's involvement in violent extremism. What we outline in this chapter are the myriad of complex and overlapping ways that women were involved in the group largely between 2013 and 2019, when the Islamic State

caliphate was a physical reality on the ground, and considerations about their agency during this period. We briefly consider women's roles in al-Hol camp since 2019 and outline the ongoing roles and agency they have in this closed camp environment, largely considered to be one of the most dangerous places on earth.[43]

Women in Jihad: A Background on Ideological Justifications for Women's Roles and Involvement

This section examines how the jihadist movement in general, and Islamic State specifically, ideologically conceptualizes women's roles within its movement, and women's perceived contribution to the group's governance ambitions and whole-of-society approach.

Women's participation in - and support for - Islamic State is framed in highly conservative terms, as a rejection of dominant, disempowering cultural norms that have upended the 'essential' role of women. This participation is framed around childbearing, child-rearing, and caregiving, and is positioned as an active 'choice' or fulfillment of a duty to benefit Islamic State.[44] In other words, women's roles as prescribed by the group are in traditional domestic roles.[45] To structure and facilitate this 'choice' over the course of the last decade in particular, Islamic State devised specific in-group (i.e., women within Islamic State), and out-group (i.e., women outside of Islamic State)[46] identities that sought to establish and perpetuate a good-versus-evil mentality that continually demonized those considered 'the enemy' while imbuing its political agenda with cosmic significance.[47]

Women's more traditional roles in the family are generally agreed upon by jihadist movements, while their roles in combat are often more disputed. While IS's declaration of its so-called caliphate in 2014 appeared seemingly out of thin air, the group that emerged was built on the back of over a decade's involvement in the region, most notably its incarnation as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).[48] During its iteration as AQI, the group used female suicide bombers, a notable differentiation from Al-Qaeda central's relationship with women.[49] Violent Islamist leaders have all generally agreed on women's more conservative/private roles within the group, but there has been some debate as to what women's roles should be in relation to combat; in most cases it has only been allowed 'under special defensive circumstances', for example if they were under attack.[50]

For instance, in early 2004, AQI leader Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi released a message titled "Follow the Caravan," which discussed women taking on combat roles.[51] Not an unbridled call for women to participate in jihad, rather, Zarqawi

was reminding his followers that defensive jihad is incumbent on all to fight. Such a reminder was especially pertinent considering the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. In fact, months before AQI's first female bomber conducted an attack, Zarqawi released another message titled, "Will the Religion Wane While I Live" (2005).[52] He unambiguously discussed the role of women in jihad, foreshadowing AQI's systematic use of female suicide bombers, referring to the precedent set by Umm 'Amarah, a female companion of the Prophet Muhammad and noted that there are "many *mujahidah* sisters in the Land of the Two Rivers [Iraq] who are requesting to perpetrate martyrdom-seeking operations."

Such a decision was not limited to Zarqawi alone; in April 2007, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, a successor of Zarqawi,[53] released a statement titled "The Harvest of the Years in the Land of the Monotheists."[54] Abu Omar al-Baghdadi said, "[e]ven Iraqi women were pleading for martyrdom operations, but we forbade them from what men can do unless it is in special circumstances where men are unable to. Oh, what anguish, for those whom [sic] were less brave than women."[55] This speech pinpoints the struggle faced by violent Islamist groups over the use of women in combat roles by both shaming men into action and allowing for women's participation under 'special circumstances.' While peaking in 2008,[56] at the turn of the decade, the organization seemingly stopped using female suicide bombers. Without ever issuing a formal statement, it seemed as though the operational necessity that led to women's involvement in combat began to dissipate with the slow withdrawal of U.S. military troops.

Islamic State's declaration of its so-called caliphate in 2014 was a declaration of power. In doing so, Islamic State framed its jihad as offensive, not defensive, and used its magazines *Dabiq*, and later *Rumiyah*, to consistently encourage women to return to conventional roles and be wives, mothers, and educators. For example, in *Dabiq* issue 7, there was even a dedicated section in the magazine titled "to our sisters," which encouraged women to "[b]e a base of support and safety for your husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons."[57] Yet, as the conflict against Islamic State became more intense, this early practice evolved, and so did women's roles.

August 2014 also heralded the start of the military offensive against Islamic State by coalition forces. By early 2015, an organization claiming to be the media wing of Islamic State's all-female Al-Khansaa Brigade released a manifesto articulating the ideal role of women in the caliphate as first and foremost wives, mothers, and homemakers. However, the manifesto also acknowledged several exceptions, including allowing women to work in medicine or education. It even stated that under very specific circumstances, there were cases where women could participate in combat, "if the enemy is attacking her country, the men are not enough to protect it, and the ulama (scholars) have given a fatwa (edict) for

it."[58] The document reiterated the legal authority for women to commit violence within the framework of defensive jihad, while noting that those conditions were not yet met. As the document was not published by the group's central media outlet, it cannot be said to necessarily represent the group's primary position.

Between 2015 to 2016, Islamic State released several documents which teased out women's roles in combat, while simultaneously emphasizing that women were only allowed to participate in jihad under very particular, defensive circumstances. For example, Islamic State reiterated these points in official English-language magazines *Dabiq* issue 11 (2015) and *Dabiq* issue 15 (2016),[59] in its official Arabic-language newspaper *Al-Naba* in December 2016,[60] as well as by the Zawra' Foundation, a female-focused pro-IS media agency, in 2015.[61] While not actively encouraging women to participate in combat, Islamic State has praised or spoken ambivalently about women who carried out operations.[62] Specifically, this trend speaks mostly to women who operated beyond the organization's territory and control. In February 2015, Islamic State demanded the release of Sajida al-Rishawi, a failed AQI suicide bomber who was arrested in Jordan in 2005, from a Jordanian prison in exchange for the lives of two hostages.[63] In another case, after the 2015 San Bernardino attack, Islamic State, while praising the attack and actions of Tashfeen Malik to join her husband and leave behind a child for the sake of jihad, refrained from referring to her as one of its "soldiers."[64] And finally, in 2016 when three young women attacked a police station in Kenya, its celebration was only tentative, noting these women "shoulder[ed] a duty that Allah had placed on the shoulders of the men of the Ummah."[65] Despite not wanting women to actively take up arms, Islamic State did not condemn these women for their actions. This contradiction highlights Islamic State's uneasy relationship with women and combat.

As the group began to incur significant territorial losses in 2017, including losing Mosul in July 2017, Islamic State seemingly lifted its moratorium on female combatants. In an article in its *Rumiyah* magazine, Islamic State encouraged women to "rise with courage and sacrifice in this war" and follow in the footsteps of Umm 'Amarah, a female companion of the Prophet Muhammad, taking to the battlefield "not because of the small number of men but rather, due to their love for jihad, their desire to sacrifice for the sake of Allah, and their desire for Jannah."[66] With this, came a return to AQI's call for women to take up arms and carry out suicide attacks from 2005.[67] For example, an aptly named *Al-Naba* (2017) article titled "The obligation on women to engage in jihad against the enemies."[68] This was supported by further articles in the publication encouraging women to follow in the footsteps of those before them who took up arms.[69]

In February 2018, Islamic State released an English-language video titled "Inside the Caliphate 7," purportedly showing women, covered from head to toe,

shooting guns and preparing for battle.[70] Although interpretations vary, including discussions about whether the figures in the video are actually women, this footage seemingly legitimizes women's ability to take up arms in the conflict while maintaining their modesty under the pretext of defensive jihad. This section has outlined the ideological justification for women's roles as affiliated with Islamic State, which are expanded on with practical examples later on.

Gendered System of Control

The section above has highlighted the ideological background of women and Islamic State, and its evolution as an organization. This section focuses on how the Islamic State governance project saw many more roles for women emerge that mirrored those of a contemporary state.

Islamic State's elaborate theological-legislative gendered system of control implemented in Iraq and Syria between 2014 and 2019 sought "to penetrate almost every aspect of society, regulating social relationships, extracting resources from local communities, and justifying the appropriation of material wealth and property for its own gain."[71] Through this system of control, Islamic State sought to balance ideology and pragmatism, simultaneously working to both perpetuate its doctrine and entrench its rule.

Essentially, the system was predicated on the idea that both public and private life should be governed in totality by Islamic State's version of Islam.[72] Islamic State believes that deviation from this system in recent centuries, has led to the decline of the Sunni Muslim *umma* (global community), something that can only be rectified through the violent restoration of 'Islam' and implementation of 'Islamic rule' as it once was.[73] With this world view, Islamic State created an in-group and an out-group. While the in-group according to Islamic State is the Sunni Muslim community that adheres to its ideology, the out-group was everyone else. In the specific context of Islamic State's governance efforts in its territories in Syria and Iraq, the out-group comprised Christian, Druze, Kakai, Yazidi, Shia Muslim, and other minority communities. Furthermore, the out-group comprised Sunni Muslims that were deemed 'apostates' for not adhering to Islamic State's version of Islam.[74]

For Islamic State, this violent, totalizing ideology played out 'domestically' within Syria and Iraq, wherein it defined and imposed the movement's conceptualization of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' behaviors for both men and women. Among other things, this manifested in hyper-gender-segregated practices including, where possible, the total relegation of women to the private sphere, unless it served the pragmatic interests of the group's governance

strategy.[75] It also manifested in stringent policies regarding how women, both those in the in-group and those in the out-group, could live, including regulations on anything from polygamy and underage marriage to the revival of sex slavery.[76]

Islamic State's harshly misogynistic approach towards governing private and public life meant that women's ability to travel, work, or leave was severely inhibited. Their existence was regulated at almost every level, including the finest details of their marital status and relationships.[77] Women interviewed for the project highlighted how in some cases once their husband joined Islamic State, he would marry multiple wives, as was allowed by the group.[78] This could include women of other nationalities.

Over the course of the last two decades, the Islamic State movement has consistently held that women belong first and foremost in the private sphere.[79] Any exceptions to this rule were exactly that: exceptions that were necessitated by extenuating, and unavoidable, circumstances. These circumstances will be explored further below. This idea is prominent across both the English- and Arabic-language materials that were produced by the group over the course of the last few years. For example, all 23 of the articles specifically directed at women in English-language Islamic State magazines since 2014 talk about the home as an 'ideal' place for women.[80]

This position was not, however, restricted to propaganda. Rather, it was enshrined in both fatwas and other formalized legal frameworks whenever Islamic State meaningfully established control over a territory. For example, written in both the city charter of Sirte (Libya) and the city charter of Mosul (Iraq) - which are very similar - Islamic State wrote specifically "to the distinguished and noble women," reminding them that

> "Modesty, covering, loose garment and veiling the head and face, while remaining in the house, adhering to the curtain [i.e. seclusion] and not leaving except for need: this is the guidance of the mothers of the believers and the distinguished female companions (may God be pleased with them)."[81]

When women were allowed into public life, Islamic State strictly limited the basis on which this could occur by calling for men and women to practice full gender segregation in order to protect women's modesty. This affected nearly all aspects of women's engagement in public life including carrying out basic daily tasks, working, or even accessing healthcare which were divided into services for women, and delivered by women.[82]

Islamic State also regulated 'properly' gendered behavior through the policing of women's bodies and dress. This included restrictions on women's clothing, including the prohibition of tight or transparent garments,[83] the enforcement of the hijab,[84] and even the enforcement of the niqab on both Muslim and non-Muslim women.[85]

This also meant Islamic State sought to regulate women's movement, issuing numerous fatwas on the matter. As part of this, women required male escorts to carry out even the most menial of everyday activities. For example, male shopkeepers were forbidden from selling products to women who did not have an appropriate escort, and taxi drivers transporting female workers had to sign pledges to abide by Islamic State rules regarding women's dress.[86] These restrictions also extended to travel within Islamic State's broader territories.[87] Travel outside of Islamic State-held territory was generally prohibited except for highly limited, and temporary, purposes such as access to medical treatment that could not be accessed inside Islamic State territory, or some business and financial transactions.[88] The rules were strict for men but even stricter for women.[89] This severe travel on limitations was also confirmed in field interviews, who also spoke of the strictly imposed dress requirements, and punishments for infractions.[90] As such, even when women may have wanted to leave Islamic State-held territory, this was often incredibly difficult.

Penalizing Infractions

For those who did not comply with this system—whether it was in the context of segregation, dress, or movement—Islamic State instituted an array of public and private punishments, with verbal warnings and fines at one end of the spectrum and executions at the other. This could include public whippings for things as menial as selling cigarettes.[91] The harshness with which Islamic State enforced its laws also had the effect, for some, of making life under Islamic State feel safer as crime was heavily reduced.[92]

Its fundamental objective in doling out punishment was to deter any resistance to segregation, something towards which its legislators were extremely sensitive, including when men were seen to have broken the rules.[93] Other women noted female *hisba* - morality police - would often publicly police them and enforce dress codes.[94]

In another document released by the *Diwan* of *Hisba*, or department of moral policing, the punishments for crimes more explicitly related to female 'infractions' were set out.[95] For example, a woman who did not dress properly

could be taken into custody, her male custodian flogged in front of her and forced to buy her an abaya. Local residents noted that women accused of sex outside of marriage were seen to be publicly flogged by female police.[96]

Dabiq 7 includes the only images of an adult woman published in an Islamic State English-language magazine.[97] Titled "Stoning a zaniyah in Ar-Raqqah," the woman was fully dressed in head-to-toe black and is being stoned by a mob of men for being an adulterer, with the accompanying text noting "in Wilāyat Ar-Raqqah, a woman was stoned after being found guilty of zinā."[98]

It is worth noting that, in 2015, the General Governing Committee of Islamic State issued a blanket instruction to all provinces of the caliphate to forward on a copy of the case file of any woman that was detained for security reasons to its central bureaucracy.[99] This announcement implies that women's arrests for security reasons were relatively rare—if this was not the case, forwarding files like this would be a huge administrative burden for its justice system, not to mention a security risk.

Through its gendered system of control, and resulting penalization of infractions, Islamic State sought to gain control over both men and women. Understanding this system and its consequences is vital for discussions surrounding women's agency and women's contributions to Islamic State.

What were the Various Roles of Women within Islamic State: 2013 to 2019?

This section looks at the distinct roles that women within Islamic State played in Iraq and Syria from 2013 to 2019. A disparity has arisen between what non-extremists consider to be 'active participation' in the in-group and what extremist women consider to be 'active participation' in the in-group.[100] The reality is that, even if women's involvement in or acquiescence to the rule of Islamic State looked inactive from the outside, it was considered active from within the movement, a choice to adopt the 'fundamental role' of the female Muslim,[101] which actively contributed to Islamic State's vision of the caliphate. As women were required to cover their faces in public, it would also be difficult to personally identify these individuals in contrast to male foreigners who were able to dress themselves more freely. This in turn has made it so male supporters of Islamic State are more easily recognizable than their female counterparts.

Private Roles

It is in private roles that women in the family unit, particularly as wives and mothers, were most active in Islamic State. Islamic State also promoted and emphasized these roles as the most appropriate for women and encouraged women to focus their efforts in the private sphere, particularly in supporting their husbands and family members, and correctly raising their children in line with Islamic State ideology and aims. Women were framed as integral to producing the next generation of fighters, and Islamic State focused significant emphasis on 'califah cubs' or children. Mothers were also highlighted in some cases as educating their children at home in preparation for more active participation in the group and encouraged to keep up their male children's physical fitness in preparation for such roles.[102]

Women were continually emphasized by the organization as mothers, where their roles in security and defense-related operations or other roles were of a lesser importance to those elevated in the domestic sphere. In their publication *Dabiq*, Islamic State noted in a 2015 edition, "the absence of an obligation of jihād and war upon the Muslim woman – except in defense against someone attacking her – does not overturn her role in building the Ummah, producing men, and sending them out to the fierceness of battle."[103] The *Dabiq* article then offers five pages outlining the importance of this "jihad without fighting" and the value of "the wife of the *mujahdid* and the mothers of lion cubs."[104] Another issue of the magazine featured an extensive article titled "two, three or four wives?" and also emphasized if a husband did not feel they could fulfill the full rights of their wives they should not seek more, which was meant to offer women some guidance in the private sphere.[105] Al-Khansaa Media also noted, "Bring up the sons of the caliphate to know true *tawheed* [oneness with God]. Bring up its daughters such that they know chastity and decency. Know that you are the hope of the ummah. The guardians of the faith and protectors of the land will emerge from you. God bless you and your patience, you are of us and we of you."[106]

This emphasis on motherhood and as wives was constantly reinforced throughout its various media, and idealized and praised as women's primary role in Islamic State. As a wife or female family member, women may support, in various capacities, their husbands or other male relatives who would partake in criminal activities or combat operations, or care for those injured. As seen in al-Hol camp today, women's roles in maintaining children and carrying forward the ideology and mission of Islamic State has occurred in some cases (see Section IV).

Owning Slaves and Running Guest Houses

In managing the home, Islamic State-affiliated women may also have access to,

or control over slaves obtained and held by the group. This could include female children and youth under the age of 18, adult women, or boys which had not yet attained puberty. There are numerous documented cases of enslaved persons being abused in domestic contexts. The activities of Islamic State-affiliated women in this context may have been directly abusive towards enslaved persons, or they may have facilitated abuse of such persons in their household. Such recorded abuse has included sexual violence (where women may have facilitated the rape or sexual assault of women for their husbands), and other physical, mental, and verbal abuse committed towards these enslaved persons.[107] In some cases, enslaved persons held in such contexts have been killed, as a court case in Germany highlighted when 'Jennifer W.' was convicted of crimes against humanity in the death of a 5-year-old Yazidi girl.[108] Several court cases have now been opened under similar charges, including in the Netherlands.[109]

This ownership of slaves was also an important aspect for some women. Males would purchase or be gifted slaves, often Yazidis, and keep them in their home where they would often face physical and sexual abuse and would be unable to leave. In total, Islamic State kidnapped 6,417 Yazidis from Sinjar and sold 3,548 women and girls to individual Islamic State members.[110] Such abuse could also be facilitated or inflicted by Islamic State-affiliated women in the home. There have also been cases where women have claimed they tried to protect enslaved persons in their households, or help them escape.[111]

Beyond personal homes, in a small number of cases, women would also maintain, run, and administer 'guest houses,' though these are largely recognized to be administered by Islamic State.[112] Such homes were used as a base for foreign women who would arrive in Islamic State territory until they were married and moved to another location. These houses could also be used for widows until their next marriage. They were also noted as a location for detaining Yazidis.[113] One interviewee in Iraq suggested that foreign women would bring Yazidi women to their guest house, teach them how to pray, and read the Qur'an (against their religion).[114] This has also been corroborated by other testimonies of Yazidis.[115] Women would act as guards in the building, and women who tried to escape - both Sunnis and minorities - would be punished.[116]

Women as 'Beneficiaries' of Islamic State's System

As noted above, the vast majority of in-group women living under the rule of Islamic State were not in gainful employment outside of the home. However, they still came into contact with its administrative practices on a day-to-day basis, its influence continually permeating both private and public life. Therefore, by virtue

of living under the caliphate, in-group women benefited from Islamic State's system including public services, payments, and other forms of financial or physical assistance.

This influence manifested in both positive and negative ways. Women, for example, were often expressly granted resources or other forms of material support. Sometimes this came indirectly in the form of material assistance provided to husbands and fathers, who were instructed to list family members in military expense and salary forms,[117] on real estate forms,[118] gas distribution forms,[119] and on wills and last testaments[120] (often these same forms would also request details about sex slaves.) In the domestic sphere, women as part of families may have taken over and occupied stolen property, or property owned by citizens who had fled Islamic State. An example of a French family occupying a local house was noted in interviews, "the people who are in the house left for another location because of the bombing. They wanted to protect their family. These people [the French family of immigrants under Islamic State] came to live in it."[121]

In other cases, women received support directly from Islamic State. For example, numerous documents show that women could be active recipients of monetary and nutritional support if they had been widowed or divorced,[122] or had lost their husbands on account of other reasons like enemy imprisonment.[123] Female orphans were also demarcated as specific recipients of zakat-derived aid.[124]

Besides material assistance, female members of the in-group were also 'beneficiaries' of Islamic State-provided education. The GW ISIS Files repository is replete with examples of references, direct and indirect, to what the education of girls and female adolescents looked like. They indicate that the caliphate invested a significant amount of time and energy in cultivating its youth support base—what it called the 'generation of the caliphate.' Generally speaking, female children were allowed to go to school which would largely focus their education on fulfilling their roles in the domestic sphere within Islamic State. In some cases, girls and young women were allowed to receive further education to support Islamic State's governance project, such as attending medical school. Male children and youth living under Islamic State were meant to attend both military training academies as well as more conventional 'schools' wherein a curriculum (of sorts) was the basis of learning. At these institutes, lessons in anything from history and geography to Arabic and English were delivered, imbued with jihadist readings of the world, and religious science was enforced at every level.[125] Children received an 'Islamic education' based on a curriculum designed by Islamic State, where schoolbooks included learning math with images of weapons, and boys could be trained in combat. While some mothers would

actively send their children to such schools, others chose to keep them at home to avoid this.[126]

Female children were precluded from attending training camps but encouraged to attend school up to at least the primary level, but in some cases girls were sent home from school.[127] A number of documents announce new school terms and give stipulations around what girls' attendance (and/or lack thereof) would result in.[128] Some track how women and their idealized roles in society are conceptualized in the pages of school textbooks.[129] Others provide logistical information about how girls' schools were actually run— anything from printing costs to the distribution of sports equipment[130] — with yet more describing the processes by which Islamic State officials regulated them.[131] One document, written from the perspective of a school inspector, notes that there was a significant need for female teachers.[132]

At the level of higher education, information is harder to come by, although we do know that at least some women attended universities in Mosul and Sirte.[133] This is because, with the notable exception of medical students, in-group females were discouraged from continuing their studies at university. This saw some subjects, like engineering, being restricted to male students only, even when the prior experiences and background of female students made them good candidates for the material sciences.[134]

From the perspective of religious education, in-group women were also perpetually exposed to theological and ideological training at the hands of Islamic State's Center for Da'wa and Mosques.[135] Such activities were at the heart of its community outreach efforts; after all, they enabled it to work to entrench the ideological basis for its system of control. This took the form of anything from women-only seminars on creed and methodology to Qur'an memorization competitions for young girls.[136]

Besides material assistance and education, in-group women would also be afforded 'protection' by Islamic State's police and judiciary. This saw them raising agriculture disputes, and a large number of family cases where Islamic State mediation or rulings were sought to resolve disputes. These could include making claims against male family members in accessing monies owed to them, or taken by, husbands, fathers, and brothers-in-law, as well as requesting legal interventions in the context of incidents of physical and mental abuse.[137] While these interventions were invariably grounded in misogyny—for example, men were reprimanded only if they beat their wives 'without good reason'[138]—they indicated that Islamic State's ideological positioning did not preclude it from taking the side of women, provided of course that they were part of its in-group.[139]

In this regard, some in-group women could attempt to seek 'justice' through Islamic State judicial systems.

Public Roles

The section above has highlighted the more private roles and benefits relevant to women. This section will focus on their public-facing roles under the caliphate, specifically fundraising and material support, recruiting, and roles in relation to propaganda which included online roles, and general 'public sector' roles. This will also address women's participation in security and defense-related roles.

Fundraising and Material Support

Women have contributed wealth, goods, or otherwise fundraised or donated money and goods for Islamic State at an individual level,[140] and through small groups or organizations.[141] These have included women within Syria and Iraq who have fundraised via social media on Twitter and Tumblr accounts, as well as women abroad who have sought out funding locally to support Islamic State. However, such fundraising has been overshadowed by Islamic State's greater wealth as acquired by its primary funding streams which include taxation of the population in territory it held, extortion, kidnapping, oil revenues, and the sales of antiquities.[142] As such, female civilians and supporters within Iraq and Syria, regardless of their affiliation or level of support for the group, were required to pay taxes, thereby directly funding Islamic State. However, cases such as those of paying tax should be approached with the understanding that harm or punishment could come to persons that refused to pay these taxes to Islamic State, and as such those forced to pay taxes and other forms of payment to the group should also be assessed in terms of coercion.

Recruitment

Women associated with Islamic State were active in recruiting other women locally in person, as well as reaching out to them online and recruiting women and men abroad.

Within Iraq and Syria, this included having women in Islamic State go out and preach locally to other women, where they may particularly target what they viewed as vulnerable women, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), widows, and others facing difficult circumstances. Here, both preaching, and

physical incentives could be utilized to recruit local women to comply, join, or support Islamic State.[143]

Women within Iraq and Syria, as well as women outside of these territories, also used the online sphere to recruit other women into Islamic State, and to provide advice or materials to facilitate travel to Iraq and Syria. They would do this via social media such as Twitter or Facebook, blogs like Tumblr, and other platforms. For example, Aqsa Mahmood, a famous Islamic State-affiliated woman from Glasgow, operated a blog for some time in which she attempted to dispel 'myths' about life in the 'caliphate' and attempted to portray a normalized life in the conflict zone. She would direct women to message her privately if they were interested in coming to Islamic State-held territory and would help facilitate their travel by providing travel tips, directions and other guidance.[144] In 2014, a 23-year-old Canadian woman referred to as 'Aisha' traveled to Syria after taking an online course to study the Qur'an taught by a woman based in Edmonton, who taught fifteen women in total.[145] Aisha's sister stated that the woman who ran the course also recruited her for Islamic State and helped facilitate passage to Syria where she was said to be with a woman from Quebec.[146] In Ceuta, Spain, two friends led a ring that recruited other women for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria before traveling themselves.[147] Offline women's study groups in the U.K. were also discovered to be promoting support for Islamic State and encouraging women to go to Syria,[148] while one group in Pakistan arranged marriages for women to Islamic State members and assisted in their recruitment.[149] Women also helped register and place international women who arrived, for example in local women's 'hostels' (*maqqars*) or arrange local housing for them and their families (often in homes seized from displaced persons).

Foreign women who traveled to Iraq and Syria themselves also provided an incentive and draw for males to come and join the group. Men who sought a wife could have one arranged by Islamic State upon arrival via their marriage bureau. This could be particularly appealing to men from countries who would be otherwise unable to marry, particularly due to high prices of dowries or weddings.[150] Women may also be attracted to the group through the prospects of marriage to a jihadist husband. Women's activities in the group were also used to shame men into action, highlighting how if women could make sacrifices for the group, so could they.[151]

As highlighted above, women in Islamic State took a particularly active role online, which was also used in the creation and dissemination of Islamic State propaganda. For example, a 2015 Brookings Institute report suggested that for every seven men who were involved in Islamic State Twitter networks, there was one woman. Author J.M. Berger noted that, "male and female social networks were observed to be segregated to some extent, often at the explicit urging of both

male and female [Islamic State] supporters,"[152] highlighting that the gender segregation promoted by the group was also enforced online. In the online sphere, women were also acting as a sub-class of key disseminators, following male or female Islamic State supporters and members online, and sharing and re-tweeting their posts. One key case of this was that of Sally Jones who, after Islamic State had hacked into the Department of Defense database, had personally reposted personal information of U.S. personnel including addresses and other contact information with explicit instruction to target these persons.[153] Others would regularly broadcast violence, death threats, condemnation, and other vitriol against their home governments or other persons, bodies or matters they viewed as un-Islamic.

Women would also feature in Islamic State digital print propaganda as authors. Islamic State publications such as *Dabiq* and then *Rumiyah*, would often have sections specifically for 'the sisters' which would feature female authors discussing topics of relevance to women.[154] This could include, for example, the edicts of owning female slaves, or advice for women's roles in marriage and the home. Grievance guidelines were also offered to widows, including points on mourning period, etiquette, and remarriage, as were points on marriage, and avoiding non-Muslims. *Dabiq* featured stories like that of Umm Khalid al-Finlandiyyah who highlighted a Finnish convert's experience and travel to Islamic State-held territory, and who encouraged others to travel.[155] In 2015, the Al-Khansaa Brigade's media wing circulated an Arabic document entitled, "Women in ISIS: Manifesto and Case Study" which was intended to recruit women specifically from the Gulf region. Women continued to carry out such roles through the duration of the period examined, though increased actions of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and others has limited the online public space that such women could access, pushing some of this online creating and dissemination of propaganda into closed, encrypted platforms such as WhatsApp or Telegram.

Public Sector' Roles

By declaring itself an Islamic 'state', Islamic State encouraged those around the world to make *hijra* to this region, to live in its 'caliphate', and to become active members of this state-building project. They specifically noted in their first publication *Dabiq* that for all Muslims (including women), *hijra* (migration) to the state was obligatory if one was able to do so, "The State is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the Muslims, all the Muslims," they noted.[156]

Practical positions emerged out of this 'state', beyond roles of mothers and wives (those most prescribed for women), such as nurses, teachers, or policing roles, offering a more tangible role which appealed to a wider support base. In the July 2014 edition of *Dabiq*, the group specifically calls for "scholars, experts in Islamic jurisprudence (*fuqaha'*), and callers, especially the judges as well as people with military, administrative, and service expertise, and medical doctors and engineers."[157] While Islamic State called for such roles broadly, women practically were limited to certain roles as discussed below.

In reality, specific roles would be more limited for women in the public space, but women were particularly emphasized and utilized in roles where interaction with women was required to maintain the strict gender segregation that Islamic State enforced.[158] Such cases particularly included education and health/medical roles. In the context of the latter, internal administrative documents from across Syria and Iraq indicate that Islamic State's deployment of female medical professionals was fairly sophisticated. Female nurses and doctors worked across its medical system, albeit in environments that were meticulously gender-regulated in order to keep to the strictures of its system of control.[159] Notwithstanding the array of ideology-born limitations that hospitals across the caliphate were technically bound by, positions for both male and female doctors and nurses were regularly advertised.[160] Often, these advertisements were more commands than calls for voluntary employment, meaning that many local medical professionals were coerced into service. Yet, in some cases, foreign women volunteered to join the Islamic State health services as was seen when several female medical students from the U.K. traveled to join the organization.[161] Foreign women were regularly observed at the dentist, or in the hospital when they were seeking medical care in cities such as Mosul.[162] With both the resources and land under its control, as well as the announcement of this 'state', individuals from varied national, professional and educational backgrounds traveled to land held by Islamic State to put their varied skill sets to use in support of this 'state'. When it came to schooling, several documents establish detailed employment parameters for female teachers working in Islamic State administered classrooms.[163] The Islamic State administration saw the basic 'education' of girls as a necessity, not an option—provided, that is, female teachers were available (on at least one occasion, a girls' school was shut down due to a shortage of female staff-members).[164]

Besides education and medicine, the only other sphere in which women could work appears to have been agriculture.[165] While the evidence for this is relatively sparse, we identified several documents that speak of women as agricultural landowners and farmers.[166] Women could take over fallow land or be listed on rental contracts if their husbands had died.[167] As with male landowners, they were obliged to pay taxes through the system of zakat that was established in 2014,

ultimately generating tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue for Islamic State.[168] However, these documents mostly pertain to Syrian and Iraqi women.

Notwithstanding the fact that women could technically work under Islamic State if they had the appropriate professional credentials or were faced by the 'right' circumstances (e.g., the death of their husbands), it is important to emphasize that their employment in these positions was an exception to the rule, not the rule itself. Indeed, rather like their involvement in policing or combat operations (explored below), it was something that Islamic State only ever permitted begrudgingly as something that was necessary to uphold the undergirding principles of its system of control.

Security and Defense-related Roles

A proportion of foreign women who traveled to Iraq and Syria, as well as local women, who became affiliated with Islamic State eventually took on security and defense-related roles in the organization. These largely comprised female 'policing' roles, and in limited cases included suicide attackers. However, as the group came under increasing pressure from local and international forces, the initially limited security and defense roles available to women evolved.

Women's security and defense-related roles, and the training which accompanied this as undertaken in Islamic State-held territory, is of particular significance as it remains quite rare for a jihadist group to allow women such roles in their organization.[169] There have been several women's units reported to have been trained to support Islamic State activities.[170] They have been noted to have diverse operational ranks and roles and were trained in activities such as enforcement of sharia laws, surveillance, combat, intelligence, assassination, and infiltration.[171] While these women were trained in many of these 'skills', it is not confirmed that each of them was eventually utilized in such a role for the organization (i.e. they may have received training, but did not necessarily put it to use if not required at that time by Islamic State).

Women in the Hisba

One of women's principal theaters of activity was in relation to religious policing, otherwise known as *hisba*. The *hisba* were tasked with tracking violations of religious laws, something that often meant enforcing 'Islamic' morality over women. For such duties, Islamic State had no choice but to enlist women (even

if the 'ideal' women should be sedentary) because the ideological restrictions on which its system of control was predicated—i.e., segregation and propriety—meant that men were physically unable to enforce all its rules.[172] In other words, policing women in a 'sharia-compliant' manner meant doing things that men simply could not, like smelling women's clothing and breath in the event that they had been accused of drinking alcohol or smoking. Importantly, and in line with Islamic State's ideology, even when women were given positions of power, it was always over other women, and never over men.

Several primary source Islamic State documents shed light on what women's *hisba* activities looked like in practice. One of the most detailed, which is dated November 2014, describes the internal structure of the *hisba* itself.[173] Among other things, it states that each *hisba* office had an all-female unit that operated separately from the male *hisba* units. Women in the *hisba* were tasked with policing women's dress and behavior - when women were deemed to be contravening such morality codes in public they could be detained and punished as deemed appropriate. As morality police, they were involved in bringing these women before Islamic State courts, and the fining, arrest, and punishment of women (both local and foreign). A local woman recalled seeing punishments of public flogging in cases of adultery,[174] and herself was approached by an armed French female member of the *hisba* for not wearing gloves in public.[175]

Interestingly, these women were also charged with providing financial and material assistance to in-group women considered 'in need,' which included practically handing out materials to women. They would also give counseling to women who had been arrested, tour women's schools to stop sharia violations and offer 'advice', and accompany male members for arrests and inspection raids when the targets were women. Moreover, in *hisba* roles, women were permitted to carry weapons, providing it was in a sharia-compliant manner.[176] This demonstrates one of the ways Islamic State was willing to grant exceptions to women's desired place in private spaces when it ensured the proper administration of its extensive bureaucracy.

These terms of reference are corroborated by, among others, one other high-level document, which was authored by the overarching emir of the *Diwan of Hisba* and directed to the *walis*, or governors, of several Islamic State provinces, including Euphrates, Khayr, Raqqa, and Aleppo.[177] The letter set out a directive of the General Governing Committee for the establishment of a devoted women's division of the *hisba* to operate in the cities of Bukamal, Mayadin, Raqqa, and Manbij, specifically 'to deal with the female violators.' In doing so, it instructed each governor to ask the emirs of the Hisba Center in the provinces in question to refer to the names of six women to work in the team. One local interview

expressed the view that for women who wanted to leave the *hisba* may risk death, or be moved to another area, sometimes through marriage.[178]

One of the most well-known and documented of these units was the Al-Khansaa brigade, located in Raqqa.[179] For some local women, joining Islamic State security units provided an income, some degree of movement, protection for them and their families, as well as influence, and even power, under Islamic State's harsh control and amidst the larger conflict. Some may have also joined to directly support the activities of Islamic State. Yet, for some foreign women, joining Al-Khansaa could further be a way to demonstrate active involvement and commitment to the organization, and a chance for them to participate in a 'security'-related activity on behalf of Islamic State. Although the brigade worked stringently within the confines of women's dictated roles within Islamic State, by focusing on issues related to women and, to some degree, children, brigade members-maintained levels of power unavailable to most women in the caliphate, and some women in the brigade recalled joining for this reason.[180]

According to an Al-Khansaa defector, women in this unit would undergo military and religious training. This reportedly consisted of training eight hours a day for a fifteen-day weapons course focused on training on and cleaning pistols, where foreigners were reported to train on Kalashnikovs highlighting distinct status and 'privileges' for foreign women. They would also assist in transporting women joining the organization to Raqqa.[181] Beyond policing other women, they would also train other women in their ranks, including in the assembling and disassembling of weapons. One interviewee recalled an American woman who used to train other women on sniper activities.[182] This echoes the case of U.S. citizen Allison Fluke-Ekren, who was charged with training women on the use of assault rifles.[183] Other women interviewed by journalists noted they picked up women at the Turkish border as part of the Al-Khansaa Brigade in Raqqa.[184]

There are well documented cases of these Al-Khansaa members committing severe violence against other women including varied levels of harassment, detention, physical and verbal abuse and even torture.[185] Traveling around the city of Raqqa, these female security actors were documented to have "policed women's dress armed with metal prongs, sometimes poking, slapping, or even biting women for dress code breaches," and would fine or beat women, or cut their fingers for minor infractions.[186]

The Khansa' manifesto, which was first circulated online by Islamic State supporters in early 2015, offered explicit advice regarding the role of women in Islamic State.[187] The manifesto's author—who claimed to be affiliated with the Al-Khansaa Brigade, stated that their "fundamental function" was "in the house, with [their] husband and children."[188] There were some exceptional

circumstances in which female supporters would be permitted to leave their homes—for example, to study their religion and to engage in medical work.[189] On the question of whether or not women could participate in combative jihad, the document was unequivocal. Women were expressly forbidden from fighting unless circumstances demanded otherwise. Indeed, the text held that women may engage in combat "if the enemy is attacking [their] country, and the men are not enough to protect it, and the imams give a *fatwa* for it, as the blessed women of Iraq and Chechnya did with great sadness."[190] According to the Khansa' manifesto, then, women could theoretically participate in combative jihad, but only in highly specific circumstances, which female Islamic State supporters in Iraq and Syria were not facing at the time that this document was published.

Women in Combat

As noted above, Islamic State's position on the active military deployment of women was often ambiguous, for strategic reasons. Women were not obliged to fight, but they would be obliged to do so if circumstances required—i.e. if the jihad became overwhelmingly a war of defense.[191] Women's roles in combat were tied to strategic necessity; specifically this meant women's roles in combat evolved over time as the needs of Islamic State evolved. This idea was specifically reiterated in several fatwas aimed at women. In Fatwa no. 397, for example, women are reminded,

> "As for jihad in the meaning of 'fighting and clashing,' it is not obligatory on her but it is permitted when there is need for her and when there is no risk of becoming a captive and sabi [sex slave], and the assessment of [when that need is present] goes back to the [caliph]. But if the enemy come and surprise the people and they cannot repel them without the participation of the women, then it is obligatory on the women. This is so and God knows best."[192]

This was also noted in Fatwa no. 418, which stated that military jihad was not obligatory for women, although "it is permitted in her right in terms of the principle, and it has been established that a number of women of the companions went out for jihad."[193]

By mid-2017, after more than a year of territorial losses, Islamic State all but abandoned its offensive campaigns across Iraq and Syria. It was at this point that it signaled it was going to start following through on its provisions regarding female combatants.[194] In the same month, an article hinting at women's roles in combat was released in *Rumiyah*,[195] reports emerged of female suicide bombers in Mosul.[196] Moreover, in October of 2017, Islamic State released further

clarification on the matter, this time in its newspaper, *Al-Naba*. In the essay, the author stated that women were now obliged to engage in jihad on behalf of the caliphate[197]

In early 2018, the first official footage appeared showing women seemingly engaging in combat against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alongside men in eastern Syria.[198] In the months that followed,[199] other visual accounts emerged, including in the first three months of 2019, when Islamic State's last holdout in Baghouz was on the brink of collapse, a period in which numerous video clips emerged—some official, others not—showing women fighting to defend what they considered to be the last true territory of their caliphate.[200] One interviewee in Iraq recalled hearing directly of armed foreign women being taken to the frontline with their husbands, and in one case deploying their child as a suicide bomber, though it was not clear what role foreign women would take on the frontlines.[201]

The more recent case of American Allison Fluke-Ekren has also highlighted a unit called Khatiba Nusaybah - named after the infamous Umm 'Amarah - in which Fluke-Ekren led and organized this battalion of women on behalf of Islamic State. Findings in her recent court case note that Fluke-Ekren "trained women on the use of automatic firing AK-47 assault rifles, grenades, and suicide belts. Over 100 women and young girls, including as young as 10 or 11-years-old, received military training from Fluke-Ekren in Syria on behalf of Islamic State."[202] Fluke-Ekren had also set up a women's center in Raqqa in 2016 where she provided medical services, educational services about Islamic State, childcare, and various training to women and young girls. Documents from the court case note, "As the center's leader, Fluke-Ekren also provided and assisted other female Islamic State members in providing training to numerous women and young girls on the use of automatic firing AK-47 assault rifles, grenades and explosive suicide belts."[203] This training was conducted and continued into 2017 to facilitate the expansion and ongoing status of the group.

Women have also conducted suicide attacks as they are able to do so alone, and thus do not contravene the group's strict gender segregation norms.[204] These attacks appeared to largely occur in defense operations where, as Iraqi forces reclaimed Mosul between June and early July 2017 for example, at least 38 female suicide bombers (some carrying infants) carried out attacks.[205] Attacks by female suicide bombers in Deir Ezzor were also reported in September 2017.[206] However, earlier examples outside of Iraq and Syria included a suicide attack plot by Dian Yukua Novi in Indonesia (2016),[207] and a successful attack by Diana Ramazova in Turkey on a police station (2015),[208] highlighting the risk from some women that extends beyond the 'caliphate'. However, the majority of cases of female suicide bombers have been recorded within Iraq and Syria. Of note in

these two cases, both examples were linked to militants inside Syria highlighting that persons from within Iraq and Syria could also guide or direct women in attacks abroad.[209] In the final battle before Islamic State was defeated in Baghouz, Syria in early 2019, at least three women also conducted suicide attacks, and some women appeared to take up arms on behalf of the group in combat operations as seen in video released by the group.[210]

Detention after the Caliphate

Since the territorial defeat of the organization in Baghouz in 2019, foreign women who remained with Islamic State forces until the end have now largely been detained in a separate annex in al-Hol camp in northeast Syria. This includes 7,800 foreigners, the majority of whom are children. The Annex is considered the most dangerous area of the camp, and women's potential roles in criminal activity or even war crimes continue here today. A smaller camp, Roj camp, holds approximately 2,000 foreigners.[211]

Since 2019, in al-Hol, there have been cases of women carrying out '*hisba* patrols' similar to that of Al-Khansaa in Raqqa; burning down other women's tents; harassing, abusing and even murdering girls and women who contravene Islamic State moral codes; and attacking SDF forces currently administering the camp with weapons including knives.[212] Between April 2019 and April 2022, Save the Children recorded 130 murders in al-Hol camp.[213] It has been reported that the victims are being identified and targeted by other women, though a lack of investigations and prosecutions have not clarified these details.[214] It has proved particularly difficult to determine what proportion of women continue to hold violent extremist beliefs, and across a broader spectrum of beliefs, what proportion may have disengaged from the group ideologically and physically. Investigations are also difficult to conduct in al-Hol camp, due to not only the significant fear of residents, but the strict enforcement of dress means that for many women who wear niqabs (which cover the face) they are not easily identified by guards or other personnel working in the camp.

Today, some of these Islamic State-affiliated women are still ardent supporters of the group, remaining steadfast in their ideological commitment to its teachings and conducting violence against other residents in the camp.[215] They could potentially rejoin the group and help ensure its ideology is passed to future generations or contribute to its ongoing activities, including conducting various forms of violence themselves. Some women in al-Hol have launched online crowdfunding campaigns to try and secure funding for human smugglers to help them escape.[216] Crucially, not all the foreign women detained in al-Hol are still

supporters of Islamic State, let alone its operatives. Hence, the potential risk they would present on repatriation must be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to answer the question: what was the agency and roles of foreign women in Islamic State? It offered the reader key information to better understand women's roles, who joined the group from abroad, and their motivations to do so, and why looking at this issue with a gender lens is important. Secondly, it discussed Islamic State's ideological conceptualization of women's roles to lay out how Islamic State envisioned the roles of women within the organization. Thirdly, the various roles women played under Islamic State were outlined, specifically the different institutions women contributed to, as well as women's roles in both public and private life under Islamic State. Finally, the chapter highlighted women's ongoing roles in detention in camps in northeast Syria today.

Women's roles must be assessed on an individual basis and considered throughout the duration of their involvement with Islamic State. Their agency too must be considered throughout the duration of this involvement, allowing for considerations of how this may have been either more or less constrained in different environments and periods of time. Finally, accounting for the duration of time many have now spent in Syria/Iraq - which in some cases is around a decade - girls who may have been taken or traveled when they were children may have since becomes adults, and even mothers and in some cases widows, and principles of child welfare and in some cases juvenile justice should be considered appropriately.

For women who have had roles within Islamic State who may face prosecution, justice for victims of Islamic State should be relentlessly pursued, while also accounting for rehabilitative and reintegration considerations, balancing both the needs of victims and aims to redirect women away from Islamic State ideological and physical support in the future.

[1] Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate," *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 6 (July 2019): 30-45, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/daesh-diaspora-challenges-posed-women-minors-fall-caliphate/.

[2] Regions such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) had significant data gaps. Cook and Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate," 30-45.

[3] Austin Doctor, Haroro Ingram, Devorah Margolin, Andrew Mines, and Lorenzo Vidino, "A Framework of Best Practices for the Reintegration of Foreign Fighter Families to the U.S.," *National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center* (2023): 1-32, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/6338.

[4] Cook and Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate," 30-45; Devorah Margolin, Joana Cook, and Charlie Winter, "In Syria, the Women and Children of ISIS Have Been Forgotten," *Foreign Policy,* October 26, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/26/in-syria-the-women-and-children-of-isis-have-been-forgotten/; Devorah Margolin and Austin C. Doctor, "Thousands of Men, Women and Children Remain in Detention Because of Their Former Ties to ISIS," *Washington Post*, February 2, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/02/02/thousands-men-women-children-remain-detention-because-their-former-ties-isis/; Haroro J. Ingram, Julie Coleman, Austin C. Doctor, and Devorah Margolin, "The Repatriation & Reintegration Dilemma: How States Manage the Return of Foreign Terrorist Fighters & Their Families," *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 31, (2022): 119-163.

[5] Margolin and Doctor, "Thousands of Men, Women and Children Remain in Detention Because of Their Former Ties to ISIS."

[6] "UNITAD Welcomes Swedish Court Ruling of ISIL Woman Committing Grave Violations of International Law," *United Nations, Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD)*, March 7, 2022, https://www.unitad.un.org/Swedish%20Conviction%20Press%20Release.

[7] "American Woman Who Led ISIS Battalion Charged with Providing Material Support to a Terrorist Organization," United States Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, January 29, 2022, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/american-woman-who-led-isis-battalion-charged-providing-material-support-terrorist.

[8] Ashley Burkey, "2 Women Arrested in Canada After Coming Home from Syrian Camp for ISIS fighters' Families," *CBC*, October 26, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/two-women-two-children-repatriated-syrian-detention-camps-1.6629838.

[9] For examples, see: "Foreign Terrorist Fighters Knowledge Hub," International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT), https://www.icct.nl/project/foreign-terrorist-fighters-knowledge-hub.

[10] "German court hands down first genocide conviction against ISIS member," *Doughty Street Chambers*, November 30, 2021, https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/news/german-court-hands-down-first-genocide-conviction-against-isis-member.

[11] Ewelina U. Ochab, "How One Yazidi Woman Helped To Secure The Second Genocide Conviction Of A Daesh Member," *Forbes*, August 2, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2022/08/02/how-one-yazidi-woman-helped-to-secure-the-second-genocide-conviction-of-a-daesh-member/?sh=455465785d5d; "German

Court Hands Down Second Genocide Conviction Against ISIS Member Following Enslavement and Abuse of Yazidi Woman in Syria," *Doughty Street Chambers*, July 28, 2022, https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/news/german-court-hands-down-second-genocide-conviction-against-isis-member-following-enslavement; Gina Vale, "Case Note–Justice Served?: Ashwaq Haji Hamid Talo's Confrontation and Conviction of Her Islamic State Captor," *Journal of Human Trafficking, Enslavement and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence,* 1.2 (2020): 189-198.

[12] "German court delivers third genocide verdict against ISIS member for the enslavement and abuse of Yazidi woman in Syria and Iraq," *Doughty Street Chambers*, June 21, 2023, https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/news/german-court-delivers-third-genocide-verdict-against-isis-member-enslavement-and-abuse-yazidi.

[13] Ochab, "How One Yazidi Woman Helped To Secure The Second Genocide Conviction Of A Daesh Member."

[14] For the sake of this research, foreign ISIS-affiliated women refer to women from outside of Syria and Iraq.

[15] These included 16 interviews in Iraq in fall 2022. All interviews are fully anonymized and referenced by interview number only in this report.

[16] At its peak it ruled over a population of approximately 8 million people and controlled an area the size of the U.K.. It set up an institutionalized means of governing, collecting taxes, administering public services, and even providing marriage and birth certificates.

[17] Mario Diani, "The concept of social movement," *The Sociological Review* 40, no.1 (1992): 1-25. Social movements are defined as "networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities." As such, this description as a social movement would apply to the broad network of people within Iraq and Syria and around the world who felt some sense of shared identity with ISIS.

[18] Isabel Coles and Ned Parker, "How Saddam's men help ISIS rule," *Reuters*, December 11, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-iraq-islamicstate/. Many of the members of ISIS were ex-Baathists, formerly officers in Saddam Hussein's military and thus provided military expertise and training to the organization which became particularly visible as it moved into cities and engaged in combat with international and local forces trying to defeat the organization.

[19] Lead Inspector General, *Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress April 1, 2019 – June 30, 2019*, August 2019, https://media.defense.gov/2019/Aug/06/2002167167/-1/-1/1/Q3FY2019_LEADIG_OIR_REPORT.PDF; Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1–02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 2010, https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp1_02.pdf; Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3–24: Counterinsurgency*, April 25, 2018, II-I, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_24.pdf. Discussion of evolution to insurgency: An insurgency is defined as, "The organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. Insurgency can also refer to the group itself." As described by the U.S. military, "Two common objectives of insurgent movements are legitimacy according to public opinion and political control of a population in a particular geographic area."

[20] For further background, please see Jessica Stern and JM Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (New York: Ecco, 2015).

[21] This propaganda often focused on state-building and governance.

[22] Lorne L. Dawson, "A Comparative Analysis of the Data on Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: Who Went and Why?" *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) - The Hague*, February 2021; Peter R. Neumann, Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), pp. 88-89;
Lorenzo Vidino and Seamus Hughes "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa," The Program on Extremism at the George Washington University, December 2015.

[23] In her research on state-building terrorist groups, Mara Revkin explores the discrepancies and necessary considerations for classification of civilians living under ISIS rule. See, Mara R. Revkin, "When Terrorists Govern: Protecting Civilians in Conflicts with State-Building Armed Groups," *Harvard National Security Journal,* no. 9 (2018): 138, http://harvardnsj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/3_Revkin_WhenTerroristsGovern-2.pdf.

[24] Oxford Dictionary of English online. Accessed July 18, 2023.

[25] Cook and Vale, "From ISIS to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate," 30-45.

[26] All Party Parliamentary Group, *Report of the Inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Trafficked Britons in Syria*, 2022, https://appgtraffickedbritons.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Report-of-the-Inquiry-by-the-APPG-on-Trafficked-Britons-in-Syria.pdf.

[27] During the conflict with ISIS, thousands of ISIS fighters were killed, and women would frequently become widowed, often remarrying other ISIS-affiliated males, under pressure from the group.

[28] Fieldwork, "Interview 11," 2022.; Fieldwork, "Interview 12," 2022.; Fieldwork, "Interview 15," 2022.

[29] Fieldwork, "Interview 15," 2022.

[30] See: Al-Hayat Media Center, "To Our Sisters: Advice on Ihdād," *Dabiq* 13, 2016; Al-Hayat Media Center, "Marrying the Widows Is an Established Sunnah," *Rumiyah* 4, 2016.

[31] Fieldwork, "Interview 14," 2022.

[32] Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State" *International Centre for the Study of Radicalization*, Department of War Studies, King's College London, (2019): 26, https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf.

[33] "Germany: Woman sentenced for 'IS' membership, breach of care," *DW*, July 17, 2023, https://www.dw.com/en/germany-woman-sentenced-for-is-membership-breach-of-care/a-66251883.; "Sweden convicts woman for recruiting son to fight in Syria," *AP*, March 4, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-travel-religion-war-crimes-europe-0d8badb600eaf53a628fd6120642c2e7.; "ISIS Member Convicted of Crimes Against Humanity for Aiding and Abetting Enslavement of a Yazidi Woman," *Doughty Street Chambers*, April 23, 2021, https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/news/isis-member-convicted-crimes-against-humanity-aiding-and-abetting-enslavement-yazidi-woman.

[34] For examples of the discussion around the issue of ignoring women's participation in extremism, please see: Kathleen M. Blee, *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate*

Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Elizabeth Pearson, "Shamima Begum: How Europe Toughened Its Stance on Women Returning from ISIS," *The Conversation*, last modified April 24, 2019, http://www.theconversation.com/shamima-begumhow-europe-toughened-its-stance-on-women-returning-from-islamic-state-112048.

[35] Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

[36] This has also played out in the criminal justice system. See "chivalry theory".

[37] Blee, *Inside Organized Racism: Women of the Hate Movement*; J.M. Berger, *Extremism*, The MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018); Hilary Pilkington, "'EDL Angels Stand Beside Their Men…Not Behind Them': The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in an Anti-Islam(ist) Movement," *Gender and Education* 29, no. 2 (2017): 238-257; Michaela Kottig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Peto, eds., *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Orla Lehane, David Mair, Saffron Lee, and Jodie Parker, "Brides, Black Widows and Baby-Makers; or Not: an Analysis of the Portrayal of Women in English-Language Jihadi Magazine Image Content," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 3 (2018) 505–520; Julia Musial, "'My Muslim Sister, Indeed You Are a Mujahidah' - Narratives in the Propaganda of ISIS to Address and Radicalize Western Women. An Exemplary Analysis of the Online Magazine Dabiq," *Journal for Deradicalization*, no. 9 (2016): 39-100; See also Cynthia Miller-Idris and Hillary Pilkington, "Women are Joining the Far Right – We Need to Understand Why," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/24/women-far-right-gender-roles-radical-right-migrant-muslim; Policy Research from the Blair Institute by Katherine Brown, Rachel Bryson, Bulama Bukarti, Devorah Margolin, Elizabeth Pearson, Charlie Winter, and Emily Winterbotham: https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/debunking-myths-gender-andextremism.

[38] Devorah Margolin and Charlie Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence," *The ISIS Files, The George Washington University* (June 2021): 1-54, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/downloads/3484zg88m?locale=en.

[39] Leonie B. Jackson, *The Monstrous & the Vulnerable: Framing British Jihadi Brides*. Oxford University Press, 2022. Pearson, "Shamima Begum: How Europe Toughened Its Stance on Women Returning from ISIS."

[40] Audrey Alexander and Rebecca Turkington, "Treatment of Terrorists: How Does Gender Affect Justice?" *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 8 (2018): 24-29, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/CTC-SENTINEL-092018.pdf; Ester Strømmen, "Female Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Da'esh: Victims or Perpetrators?" *PluriCourts Research Paper* 17, no. 1 (2016) 1-71, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2962231; Summer Jackson, Katie Ratcliff, and Jeff Gruenewald, "Gender and Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism in the United States." *Crime & Delinquency* 69, no. 5 (2021): 1044-1070, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00112872110047535; Gathings and Parrotta, "The Use of Gendered Narratives in the Courtroom."

[41] Stephanie Bontrager, Kelle Barrick, and Elizabeth Stupi, "Gender and sentencing: A metaanalysis of contemporary research," *Journal of Gender Race & Justice* 16 (2013): 352.

[42] Bontrager, Barrick, and Stupi, "Gender and sentencing: A metaanalysis of contemporary research," 352.

[43] "Between two fires: Danger and desperation in Syria's Al-Hol camp," *Doctors Without Borders*, November 2022, https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/sites/default/files/documents/MSB141137%28High%29.pdf.

[44] Kiriloi M. Ingram, "An Analysis of ISIS's Gendered Propaganda Targeted Towards Women: From Territorial Control to Insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2021): 1-17; Nelly Lahoud, "Empowerment or Subjugation: An Analysis of ISIL's Gendered Messaging," *UN Women* (June 2018): 1-26, https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Arab%20States/Attachments/Publications/Lahoud-Fin-Web-rev.pdf; Devorah Margolin, forthcoming unpublished PhD diss., (King's College London, 2020).

[45] This has parallels with women from other extremist ideologies which emphasize traditional gender roles, for example far right violent extremists who may also promote women as traditional wives ('tradwives').

[46] This saw women in the out-group being deliberately and systematically victimized through its system of governance, something that most clearly manifested in its revival of slavery (specifically in relation to its enslavement of Yazidi women), as well as in the less prominent context of its collective economic, corporal, and capital punishment of Shia Muslim, Christian, and even some Sunni Muslim populations (among many others). Crucially, ISIS justified all these actions on ideological grounds even when they were clearly motivated (at least in part) by pragmatism (e.g., a desire to accrue wealth).

[47] Kiriloi M. Ingram, "IS's Appeal to Western Women: Policy Implications," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) - The Hague* 8, no. 4 (2017): 1-12.; Ingram, "An Analysis of ISIS's Gendered Propaganda Targeted Towards Women: From Territorial Control to Insurgency," 1-17.

[48] Craig Whiteside, "New Masters of Revolutionary Warfare: The ISIS Movement (2002-2016)," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 4 (2016): 4-18.

[49] Charlie Winter and Devorah Margolin, "The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and ISIS," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 7 (2017): 23-28, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-mujahidat-dilemma-female-combatants-and-the-islamic-state/.

[50] Devorah Margolin, "The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups," in *Perspectives on the Future of Women, Gender, and Violent Extremism*, ed. Audrey Alexander (Washington, DC: The George Washington University Program on Extremism, 2019), 40–49, https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Perspectives%20on%20the%20Future%20of%20Women%2C%20Gender%20and%20Violent%20Extremism.pdf.

[51] "The war has broken out and the caller to Jihad has called for it, and the doors of the heavens have opened, if you don't want to be [one] of the knights, then make room for the women to commence, and take the eyeliner O you women with turbans and beards, if not then to the horses and here are the reins and shackles." Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, "Follow the Caravan," 2004.

[52] Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, "Will the Religion Wane While I Live," 2005.

[53] Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was leader of ISIS in Iraq, another incarnation of AQI as it transitioned into ISIS.

[54] Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, "The Harvest of the Years in the Land of the Monotheists," 2007.

[55] Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, "The Harvest of the Years in the Land of the Monotheists." 2007.

[56] Jessica Davis, "Evolution of Global Jihad: Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 4 (2013): 279-291.

[57] Al-Hayat Media Center, "From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone," *Dabiq* 7, 2015, 54-67.

[58] Charlie Winter, "Women of ISIS: A Manifesto on Women by the al-Khansa' Brigade," *Quilliam*, February 5, 2015, 22.

[59] Al-Hayat Media Center, "From the Battles of Al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions," *Dabiq* 11, 2015, 46-56; Al-Hayat Media Center, "Break the Cross," *Dabiq* 15, July 2016, 46-63.

[60] Islamic State Central Media Diwan, "I Will Die While Islam Is Glorious," *Al-Naba* 59, 2016, 15.

[61] "Valuable Advice and Important Analysis on the Rules for Women's Participation in Jihad," translated by Charlie Winter, 2015.

[62] Devorah Margolin, "The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups," 40-49.

[63] Jason Hanna, "New Apparent ISIS Post Threatens Japanese Hostage, Jordanian Pilot," *CNN*, last updated January 27, 2015, https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/27/world/isis-japan-jordan-hostages/index.html.

[64] Al-Hayat Media Center, "The Rāfidah from Ibn Saba' to the Dajjāl," *Dabiq* 13, 2016, 32-45.

[65] Al-Hayat Media Center, "A Message from East Africa," *Rumiyah* 2, 2016, 2-3.

[66] Al-Hayat Media Center, "Our Journey to Allah," *Rumiyah* 11, 2017, 12-15.

[67] Al-Hayat Media Center, "Our Journey to Allah," *Rumiyah* 11, 2017, 12-15.

[68] Islamic State Central Media Diwan, "The Obligation on Women in Jihad against the Enemies," *Al-Naba* 100, October 2017, 11.

[69] Islamic State Central Media Diwan, "Stories from the Jihad of Women I," *Al-Naba* 102, October 2017, 9.

[70] Al-Hayat Media Center, "Inside the Caliphate 7," February 2018.

[71] Devorah Margolin and Charlie Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence," 15.

[72] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "This Is Our Aqeeda and This Is Our Manhaj," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog* (blog), 2015, https://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/10/this-isour-aqeeda-and-this-is-our-manhaj-islam. ISIS claimed this 'law' was derived through an absolute reliance on the 'principles of proof' found in the Quran, Sunna, and the chronicles of the first three generations of Muslims from the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

[73] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006): 207–39.

[74] ISIS's creation of an in-group and out-group identity created a good versus evil mentality, seeking to demonize the out-group. As research has demonstrated, after creating an 'us' versus 'them' typology, extremists ascribe negative attributes to the out-group, even classifying them as 'sub-human.' This dehumanization rationalizes violence against its perceived enemies. See: Ingram, "IS's Appeal to Western Women: Policy Implications," 1–12; Kurt Braddock, *Weaponized Words: The Strategic Role of Persuasion in Violent Radicalization and Counter-Radicalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[75] Margolin, forthcoming unpublished PhD.

[76] Al-Hayat Media Center, "Sisters: I Will Outnumber the Other Nations Through You," *Rumiyah* 5, January 6, 2017, 34-35. Several primary source documents dictate ISIS's policy

of underage marriage. These were excluded in order to protect the personally identifiable information of these minors. More information on the group's policy of underage marriages can be found in its propaganda.

[77] One way ISIS was able to control local populations was by controlling weddings and registering the marriages of both its supporters as well as those that lived under its control. Marriage contracts often asked women about their families, virginity, and required a 'premarital examination' and copies of local IDs. Marriages were witnessed by only men, and a special section on the contract asked if a woman consented or remained silent. For examples, see: *Marriage Certificate*, 2015, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/concern/artifacts/k643b116n?locale=en, (Source: 36_001648_74); *Questionnaire/Marriage Contract*, 2015, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/concern/artifacts/rj430453j?locale=en, (Source: 33_001520); *Marriage Contract*, 2015, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/concern/artifacts/r494vk17h?locale=en, (Source: 32_001506); *Contract of Nikah: Islamic Court, Euphrates Province*, 2016, Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/contract-nikah-islamic-court-euphrates-province/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2017-207234); *Marriage Confirmation Document: Islamic Court, Raqqa Province*, Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/marriage-confirmation-document-islamic-court-raqqa-province/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2017-113628); Several files were also found as part of Al-Tamimi's collection: Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," 2016, including Specimen 13H, 22M, and 22N in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog, https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-1; "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," 2016, including Specimen 23R, 23S, 23T, 23U, 23V, 23W, 36H, and 36I in Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog, https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/09/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-2; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.- IV)," 2016, Specimen 42G: Request to agree to a marriage, Rutba area, Anbar. Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog, https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-3.

[78] Fieldwork, "Interview 14," 2022.

[79] Ingram, "An Analysis of ISIS's Gendered Propaganda Targeted Towards Women: From Territorial Control to Insurgency," 1-17; Lahoud, "Empowerment or Subjugation: An Analysis of ISIL's Gendered Messaging," 1-26; Margolin, forthcoming unpublished PhD.

[80] Margolin, forthcoming unpublished PhD; See also: Al-Hayat Media Center, "Abide in Your Homes," *Rumiyah* 3, November, 11 2016; Al-Hayat Media Center, "Sisters: The woman is a shepherd in her husband's home and responsible for her flock," *Rumiyah* 9, May 4, 2017.

[81] Aaron Zelin, "New statement from ISIS of Iraq and al-Sham: 'Charter of the City,'" *Jihadology*, June 12, 2014, https://jihadology.net/2014/06/12/new-statement-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-charter-of-the-city; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents: Specimen 11L: City charter, Sirte," 2015.

[82] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 7Y: Prohibition on gender mixing, Manbij, Aleppo Province, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 1G: Warning against certain

customs on Eid al-Adha: Hasakah Province (October 2014), 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 12T: Statement on imposing Shari'a regulations in Aden University, Aden Province, Yemen [c. October 2015], 2016.

[83] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 1F: Diwan al-Hisbah (Derna: Cyrenaica Province, Libya) on women's clothing (October 2014), 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 1I: Restrictions on women's clothing, Tel Abyad, Raqqa province (December 2013), 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 10R: Regulations for shops in Raqqa province, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 2Z: On selling prohibited garments, Ninawa province, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 13V: Statement from ISIS in AdenAbyan (Yemen), 2016.

[84] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 5P: Imposition of Hijab Shari'i on Women, Jarabulus, November 2013, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents." Specimen 6J: Prohibition on shaving beards, 2015.

[85] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 10M: Early rulings imposed in Mosul (June 2014), 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 12V: Imposition of the niqab in Raqqa (January 2014), 2016.

[86] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 8F: Regulations for clothes shop owners imposed by Diwan al-Hisba (Albukamal area): September 2015, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 10R: Regulations for shops in Raqqa province, 2015; *Written Pledge, Raqqa Province*, Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/written-pledge-raqqa-province/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2017-110372).

[87] One fatwa stipulates that women could not travel without a male escort because the Prophet Muhammad said, "[t]he woman is not to travel without the mahram." *Fatwa 45 – Question: What is the ruling when a woman travels without her mahram (if she has a mahram and does not go out with him)?*, 2014, Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/fatwa-45-question-ruling-woman-travels-without-mahram-mahram-not-go/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2015-125621_FATWA45); Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 1Y: Fatwa on Women's Travel: AlBuhuth wa al-Eftaa' Committee", 2015.

[88] *Fatwa 37 – Question: What is the ruling on travel to areas controlled by the regime out of necessity?*, 2014, Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/fatwa-37-question-ruling-travel-areas-controlled-regime-necessity/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2015-203984_FATWA37); Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi. "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 6G: Conditions for travel outside Mosul, 2015. For further reading, see: Gina Vale, "Piety is in the eye of the bureaucrat: The Islamic State's strategy of civilian control." *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 1 (2020): 34-40.

[89] For example, permission forms and other regulations imposed by ISIS for women's travel, requesting anything from reasons for travel to the destination location and biometric information about male escorts. See: Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 14N: Travel slip from 'Euphrates Province' to Damascus, 2016; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen M: On Movement of Women and the Garages: Raqqa Province, 2015.

[90] Fieldwork, "Interview 14," 2022.

[91] Fieldwork, "Interview 12," 2022.

[92] Fieldwork, "Interview 1," 2022.

[93] For example, one prisoner handover document details arrestable offenses such as 'mixing with women not permitted to [the arrested individual],' 'being in seclusion against the sharia with women not permitted to [the arrested individual],' 'sitting near a woman not permitted to [the arrested individual],' and 'suspicion of adultery with a married woman.' *Prisoner Handover Documents,* 2015, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/concern/artifacts/hx11xf263?locale=en, (Source: 25_001347).

[94] Fieldwork, "Interview 14," 2022.

[95] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 13S: Reprimand penalties for various offences, Mosul (2014), 2016.

[96] Fieldwork, "Interview 14," 2022.

[97] In addition to the one image of an adult woman, there are four images of prepubescent girls, all of whom were dressed modestly. Margolin, forthcoming unpublished PhD.

[98] Al-Hayat Media Center, "Stoning a zaniyah in Ar-Raqqah," *Dabiq* 7, 2015.

[99] *Guidance: Commanding General Committee*, 2015, Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/guidance-commanding-general-committee/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2017-111961).

[100] Ingram, "An Analysis of ISIS's Gendered Propaganda Targeted Towards Women: From Territorial Control to Insurgency," 1-17; Elizabeth Pearson, "Wilayat Shahidat: Boko Haram, ISIS, and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber," in *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines*, ed. Jacob Zenn, *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* (2018): 33–52.

[101] For more on this, see: Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, and Charlie Winter, "Women in the Islamic State (2015)," in *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of ISIS Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 199-214.

[102] For more discussion see: Gina Vale "Cubs in the Lions' Den: Indoctrination and Recruitment of Children Within Islamic State Territory," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, Department of War Studies, King's College London* (2018) 1-35, https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/472209/1/ICSR_Report_Cubs_in_the_Lions_Den_Indoctrination_and_Recruitment_of_Children_Within_Islamic_State_Territory.pdf.

[103] Al-Hayat Media Center, "To Our Sisters: A Jihad without Fighting by Umm Sumayyah Al-Muhājirah," *Dabiq 11,* 2015.

[104] Al-Hayat Media Center, "To Our Sisters: A Jihad without Fighting by Umm Sumayyah Al-Muhājirah," *Dabiq 11,* 2015.

[105] Al-Hayat Media Center, "Sisters: Two, Three or Four By Umm Sumayyah Al-Muhājirah," *Dabiq 12*, 2015.

[106] Charlie Winter, "Women of ISIS: A Manifesto on Women by the al-Khansa' Brigade," 22.

[107] "German court delivers third genocide verdict against ISIS member for the enslavement and abuse of Yazidi woman in Syria and Iraq," *Doughty Street Chambers*, June 21, 2023, https://www.doughtystreet.co.uk/news/german-court-delivers-third-genocide-verdict-against-isis-member-enslavement-and-abuse-yazidi.

[108] Melissa Eddy, "German Woman Convicted of a Crime Against Humanity in Death of Yazidi Child," *New York Times*, October 25, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/25/world/europe/germany-isis-yazidi-child.html.

[109] Ewelina U. Ochab, "Dutch Court Prosecuting First-Ever Case For Enslaving Yazidis In Syria," *Forbes*, February 22, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2023/02/22/dutch-court-prosecuting-first-ever-case-for-enslaving-yazidis-in-syria/?sh=5637230e2c7a.

[110] Jennifer Venis, "Justice for the Yazidis," *International Bar Association*, September 27, 2022, https://www.ibanet.org/Justice-for-the-Yazidis.

[111] Joshua Baker, "I'm not a monster," *BBC*, November 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/ggkz0ug4ff/im-not-a-monster.

[112] Daniel Milton and Brian Dodwell. "Jihadi Brides? Examining a Female Guesthouse Registry from the Islamic State's Caliphate," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 5 (2018): 16-22.

[113] Such guesthouses are discussed in Azadeh Moaveni, *Guest house for young widows: Among the women of ISIS* (New York: Random House, 2019).

[114] Fieldwork, "Interview 14," 2022.

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[117] The ISIS Files Document 34_001556, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence"; See also: Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 14U, 15M, 19N, 19S, 21S, 21X, 21Y, 22A, 22B, and 22D, 2016; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," Specimen 36L, 33P, 33K, 33L, and 36L, 2016.

[118] *Home Request Form*, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/concern/artifacts/nk322d32h?locale=en, (Source: 36_001651_02); *Will Form and Personal Identification Form for a Brother*, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/concern/artifacts/xw42n789j?locale=en, (Source: 37_001655).

[119] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 4R: Gas Distributions in Deir az-Zor Province, 2015, https://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents.

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[121] Fieldwork, "Interview 1," 2022.

[122] The ISIS Files Document 30_001483, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence."

[123] *Untitled [Memorandum from the Office of the Wali, Raqqa Province]*, 2015, Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/untitled-memorandum-office-wali-raqqa-province/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2017-115525).

[124] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 13I: Opening of office for the share of the orphans in spoils and booty, Raqqa, 2016.

[125] For a more in-depth discussion into ISIS's education system, please read: Sara Zeiger, Farangiz Atamuradova, Lilah Elsayed, and Muna Chung, "Planting the Seeds of the Poisonous Tree: Establishing a System of Meaning Through ISIS Education," The ISIS Files, The George Washington University (February 2021): 1-117, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/report/j3860694x.

[126] Fieldwork, "Interview 2", 2022.; Fieldwork, "Interview 9", 2022.; Fieldwork,"Interview 11",2022.; Fieldwork, "Interview 14", 2022.

[127] Fieldwork, "Interview 12," 2022.

[128] *Subject: Circulars on Sixth Grade Reforms*, 2015, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/vq27zn41g, (Source: 35_001584); Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen H: Announcement of Beginning of School Term with List of Schools (Raqqa Province), 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 3G: Registration Form at Shari'a Institute for Girls in al-Bab, Aleppo Province [c. May 2014], 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 8V: Opening of schools for registration for the new school year, Raqqa, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," Specimen 28V: Certificate to female student for passing Shari'i session, A'isha institute, Saluk, Raqqa province, 2016.

[129] Islamic State, *Arabic Grammar: 4th Primary Grade*, textbook, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/vt150j25g, (Source: 19_001087); The ISIS Files Document 19_001088, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence"; The ISIS Files Document 27_001373, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence"; The ISIS Files Document 37_001654, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration,

and Acquiescence"; See also: Zeiger, Atamuradova, Elsayed, and Chung, "Planting the Seeds of the Poisonous Tree: Establishing a System of Meaning Through ISIS Education," 1-117.

[130] *Subject: Circular Letter to Schools*, 2015, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/wh246s13j, (Source: 30_001480); *Letter To-From*, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/hq37vn57m, (Source: 30_001482); The ISIS Files Document 31_001487, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence"; The ISIS Files Document 35_001586, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence"; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 10E: Prices for printing ISIS 1st grade secondary school textbooks (Mosul area), 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," Specimen 30T: Distribution of balls for schools, Ninawa centre (school), 2016; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," Specimen 39S: Request for books from Diwan al-Ta'aleem, Ninawa, 2016.

[131] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 3F: Educational Regulations Notification Distributed in Aleppo Province, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 15A: Education regulations, Salah al-Din province, 2016; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," Specimen 27K: Report on a student for local education administration, 2016; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," Specimen 27L: Report on a student for local education administration, 2016.

[132] *Subject: Assignment Request to Supervise Girl's School*, 2015, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/f7623c57r, (Source: 35_001583).

[133] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 9G: Admission statistics for Mosul University: 2015-2016, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 12C: Announcement for the colleges of Sirte University, 2015.

[134] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 8X: Structure of ISIS-controlled Mosul University, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 9M: Timetable of classes, Mosul Medical College, 2015.

[135] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Archivist: Stories of the Mujahideen: Unseen ISIS Biographies of Outstanding Members," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog* (blog), 2016, https://www.aymennjawad.org/19132/the-archivist-stories-of-themujahideen-unseen; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "ISIS Internal Files on Dr. Imaan Mustafa al-Bagha," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog* (blog), 2020, http:// www.aymennjawad.org/2020/05/islamic-state-internal-files-on-dr-imaan-mustafa.

[136] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 6Z: Teaching and Memorization of Qur'an, Deir az-Zor Province (Dept of Dawa), 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 7Q: Session in 'Ilm, Manbij, Aleppo Province, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 10H: Prohibition on music, song and displaying

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[137] The ISIS Files Document 01_000052, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence"; See the following images of Complaint Forms filed with Islamic State Police in Wilayat Nineveh (All are found on The ISIS Files, The George Washington University):
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/wm117n98w, (Source: 01_000056, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/1j92g749n, (Source: 01_000067, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/bv73c046q, (Source: 01_000076, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/0c483j399, (Source: 01_000081, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/t148fh15c, (Source: 01_000126, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/dr26xx384, (Source: 01_000128, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/hx11xf28n, (Source: 01_000129, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/dr26xx39d, (Source: 01_000154, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/sx61dm30x, (Source: 01_000157, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/m613mx59x, (Source: 01_000182, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/ht24wj43h (Source: 01_000186, 2016);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/mc87pq30p (Source: 02_000260);
https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/j38606981, (Source: 02_000277, 2016); *Claimant (Plaintiff) Personal Information Form,* 2016, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/v405s9361, (Source: 25_001343).
[138] *Complaint Form*, 2016, The ISIS Files, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/cv43nw88q (Source: 02_000263); Also see: *Formal Written Complaint*, 2015, The ISIS Files, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/5m60qr90,c (Source: 02_000297).
[139] *Complaint Form*, 2016, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/2r36tx54r, (Source: 01_000051); *Complaint Form*, 2016, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/cj82k729x, (Source: 01_000074); *Formal Written Complaint*, The ISIS Files, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/8w32r5659, (Source: 01_000155); *Formal Written Complaint*, The ISIS Files, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/th83kz37g, (Source: 01_000156).
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[141] Faraz Khan, "Assistants of Terror: How Women Raise Funds for Da'ish in Karachi", *The Express Tribune*, December 21, 2015, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1013558/assistants-of-terror-revealed-how-women-raisefunds-for-daish-in-karachi/.
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[143] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Internal Structure of ISIS's Hisba Apparatus," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog* (blog), 2018, http://www.aymennjawad.org/21246/the-internal-structure-of-the-islamic-state-hisba.

[144] "UN Security Council Sanctions: Aqsa Mahmood," *United Nations Security Council*, 2015 https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/individual/aqsa-mahmood.

[145] Aisha's real name was not disclosed for the privacy of her family.

[146] Natalie Clancy, "ISIS Recruiter in Edmonton Enlists Canadian Woman to Join Fight in Syria," *CBC*, January 25, 2015, https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/isis-recruiter-in-edmonton-enlists-canadian-woman-to-join-fight-in-syria-1.2970535.

[147] Lauren Frayer, "In a Spanish Enclave, Women Recruit Women to Join ISIS," *NPR Parallels*, April 12, 2015, https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/04/12/398756119/in-a-spanish-enclave-women-recruit-women-tojoin-isis.

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[149] Benazir Shah and Rimmel Mohydin, "'Pray Your Wife and Children Die in Jihad,'" *Newsweek*, January 20, 2016, http://newsweekpakistan.com/pray-your-wife-and-children-die-in-jihad/; Umar Cheema, "20 Men, Women, Children from Lahore join Daesh, go to Syria," *The News*, December 31, 2015, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/85370-20-men-women-children-from-Lahore-join-Daesh-go-to-Syria.

[150] See also, Valerie M. Hudson and Hilary Matfess, "In plain sight: The neglected linkage between brideprice and violent conflict." *International Security* 42, no. 1 (2017): 7-40.

[151] Al-Hayat Media Center, "Inside the Caliphate 7."; Al-Hayat Media Center, ""Foreword: A Message from East Africa," *Rumiyah 2*, 2016.; Al-Hayat Media Center, ""How I Came to Islam by Umm Khalid Al-Finlandiyyah," *Dabiq 15*, 2016. ISIS media 2016a

[152] J.M. Berger and Jonathan Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter," in *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*, The Brookings Institute (March 2015): 15, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf.

[153] "ISIS-Linked Hacker and Abu Hussain Al Britani Associate Arrested for Leak of U.S. Military and Government Personnel Information," *Flashpoint*, October 15, 2015. https://www.flashpoint-intel.com/blog/cybercrime/islamic-state-linked-hacker-and-abu-hussain-al-britani-associate-arrested-for-leak-of-u-s-military-and-government-personnel-information/.

[154] It should be noted that though the given author for this section was noted to be female, and these articles were targeted towards a female audience, the gender of the author was more difficult to confirm in practice and there was a chance that in some cases male authors may be posing as female.

[155] Al-Hayat Media Center, ""How I Came to Islam by Umm Khalid Al-Finlandiyyah," *Dabiq 15*, 2016.

[156] Al-Hayat Media Center, "A Call to Hijrah," *Dabiq* 1, 2014.

[157] Al-Hayat Media Center, "A call to all Muslim: doctors, engineers, scholars, and specialists" *Dabiq* 1, 2014.

[158] This could be comparable to an extent to countries like Saudi Arabia which enforce particularly strict gender segregation in the public.

[159] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 2L: Fatwa on Nurses with Doctors – segregation of the sexes, 2015; *Administrative Order from al-Tabqa Hospital to Female Section Nurses*, Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/administrative-order-al-tabqa-hospital-female-section-nurses/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2017-111984); *Fatwa 42 – Question: What is the ruling on the presence of a nurse in the office of a doctor by themselves without the mahram present in the city and in some villages?* Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/fatwa-42-question-ruling-presence-nurse-office-doctor-without-mahram-present-city-villages/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2015-125621_FATWA42). Also noted in Gina Vale. "Piety is in the eye of the bureaucrat: The Islamic State's strategy of civilian control." *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 1 (2020): 34-40.

[160] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 1S: Advertisement of Services for Umm al-Mu'mineen A'isha Hospital, Aleppo Province, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 3I: Reopening of applications for medical school in Raqqa, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 6N: Opportunities in Midwifery Courses, Health Department, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 11S: Notice to doctors who leave ISIS territory, Deir az-Zor Province (2015), 2015.

[161] Marga Zambrana, Hazar Aydemirm, and Emma Graham-Harrison, "Nine British Medics Enter ISIS Stronghold to Work in Hospitals," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/21/british-medical-students-syria-isis.

[162] Fieldwork, "Interview 12," 2022.

[163] For example, teachers – both male and female – were required to take mandatory sharia before being cleared to teach in schools. Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen L: Shari'a Session for Teachers, Raqqa Province, 2015; See also: Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 1V: Call for repentance of teachers in IS-controlled parts of Syria: February 2015, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 3C: More on repentance programs in Manbij, Aleppo Province, Aleppo 2015, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 4U: Call for Repentance of Female Education Workers, Al-Basira, Deir az-Zor Province, 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 5N: Repentance for Female Employees in Schools, Raqqa, 2015.

[164] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," Specimen 26A: Closing schools for girls that do not have female staff, Dijla province, 2016; On girls education, see also: The ISIS Files Document 19_001084, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence"; The ISIS Files Document 37_001656, cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence"; *Information on Students at Bara'im (Blossoms) of Nineveh Orange*, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/vh53wv72q,

(Source: 05_000450); *Forms of Assignment and Variations,* 2015, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/4x51hj023, (Source: 30_001478).

[165] For example, women working in internet halls or factories. See: Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents," Specimen 9Y: Conditions for opening a new hall [for internet], Raqqa, October 2015; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (cont.)," Specimen 18V: Further Internet restrictions in Mosul, 2016; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of ISIS Administrative Documents (continued...again)," Specimen 23H: List of employees at a tailoring factory, Shirqat area, 2016; The following ISIS Files Documents cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence": The ISIS Files 35_001606; The ISIS Files 35_001614; The ISIS Files 35_001616; The ISIS Files 35_001621; The ISIS Files 35_001622; The ISIS Files 35_001615; The ISIS Files 35_001629.

[166] The following ISIS Files Documents cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence": The ISIS Files 35_001606; The ISIS Files 35_001614; The ISIS Files 35_001616; The ISIS Files 35_001621; The ISIS Files 35_001622; The ISIS Files 35_001615; The ISIS Files 35_001629.

[167] In one rental contract, ISIS noted, "A rental agreement cannot be made with a wife if the husband is still alive." *Lease Agreement*, 2016, The ISIS Files, The George Washington University, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/0z708w41n, (Source: 36_001651_07); Please also see the following ISIS Files Documents cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence": The ISIS Files 35_001627; The ISIS Files 10_000760.

[168] For more on this, see: Devorah Margolin, Mathilde Becker Aarseth, Hans Christensen, Tati Fontana, and Mark Maffett, "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to ISIS's Governance Strategy," The ISIS Files, The George Washington University (June 2015): 1-57, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/report/2n49t1699; For examples, see the following ISIS Files Documents cited in Margolin and Winter, "Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence": The ISIS Files 23_001251; The ISIS Files 06_000511; The ISIS Files 06_000489; The ISIS Files 06_000479; The ISIS Files 05_000447.

[169] While al-Qaeda in Iraq utilized female suicide bombers in Iraq beginning in 2005, and Boko Haram does this frequently, this is distinct from policing and combat roles which demonstrate an expansion of institutionalized training and roles for women under ISIS. See: Margolin, "The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups," 40–49.

[170] These are outlined in greater detail in Anne Speckhard and Asaad Almohammad, "The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers," *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism* (Research Reports), April 23, 2017, http://www.icsve.org/research-reports/the-operational-ranks-and-roles-of-female-isis-operatives-from-assassins-and-morality-police-to-spies-and-suicide-bombers/.

[171] Speckhard and Almohammad, "The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers."

[172] Kathy Gilsinan, "The ISIS Crackdown on Women, by Women," *The Atlantic*, July 25, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/07/the-women-of-isis/375047/.

[173] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Internal Structure of ISIS's Hisba Apparatus," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog* (blog), 2018, http://www.aymennjawad.org/21246/the-internal-structure-of-the-islamic-state-hisba.

[174] It was not clear if a woman was conducting the flogging.

[175] Fieldwork, "Interview 14," 2022.

[176] See for example: *Fatwa 41 – Question: What is the ruling on carrying a weapon over the abaya by which a part of her body may be exposed or show its shape?* Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/fatwa-41-question-ruling-carrying-weapon-abaya-part-body-may-exposed-show-shape/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2015-125621_FATWA41).

[177] *Subject: The Reactivation (of the Female Division) in Some Cities of ISIS: Department of the Hisba,* Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/harmony-program/subject-reactivation-female-division-cities-islamic-state-department-hisba/, (Reference Number: NMEC-2017-406558).

[178] Fieldwork, "Interview 10," 2022.

[179] Anita Peresin and Alberto Cervone, "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015): 495-509.

[180] Azadeh Moaveni, "ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape," New York Times, November 21, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/world/middleeast/isis-wives-and-enforcers-in-syria-recount-collaboration-anguish-and-escape.html.

[181] Azadeh Moaveni, "ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape," *New York Times*, November 21, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/22/world/middleeast/isis-wives-and-enforcers-in-syria-recount-collaboration-anguish-and-escape.html.

[182] Fieldwork, "Interview 14," 2022.

[183] "American Woman Who Led ISIS Battalion Sentenced to 20 Years," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, November 1, 2022. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/american-woman-who-led-isis-battalion-sentenced-20-years.

[184] Moaveni, "ISIS Women and Enforcers in Syria Recount Collaboration, Anguish and Escape."

[185] "Iraq: Women Suffer under ISIS. For Sunnis, Lives Curtailed; for Yezidis, New Accounts of Brutal Rapes," *Human Rights Watch,* April 5, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/06/iraq-women-suffer-under-isis.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Charlie Winter, "Women of ISIS: A Manifesto on Women by the al-Khansa' Brigade," 22.

[188] Ibid.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Winter and Margolin, "The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and ISIS," 23–28.

[192] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "ISIS Fatwas on Women and Jihad," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog* (blog), 2021, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2021/03/islamicstate-fatwas-on-women-and-jihad.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Margolin, "The Changing Roles of Women in Violent Islamist Groups," 40–49; Winter and Margolin, "The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and ISIS," 23–28; Charlie Winter, "ISIS, Women and Jihad: Breaking With Convention," *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, September 13, 2018, https://institute.global/policy/isis-women-and-jihad-breaking-convention.

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5

Islamic State Propaganda

Charlie Winter

Following the establishment of its so-called caliphate in 2014, Islamic State generated a diverse array of media products, many of them published simultaneously in as many as eight languages, ranging from video clips, feature films, newspapers, and photo-stories, to radio bulletins, posters, and mobile phone apps. Each piece of its propaganda was strategically designed not just for the recruitment of new supporters, but also for shaping perceptions, manipulating understanding, and steering behaviors. To be sure, its production of propaganda was not new; however, from 2014 onwards, it was a sphere of activity that was systematically scaled up, accelerated, and globalized.

Islamic State's sophisticated and extensive use of strategic communication was and, in many ways, remains unprecedented. This form of communication was integral to its caliphate project, amplifying its operations daily and solidifying its place in the annals of modern insurgency. Its nuanced approach to propaganda starkly contrasted the simplistic viewpoint held by many, even at a policy level, who perceived it merely as a tool to draw supporters and showcase its "savagery." Throughout Islamic State's rise and, in more recent years, decline, the common belief was that its media operations were a homogeneous, straightforward form of communication that could be readily countered with a similarly straightforward, homogeneous response. This mainstream perception, however, proved dangerously inadequate as it failed to comprehend the multi-faceted tactical and strategic benefits that Islamic State derived from its propaganda.

The existing research literature on Islamic State's approach to and usage of propaganda is rich, but it is overly focused on its appearance and role in online spaces. Moreover, it is for the most part highly theoretical and, for that reason, not immediately applicable in a court of law. This report sets out to rectify that imbalance, providing a structured analysis of why and how Islamic State engaged in outreach in the way it did during the 'golden years' of its caliphate. Such an analysis has become increasingly important in recent years as jurisdictions around

the world have sought to try third country nationals who participated – as either perpetrators or producers – in the violent mediatization of Islamic State's project in Iraq and Syria. Whether they served as co-conspirators to executioners like the U.K. national El Shafee Elsheikh or as narrators like the Canadian citizen Mohammed Khalifa (aka Abu Ridwan al-Kanadi), foreign nationals were always disproportionately impactful in Islamic State's propaganda cycle.[1] They played pivotal roles not only in the furtherance of its proto-state project, but also in its incitement of terroristic violence back in their home countries.

Accordingly, international jurisdictions are – and will continue to be – duty bound to prosecute these individuals, if and when they are repatriated to their home countries. Moreover, several jurisdictions have in recent years found themselves prosecuting not their own citizens, but Iraqi and Syrian supporters of Islamic State who fled to their own territories as its prospects soured from late 2015 onwards. Consider, for example, Finland, which in 2015 arrested Iraqi twins over their participation in Islamic State's mass summary execution of Iraqi soldiers at Camp Speicher the previous year.[2] What's more, besides this, Islamic State propaganda materials have played and continue to play a central evidentiary role in prosecutions relating to both support for the group in Syria and Iraq and domestic terrorism and related offences.[3]

On the basis that, for the above-stated reasons, Islamic State propaganda will continue to have an enduring centrality in the context of Islamic State-related prosecutions for years to come, this report provides a broad but detailed strategic overview of the structures, processes and motivations behind Islamic State's media activities in Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2019 – that is, the period that constituted the high point of its proto-state. In doing so, this chapter aims to establish a rigorous, evidence-based context for prosecutors working to charge Islamic State media activists, producers, and perpetrators, enabling more effective prosecution of the actors that were involved in these activities and providing a well-sourced baseline for jurisdictions aiming to hold the movement accountable for its crimes.

This chapter has four sections. The first section provides a brief history of Islamic State propaganda; the second section gives an overview of Islamic State's strategic approach to propaganda and propaganda-adjacent activities; the third section describes how Islamic State engaged in the production and distribution of propaganda and propaganda-adjacent activities; and the final section focuses in particular on the role of execution propaganda in Islamic State's overarching outreach strategy, exploring how it was produced and why (with a focus on foreigner fighter involvement and terrorism incitement) as well as what its significance is as a potential evidence base for prosecutors.

The intention is that prosecutors will be able to draw on this analysis as they build out a contextual basis for the cases they are prosecuting, using it to understand precisely what role the defendants in question played within Islamic State, how this overlapped with Islamic State's perpetration of war crimes and acts of violence, and why they, whether translators, narrators, videographers, photographers, editors, or producers, "mattered" in the context of its global terrorist project.

A Brief History of Islamic State Propaganda

The roots of Islamic State's approach to propaganda can be traced back to al-Qa'ida's activities in Afghanistan and Iraq during the 1990s and early 2000s. Recognizing the power of media in shaping perceptions, al-Qa'ida heavily relied on propaganda as a tool for recruitment, ideological indoctrination, and fostering anti-Western sentiments. Ayman al-Zawahiri, one of al-Qa'ida's top leaders, famously once noted that "media is half the battle," underscoring the organization's understanding of the value of strategic communication in its war against perceived enemies of Islam.

The subsequent emergence of al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) in 2004 marked a significant shift in the conventional production and distribution of propaganda. AQI harnessed the growing influence of the internet, using online forums alongside traditional channels to broadcast its message. This allowed it and its supporters to reach a wider audience and fast-track their dissemination of propaganda, making communications efforts both more efficient and more effective.

Following AQI's transformation into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006, the organization continued to prioritize the production of "jihadi media." Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, ISI's long-time War Minister, championed a more systematic and aggressive approach to propaganda creation and dissemination. His organization's commitment to well-resourced and ambitious strategic communication remained steadfast and unyielding even when ISI was at its lowest ebb in the late 2000s, acknowledging the critical role it played in ISI's effort to create and sustain a militant "Islamic" state.

This focus on propaganda became even more pronounced when ISI morphed into Islamic State after its intervention in the Syrian Civil War. At this juncture, Islamic State massively ramped up its production capabilities and moved away from using closed forums such as Shumukh al-Islam and Al-Platform Media for media distribution. Instead, its media officials and supporter communities began to distribute propaganda on more open mass social media platforms like Twitter

and YouTube, reaching out to a global audience and making their content more accessible than ever before.

The declaration of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's caliphate in 2014 brought about yet another radical change in Islamic State's approach to propaganda. Its production and distribution of media content became formalized and centralized, fueled by an injection of resources and an influx of foreign "talent" in the form of foreign nationals who had flocked to join the caliphate following its declaration, bringing with them a diverse set of skills and experiences that enriched Islamic State's propaganda efforts.

From 2015 to 2019, Islamic State's vast and complex media infrastructure consolidated, becoming its primary method of engagement with the rest of the world. It served as a potent tool for recruitment, a platform to intimidate adversaries, and a means to project, on a global basis, Islamic State's image and narrative. Through propaganda, the movement was able to create a powerful and enduring presence, even while it was facing near existential military and territorial losses, reinforcing the truth in Zawahiri's words: "media is half the battle."

It is important to bear in mind that, throughout this evolution, but especially from 2014 onwards when Islamic State was actively attempting to recruit both men and women, the movement's approach to propaganda was highly, and very deliberately, gendered. Islamic State reached out directly to female audiences through a variety of methods. Women-centric articles were featured in publications such as English-language magazines like *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, and Arabic-language materials like *al-Naba'*. Its materials not only provided theological content specifically designed for women, but also offered practical advice including recipes and lifestyle tips. From 2018 onwards, the organization even began to directly call for women's military mobilization as its prospects in Syria and Iraq soured. It is worth noting that some, if not most, of these materials were likely produced by women, although the precise scale of women's involvement in Islamic State's day-to-day media operations at the time remains unknown.

This highly gendered approach to communication extended beyond topics that were explicitly focused on what Islamic State saw as "women's issues." Even when women were not its direct focus, Islamic State's media content was always gendered. The movement exerted significant and continuous efforts to promote a hyper-masculine image of its male supporters by glorifying the "warrior mujahidin." This was achieved through the intensive mediatization of its male fighters. Women, on the other hand, were conspicuously absent from the visual landscape of Islamic State propaganda, due to what was presented as a theological

necessity. The exclusion of women from these visuals reinforced traditional gender norms within the organization and underscored its version of the masculine ideal. This not only made its propaganda more appealing to potential male recruits but also subtly reinforced the group's interpretation of Islamic theology, which placed men in roles of public power and women in private, supportive roles.

Islamic State's Strategic Approach to Propaganda

According to the conflict communications scholar Carsten Bockstette, jihadist movements have historically had a significant advantage in information environments over better-equipped, better-resourced, and more numerous adversaries due to the way that they conceptualize the communication battlespace.[4] They are able to take advantage of a "favorable communication asymmetry" that arises from their ability to nimbly navigate the global influence landscape, thereby compensating for a comparative lack of military and resource might.[5] With relative freedom of action, jihadist actors are better able to carry out highly planned, high-risk outreach strategies using both social, mainstream, and legacy media channels, influencing friend and foe alike.

Jihadist communication campaigns generally focus on one of three strategic objectives: propagation, legitimization, and intimidation.[6] Propagation refers to the efforts to attract new recruits, draw in new donors, and expand the reach of their ideology. Legitimization is a more defensive form of communication that focuses on justifying violence and situating the movement in question's actions within a broad Islamic-historic context. Intimidation efforts target adversary audiences and are most prominent in the context of terrorist operations and execution propaganda, both of which are typically deployed for their communicative, rather than kinetic, potential.

Besides propagation, legitimization, and intimidation, there is at least one more core communication objective to bear in mind in the context of Islamic State's deployment of propaganda –instruction. While scarce in quantity, Islamic State's instructional materials have been central to its aggressive communication campaigns since 2014. In 2017-2019, for example, its central media offices issued extensive, detailed advice on how to commit terrorist attacks using anything from knives and cars to more complex tactics like hostage-taking and bomb-making, advice that was operationalized by Islamic State supporters in the West on a number of occasions. To be sure, Islamic State was not the first to produce such materials – they have a rich pedigree both in and out of the jihadi paradigm, including AQAP's Inspire magazine and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Muqrin's 2004

publication, 'A practical course for guerrilla warfare' – nor will it be the last. However, their global impact is, at least at the time of writing, unprecedented.

Per Bockstette, jihadist movements (Islamic State foremost among them) usually follow a five-step model to achieve these objectives. (Notably, this model is effective for strategic communication planning outside of the context of insurgency, and can equally be applied to non-jihadist political marketing campaigns.) Bockstette's "five steps" include strategic end-state assessment and development; communication infrastructure evaluation; target audience analysis and channel selection; plan development and execution; and monitoring and evaluation.[7]

In recent decades, this approach has allowed jihadist communicators to exploit an asymmetry in which their enemies are often bound by ethical and moral conventions associated with modern-day war-fighting, while jihadists are not. Notably, while this model was first proposed in 2008, today's advanced jihadist media production efforts bear little resemblance to the rough-cut tapes of the mid-to late 2000s. However, the three strategic objectives identified as part of it have remained enduringly relevant, as is demonstrated in the following pages.

Below, two key documents relating Islamic State's official position on media warfare and propaganda are analyzed. The first document, titled "To those entrusted with the message," is a speech attributed to Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir, a former first and war minister of the Islamic State of Iraq, who was one of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's immediate successors. The speech surfaced in 2010, after Abu Hamzah's death, when the group was at its lowest ebb since its formal emergence in 2006. The second document, titled "Media operative, you are also a mujahid," is a field-guide for media operatives published by the Himmah Library, Islamic State's official printing press. It was first released in mid-2015 when the group was at the height of its influence, and has been frequently cited in its communications around propaganda in the years since.

Both documents have a similar focus and simultaneously speak to the relevance of Bockstette's theoretical framework; they aim to address core supporters and justify why Islamic State invests so much time and energy into media activism by, among other things, setting out its strategic and tactical value.

"To those Entrusted with the Message"[8]

Abu Hamzah's speech revolves around 14 guidelines that are grouped into four themes and align directly with Bockstette's communication objectives:

propagation, legitimization, and intimidation. The fourth theme covers educational and administrative matters, which are not seen as motivators for propaganda activism.[9]

Throughout the text, Abu Hamzah emphasizes the importance of proactive and positive outreach as the primary means to propagate the ideology of what would, four years after the speech was first published, become the group known as Islamic State. He advises media workers to establish communication and dialogue with sympathizers and to prepare daily video news bulletins on events related to the prospects of the "mujahidin." He also suggests compiling a monthly memorandum of proposals and guidance for the "mujahidin and commanders of jihad." By correctly implementing these instructions, Abu Hamzah holds that jihadist media operatives – wherever they are – can efficiently expand the global support base of the movement, "raising the spirits of the mujahidin," frightening their enemies, and making the group and its supporters appear as "one ummah fighting for one objective on many front lines."

Abu Hamzah also emphasizes the media worker's crucial role in legitimizing jihad in the face of its adversaries. He stresses that they must constantly work to "defam[e] the image of the infidels, expos[e] their immorality, and describ[e] every defect they have." At the same time, they must understand their adversaries' arguments to develop counter-messaging campaigns based on this awareness. If successful in these endeavours, the jihadist media operative will be equipped with everything they need to "expose their [enemies'] contradictions, violations, and grave sins." Essentially, this second stream of media operations aims to deride any ideas that run counter to Islamic State and its belief system, including those that emerge in mainstream news media, to entrench the group's exclusivist in-group identity, and legitimize its actions while discrediting those of its adversaries.

This text also delves into the theme of intimidation, which Abu Hamzah introduces as one of the primary objectives of aggressive communication operations. He proposes two approaches: first, to "instill terror in the hearts of our enemy" using tactics that "comply with shari'ah," such as terrorism and violent propaganda, and second, to provide online jihadist activists with instructions for electronic and information warfare against enemy institutions, to "terrify those who have shares in these establishments and destroy their trust." By creating a perception of Islamic State's ubiquity, influence campaigns focused on intimidation can amplify the perception of the organization's "strength" in terms of "determination and number" for both allies and adversaries alike.

Despite the fact that they first appeared in a more-than-decade-old speech by a deceased and now fairly obscure figure, these ideas continue to inform Islamic

State's media operations, the architects of which have utilized them in various outreach campaigns, including efforts to propagate utopian depictions of life under the caliphate and ultra-violent propaganda, as well as counter-messaging campaigns.

"Media Operative, You are also a Mujahid"[10]

For its part, the Himmah Library field-guide, when it was published in 2015, aimed to inspire Islamic State media operatives to double down in their efforts, stressing the strategic importance of propaganda production and media jihad directly in line with Abu Hamzah's guidance. Its authors clearly state that media production and distribution is crucial in advancing the prospects of the movement. As part of it, the "first goals" of the jihadist media operative are:

> "To buoy the morale of soldiers, spread news of their victories and good deeds, encourage the people to support them by clarifying their creed, methodology and intentions and bridge the intellectual gap between the mujahidin and ordinary Muslims."[11]

The document's anonymous authors hold that propaganda plays a crucial role in popularizing the Islamic State brand, conveying information about its news, current affairs, and ideological matters related to its creed. As Abu Hamzah also asserted, media outreach is a primary tool for inciting "regular Muslims" to participate in jihad en masse. The authors frequently return to this notion, underscoring the importance of "bring[ing] glad tidings to the believers' hearts," "transmit[ting] to the simple people a true picture of the battle," and "steering others towards [the ideology] and opening their eyes to it."[12]

In essence, the text suggests that propaganda serves as a central vehicle for promoting the Islamic State brand and spreading its message to the masses. By using various media channels, including social media, audio and visual productions, and printed materials, it asserts that a fine-tuned and carefully targeted propaganda operation is an optimal means with which to disseminate the Islamic State worldview and win over supporters. According to the authors, propaganda plays a critical role in shaping the perceptions of potential recruits, drawing them to the cause and persuading them to take action. Ultimately, then, the use of propaganda helps to create a coherent narrative that can resonate with a wide range of audiences, promoting Islamic State's brand and furthering its strategic goals.

Echoing Abu Hamzah (and, indeed, Bockstette), this document also emphasizes the importance of defending the Islamic State "caliphate" through media operations that focus on legitimization. The authors argue that Western states are conducting an "intellectual invasion" against Muslims worldwide and that "Muslim media workers" must respond to their lies and falsification efforts.[13] The authors also note that, since the early 2010s, defensive communication operations have become even more important due to the recent intensification of this propaganda war. The battle is not just about the reputation of Islamic State as an organization, they hold, but also for the existence and future of Islam as a religion.[14]

Lastly, the document turns to intimidation. Aggressive communication operations are discussed as a significant component of both "verbal jihad" and "jihad of the sword."[15] The authors emphasize the importance of offensive psychological operations in "infuriating the enemy," which they view as an entirely legitimate form of jihad even if it means engaging in egregious acts of violence. Their perspective suggests that such operations – especially execution propaganda – should be considered a logical extension of or even a substitute for kinetic military campaigns.[16] Notably, the text highlights the fact that Islamic State's war is total and, therefore, it is irrelevant which aspect of the adversary is targeted, be it the government and its military or the general "enemy" public. The authors write that anything that "angers the enemies of Allah is a form of jihad."

Considered together, the eight chapters of the Himmah Library field-guide repackage and reiterate much of what Abu Hamzah said five years earlier regarding the fundamental drivers and objectives of Islamic State's propaganda efforts. This is especially noteworthy because the group underwent a significant strategic transformation between 2010 and 2015, having announced in 2014 its caliphate, attracted tens of thousands of supporters to Iraq and Syria, and incited a global war. The fact that its core communication objectives remained more or less the same throughout this transition speaks to their enduring relevance today.

Islamic State's Production and Distribution of Propaganda and Propaganda-Adjacent Activities

Having set out "why" Islamic State used propaganda in the manner it did between 2014 and 2019, this section explores "how" it did it. It draws on a series of internal documents relating to Islamic State's media operations that were declassified by the United States Department of Defense (DoD) in August 2018.[17] Captured from a senior propaganda official in the group's Afghanistan-based Wilayat Khurasan,

the files were originally produced and covertly distributed by Islamic State's Central Media Diwan.

Prior to the emergence of these documents, the media infrastructure of the "caliphate" was one of its most obscure facets. To date, aside from a handful of propaganda-related legislative decrees leaked from Iraq and Syria – which, considered together, did little more than compound its obscurity – no detailed tactical- or operational-level documents regarding its outreach activities had been available in open sources. As such, independent analysis of the intricacies of its operations had been limited to reasoned speculation informed by interview data, historic (and, therefore, outdated) documents, and the output itself. With this in mind, it is difficult to exaggerate the value of the Khurasan files, which profoundly altered the extent to which outside observers could understand Islamic State's approach to conflict communication.

This section focuses on what this author considers to be four of the most important documents that were released as part of the tranche: "Clarification regarding the media of the Islamic State,"[18] "General guidance and instructions,"[19] "Organizational structure of the media office,"[20] and "The essential duties of the media mujahid in the wilayat of the Islamic State."[21] Using the author's own translations alongside those provided by the DoD, it analyzes each in turn, highlighting key insights found within them.

Before proceeding, it is worth briefly setting out some context regarding these documents. When they were first made public in 2018, the DoD asserted that they were captured in the course of operations in 2016 and 2017 that targeted "senior Islamic State Khurasan personnel in Afghanistan."[22] Comprising thirteen individual PDF files written in modern standard Arabic and dating back to 2015-2017, they range in length from two to sixteen pages and cover multiple aspects of the Islamic State media nexus – anything from its dissemination tactics to the way it trained photographers. In none of the documents is an author identified, but a number of them are stamped with the logo of organizations and committees known to be directly affiliated with Islamic State's Central Media Diwan (aka Ministry).

Critically, these materials were never meant for public consumption. They were written in a manner that is unlike most other propaganda-focused literature attributed to and deliberately made publicly available by Islamic State. Indeed, besides one fleeting reference to the Prophetic tradition, there are no substantive discussions of theology or Islamic history in them. Instead, the authors opt for clear, almost scientific language. As will be further discussed below, this, coupled with the fact that they are centrally produced documents that were found in the possession of a provincial affiliate outside of Iraq and Syria, is unequivocal

evidence that, behind the ideological veneer of the "caliphate," there existed a highly pragmatic and hierarchical public relations bureaucracy.

It is important to note that the operational relevance of these materials today must be approached with caution. Islamic State's central media infrastructure has proven to be both nimble and innovative in recent years. Thus, what was true seven years ago when the first of these documents were captured may not be true today. Notwithstanding this, the strategic insights that can be gleaned from them in relation to Islamic State's propaganda operation while it was at its height from 2014 to 2019 remain unprecedented and unparalleled.

Purpose and Limitations

The first document, "Clarification regarding the media of the Islamic State,"[23] sets out, in very general terms, the structure and purpose of Islamic State's media department. It begins by stating that its purpose is to explain the central media authority's "publishing policy" with a view to making sure that "all media personnel [in Islamic State] are aware of it and abide by it." In so doing, it adds a degree of nuance to issues about which observers hitherto had but a superficial understanding.

In the introduction, the authors clarify the remit of Islamic State's Central Media Diwan, which is said to have supervised all the group's media-facilitated outreach operations "from Indonesia in the east to Africa in the west." They state that this includes both the communication activities of provincial affiliates – that is, the wilayat – as well as those of the various "battalions and groups that have pledged allegiance to the caliph" – which it refers to as "soldiers of the caliphate." The Diwan, the document states, had oversight over everything "happening within the authority of the caliphate, including military, shari'ah, [and] service matters." Its core mouthpieces are identified as the Furqan Foundation, the Al-Hayat Media Center and the Furat Center (both of which were foreign fighter-dominated); and their outputs are complemented by a newspaper (Naba'), a news agency (A`maq), and a radio station (Bayan).

The next part of the document sets out what the Diwan's operations looked like on a day-to-day basis while it was operating at the peak of its influence. It states that its core aim was to "standardize" Islamic State's official output by "monitoring, supervising and reviewing productions," whether they were news bulletins, images, videos, or audio files. Pending approval, Diwan officials published these wares online through a small collection of channels on Telegram, namely those that are operated by Nashir and the Furat Center. Though it is not

mentioned here, the A'maq News Agency channel was, and continues to be, a third publication outlet.

Having established this, the document sets out three core responsibilities for media operatives in the rank-and-file. They are as follows:

1. All were obliged to "follow the policy set by the [Central] Media Diwan," regardless of their whereabouts.
2. Media operatives could publish nothing, online or off-, "without [first] consulting with the Media Monitoring Committee." This Committee was, and likely continues to be, embedded within the Diwan.
3. The "provincial-level" media operative's "principal" role was to document life in Islamic State. The actual production and publication of materials online is strictly off-limits.

If these core principles were not adhered to, the document warns, the credibility of "the wilayah's media [as well as] the credibility of those materials that were published in an unofficial method [i.e., materials produced by pseudo-unofficial outlets like A'maq and Furat]" would suffer, thereby "causing the spread of rumours, gossip, and questions."

The above is significant for a number of reasons. First, it unambiguously confirms that both the Furat Media Center and the A'maq News Agency were official mouthpieces of Islamic State, something that was long suspected by the analyst community but that has never been independently confirmed by Islamic State. Second, it details, with clarity, the expansive authority of the Central Media Diwan, demonstrating the sheer extent of its reach and structure at the time. Third, it gives us a broad sense of how Islamic State was able to harmonize its production and dissemination activities so efficiently in recent years. This last aspect is elaborated on in the next text.

Key Roles, Themes, and Remits

The guidelines in the second document, "General guidance and instructions,"[24] are significantly more detailed than the above. Reiterating some of what has already been stated, they provide a granular overview as to how Islamic State's media infrastructure operated on a day-to-day basis, in the main focusing on production, dissemination and monitoring.

The document begins by reiterating the core stipulation of the first directive, "Clarification regarding the media of Islamic State." Its authors declare that:

> "The official media offices in the wilayat are platforms belonging to the Central Media [Diwan] and the wilayat have been authorized to run them on behalf of the center […] therefore, we want all the brothers to follow the guidance of the Central Media [Diwan], otherwise the granted authorization to the wilayah will be withdrawn."

The authors then build on this, again stipulating that regional media workers were not allowed to engage in any form of external outreach whatsoever: their first priority was to document at the local level – that is, to record "everything that happens in the wilayat including news and events" – and their second priority was to distribute at the local level – whether that was through the dissemination of "news bulletins, video and photo-reports, individual and breaking images [or] statements." All other publishing activities, the document states, were to be left to the Central Media Diwan and the Central Media Diwan alone.

In the next section, the authors focus on the first side of that equation, media production, specifically discussing what should be catalogued. In so doing, they identify four thematic clusters:

1. "Military news: [This] includes offensive and defensive military operations, enemy airstrikes against the Islamic State, and everything else that is related to military work, whether individually executed operations (such as martyrdom operations) or group-executed operations (such as raids and so on).
2. Shari'ah [Religious] news: [This] includes news related to the hisbah [religious policing], [Islamic] courts, da'wah [operations], mosques and other things related to shari'ah affairs taking place inside the wilayah.
3. Services: [This] includes all news related to the services that are being provided inside the wilayah such as the fixing and cleaning of roads, waterworks, electricity, and other related topics.
4. Other: The wilayah [media office] should [also] cover miscellaneous events that are not included in the topics above such as snowfall in areas of the Islamic State, the rise of water level in a river, and other such things."

The guidelines then set out how these things should be documented. Media workers were instructed to produce five outputs:

1. Breaking news announcements, which should be compiled using the "red template" and "include the precise details of the military event such as location, results, and weapons used."
2. Non-urgent news announcements made using the "regular template," which "should include the same content as the red template; however, this [one] should be used for news of events that took place more than 24 hours

ago [and] after the [Media Monitoring] Committee's assessment that it is no longer breaking news."

3. Photo-reports, which "deliver an image about what is going on in the Islamic State, the status of Muslims there, the way its services and diwans work, and other such things." Ideally, these reports were mono-thematic, conveying just one "clear idea," and their constituent images were professional in style – they were to be captured on high-definition cameras and are uniformly designed.

4. Individual images or collections of images, which were to be produced alongside formal photo reports. These were "mostly used in [the context of] breaking news" and akin to photo-reports inasmuch as they were to be high-quality, monothematic and uniformly presented.

5. Videos, which comprised "a series of clips edited and prepared in a professional way that has an idea, scenario, or commentator." They had to be uniform in every way – that is, their "fonts, introduction and conclusion" should all adopt the template provided by the Central Media Diwan – and they were meant to show Islamic State at its best. To this end, those that appeared in them – whether soldiers or civilians – should "appear in a very suitable appearance" and "be well spoken." Videos also had to be technically impressive: all filming, for example, "should be done using more than one camera." Once produced, they would be sent "from the wilayat to the [Media Monitoring] Committee" for evaluation. Once there, quality control was tight: indeed, "when there are big mistakes," the video would be rejected.

The next section of the document describes the three-pronged network that was used by the Central Media Diwan for editing, dissemination, and discussion.

Its first prong is described as a "pre-publishing" (*qabal al-nishr*) group, which comprised an encrypted chatroom – based on the "Information security" document released at the same time as this one, it can be assumed that this was on either Telegram, Pidgin, or WhatsApp – to which designated provincial representatives submitted their office's output for evaluation.[25] Once there, "brothers" in the Media Monitoring Committee evaluated and cleared content for approval. If approval was not granted, "it is not permissible to publish [it]."

Upon completion of the review process, approved outputs were dispatched to the "publishing" (*al-nishr*) group, which formed the next prong of the network. The document stipulates that "the only [activities] that take place inside the (publishing) room are publishing" – "comments or editing" suggestions were strictly forbidden. The third and final prong of the network was the "monitoring" (*mutaba'at*) room, which was reserved for "communication between the media personnel of the wilayat." It is described as a chatroom where media officials

virtually congregated "to discuss important issues and participate in wider scale publishing." It is highly likely that this is where the Central Media Diwan issued directives for tactical media campaigns.

The last substantive section of the document describes the reporting responsibilities of media offices, which are said to have directly fed into the monitoring and evaluation programming of the Central Media Diwan. The process was relatively simple, but time consuming: each month, media offices were requested to "send statistics of their work" – including "the number of videos alongside the title of each one," "the number of photo reports alongside their titles," and "the number of individual images alongside their titles and subjects" – to the Media Monitoring Committee. These figures were then published – presumably internally – before being incorporated into the Committee's general reporting.

Other documents published by the DoD demonstrate that a more detailed evaluation of videos – in the course of which they would be graded according to framing, narrative, and technical proficiency – was also conducted in parallel to this more general process.

Miscellaneous Items

Besides the above, the document is littered with miscellaneous requests and stipulations. An inexhaustive list of these follows below:

- Media offices were advised against innovation because it is "the main cause of mistakes." It is unclear what prompted the inclusion of this statement but, in any case, it was adhered to: Islamic State's media output to this day remains highly uniform and, if any office introduces innovations, it is outlets associated with the Central Media Diwan.
- Cameramen were instructed to ensure that they do not show audiences at public hudud punishments smiling. This is an interesting addendum to the document, one that speaks to how concerned Islamic State was with global perceptions regarding its governance operations. Cameramen were also advised to avoid "filming the apostates saying the *shahadah* before executing them, and if this happens, it should be removed during the editing of the clip." This is presumably to ensure that "apostates" remained "apostates" in the eyes of the target audience (technically speaking, the accused's proclamation of the *shahadah* would nullify an allegation of apostasy).
- Only Islamic State's flag was allowed to appear in official output. Indeed, "no report is accepted with a different flag such as a white flag or any other

flag other than Islamic State flag." This is interesting because it suggests that other flags were used on a local basis by regional allies. If this is the case, it could indicate that there was more fluidity to the affiliate model than was previously thought.

- Media offices are instructed to "avoid exaggerating in acting and making Islamic State look in a way that is not true in the video releases, photo-reports, or individual images." This item speaks to the fact that the group considered itself to be providing news, not propaganda.

- Lastly, media offices were told that they must cooperate with the "A`maq News Agency by providing it with details about main events that take place inside the wilayat." Their cooperation was extensive: "each wilayah should send video clips to the A`maq Agency on a monthly basis about the course of battles, events, and other items." They had to also "cooperate with al-Naba' newspaper and al-Bayan radio and answer all the information they request from you to make their media projects successful."

Considered as a whole, this document paints a picture of a meticulously organized apparatus for propaganda production, review, and dissemination, the activities of which revolved around three core principles: uniformity, centralization, and variance. In pursuit of each, the Central Media Diwan issued strict, regimented instructions to its subsidiaries, instructions that were geared towards maximizing efficiency and minimizing regional autonomy.

Structure

The third document, "Organizational structure of the media office,"[26] shifts the focus to how provincial media offices should best be organized. It contains a detailed blueprint for their leadership and organizational structure. Its authors open by stating that a dedicated media amir should preside over every media office, wherever it was and whatever the extent of its relationship with the Central Media Diwan. This amir would be in charge of regional management and discipline and operated as the chief liaison between the office in question and the Central Media Diwan. Where possible, the amir was also required to meet with the Media Monitoring Committee in order to coordinate with it in terms of recruitment and expertise management – presumably, such meetings occurred virtually.

Working closely with each of the media amirs was an "administrative cadre" (*kadri idari*), who was the chief liaison with the governor of the wilayah in question and charged with providing "administrative needs for the office,"

"maintaining headquarters and vehicles," and "assisting the team of the interior publishing to carry out their mission."

Both the amir and their administrative cadre were advised to have lines of communication open with all "diwans, groups and news sources" at all times so that they could efficiently keep abreast of "their work and conduct media coverage." Moreover, they were advised to be in regular communication with key military officials in the wilayah so as to make sure that they did not miss important news events. Clarifying this instruction, the authors propose the following scenario:

> "If the military amir wants to communicate with the media office to convey to them information about an upcoming raid or operation, whom should he communicate with? There should be a person in charge of this matter. Also, if the filming team wants to coordinate regarding a specific project with any group inside the wilayah, and instead of them busying themselves with coordinating and scheduling appointments, the [administrative cadre] should coordinate and schedule appointments for them."

The next part of the document shifts the focus from the leadership to the rank-and-file. In so doing, it differentiates between internal (*dakhili*) and external (*khariji*) media production and distribution.

The internal side of this equation is said to have involved a "publishing and distributing team" for disseminating media products to soldiers and citizens of Islamic State as well as a cluster of production teams for "main filming," "military filming," "montage," "design," and "printing." Together, they were responsible for the compilation, production, and dissemination of all local media products. The external side of the equation was less convoluted but more networked. Its teams were in charge of "framing news, preparing photo reports, individual photos and photos related to breaking news, communicating with the Central Media [Diwan], and publishing and downloading official releases on a daily basis before delivering them to the internal publishing team." It is unclear how much crossover there was between each team and, for that matter, the materials that were distributed by each team.

The blueprint set out in this document is interesting if nothing else for the sheer amount of detail into which the authors go. However, it is its separation of internal and external propaganda operations that is most interesting. It suggests that, at the local level, there was more variation and flexibility in Islamic State's narrative priorities than was often assumed.

Audience Delineation

The last of the documents dealt with in this chapter, "The essential duties of the media mujahid in the wilayat of the Islamic State,"[27] issues detailed advice to individual media operatives – that is, the photographers, editors, sound engineers, and distributors that made up the rank-and-file. It covers a lot of ground that has already been addressed, but, in addition to this, provides more detail on the abovementioned internal-external delineation.

"Internal media" is said to comprise media products that were published for "the soldiers and subjects of the Islamic State inside the wilayah," while the latter constituted that which was published "for the supporters, opposition and enemies of the Islamic State outside of the wilayat of the Islamic State." While videos, photo-reports, audio programs and statements were included in both streams of output, there were several internal-only items – among them a publication called Yara' and an electronic magazine called *Maysarah*, neither of which has ever been published online.

Towards the end of the document, the authors also state that "exterior publishing (via the internet) is the responsibility of the Central Media [Diwan] exclusively." There is an implicit suggestion here that the regulations regarding internal publishing were more relaxed and that certain outputs that were published offline never made it online. The further detail that this document adds to the delineation between internal and external outreach is critically important; it suggests that Islamic State presided over a parallel system of in-theatre media production and distribution.

Implications

Evidently, Islamic State presided over a highly structured and centrally regulated system for producing, reviewing, and distributing propaganda between 2014 and 2019. Recognizing the workings of this system, its underpinning principles, and varied methods is crucial for prosecutors seeking to indict individuals accused of being involved with Islamic State for several reasons discussed below.

The elaborate level of detail and organization within the above-described guidelines suggests that participation in Islamic State's media division was not an arbitrary or incidental activity. Instead, it demanded strict adherence to guidelines, professional skill, and a grasp of the group's objectives and messaging. An understanding of this could help to illustrate a level of intent and active involvement, which would be pivotal in any attempt to prosecute individuals involved with Islamic State's media activities.

The integral role of Islamic State's media offices in shaping how it was perceived globally, both internally and externally, underscores its centrality in the group's operations. Individuals deeply involved in its propaganda machine can and should therefore be seen as not just passive participants, but as key actors in disseminating Islamic State's ideology, something that speaks to the seriousness of the allegations of which they are charged.

These guidelines could also assist in efforts to investigate and map tangible links between accused individuals and Islamic State as an organization. Evidence of the use of specific templates, adherence to certain themes or narrative structures, or the implementation of strict, formalized reporting protocols could serve as definitive indicators that the accused in question was not merely engaging in independent pro-Islamic State activity but was actually part of Islamic State's formal structure.

The intricacies associated with this operation – from the network behind Islamic State's pre-publishing, publishing, and monitoring activities to the detailed responsibilities of provincial media offices and individual operatives – speak to a highly coordinated system designed for optimal efficiency and minimal independence. Understanding this system could aid prosecutors as they work to evaluate the role and importance of individuals within Islamic State, thereby facilitating a more informed and evidence-based judicial process.

The Role of Execution Propaganda in Islamic State's Overarching Outreach Strategy

This section describes the ideological logic behind Islamic State's execution propaganda, which, though it only formed a small proportion of its total media output between 2014 and 2019,[28] is the most likely to be drawn on or be referenced as an evidence base for prosecutions. Foreign nationals have always played an outsized role in Islamic State's media operations, and especially so in the context of its execution-focused materials, in which they regularly featured as both orators and executioners.[29]

Islamic State media production peaked between 2014 and 2019 before tailing off with the fall of its proto-state in Baghuz. Between 2014 and 2016, its thematic focus was fairly evenly split between war-focused content and civilian-life-focused content.[30] This changed from 2017 onwards, when it became progressively more war-focused.

Throughout this time, execution propaganda was published with relevant frequency, peaking in both brutality and regularity in 2016 and 2017 during the preamble to the battles for Mosul and Raqqa. Generally speaking, these materials revolved around four core precepts, two of which were used to depict Islamic State positively, with the other two portraying its adversaries negatively. The two positive themes, in-group strength and in-group religiosity, aimed to glorify the group and its members. Meanwhile, the two negative themes, out-group aggression and out-group weakness, aimed to dehumanize Islamic State's opponents.

These four themes worked together to create a textbook case of moral disengagement, a psychological phenomenon that has been observed throughout history, most famously in Nazi Germany.[31] Moral disengagement involves violent political movements legitimizing their actions by demonizing their opponents, often through comparing them to animals or insects.[32]

One of Islamic State's most notorious execution videos, "Kill them wherever you overtake them," provides an example of how these themes were deployed. Documenting the Camp Speicher massacre in Iraq in June 2014, in which hundreds of members of the Iraqi security forces were summarily executed, this video is an emblematic example of Islamic State's execution propaganda. Through the use of rational and religious framing, the video depicts the captured individuals as physically and spiritually weak, positioning them as submissive animals who had abandoned their religious beliefs in the face of Islamic State's might. The captives are portrayed as defenseless and resigned to their fate, effectively "justifying" their execution.

By constructing their adversaries in this consistently negative and dehumanized light, Islamic State attempted to justify its most egregious crimes against humanity. It was a framing, and process, that occurred not just in the context of this video but that was repeated each and every time it executed an "enemy" on film.[33] This portion of its propaganda thus served to normalize extreme violence and fuel the moral disengagement of Islamic State's members and sympathizers, ultimately legitimizing its actions and inciting attacks against imagined enemies of the "in-group."

In-Group Strength

This message was fundamental to Islamic State's broader propagandistic narrative between 2014 and 2015.[34] Accordingly, it should come as no surprise that it underpins much of "Kill them wherever you overtake them," which is, in

many ways, an archetypal representation of Islamic State content from that period.

On multiple occasions in the video, the video's protagonists can be heard returning to the idea that Islamic State had almost effortlessly prevailed over its enemies in Salah ad-Din governorate in the run-up to the Speicher massacre in 2014 – whether that was in the context of vehicles ("As for their hummers and armored vehicles, they became chunks of rusty metal"),[35] fortifications ("The fortifications of the Rafidah did not benefit them for they began to collapse by Allah's grace, in the face of the mujahidin's attacks"),[36] or manpower ("By the grace of Allah, despite our weakness and small numbers Allah honored us and enabled us to overpower them. More than 2,000 captives! More than 2,000 surrendered themselves, by Allah's grace!").[37] This idea is also frequently raised in quoted excerpts of speeches from Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani ("We will surely send you to Hell in masses")[38] and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi ("It is impossible for the followers of the Majus to overpower the sons of al-Hasan and al-Husayn").[39]

Such framing was an essential part of a large amount of Islamic State propaganda from the same period.[40] It rested on the idea that Islamic State's supporters in Iraq and Syria in particular were able to triumph over their adversaries in spite of the seemingly unassailable odds they faced at the time. Implicit to this claim is the idea that Islamic State was militarily successful not because it had better weapons or greater numbers; rather, it was militarily successful because it was, per Islamic State's propaganda line, happening "with the permission of Allah" or "by the grace of Allah."[41]

In-Group Religiosity

The second key pretext in "Kill them wherever you overtake them" relates specifically to the religious credentials of Islamic State and its supporters, a recurring theme in its execution-focused media. Throughout the video, they are celebrated as archetypal Sunni Muslims, idealized "mujahidin" fighting for Islam and nothing else.

This idea is conveyed both verbally/explicitly and visually/implicitly. It is, for example, typified in one of the excerpts of Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, who at one point can be heard saying, "We have not fought a single day for the sake of territory. We do not fight except for the return of the *khilafah* and the establishment of the Shari'ah. We fight to rule the entire world with what Allah has revealed."[42] It also comes up frequently in a statement from an unnamed Wilayat Salahuddin official, who says, for example, that Islamic State "will kill

[Shi'ite Muslims] because [they] seek help from other than Allah."[43] Assertions such as these are intended to convey the idea that this episode at Camp Speicher was part of a broader war between Muslims and non-Muslims, a war for Islam, not transient material ambitions.

The religious credentials of Islamic State's rank-and-file fighters are also underlined visually in these materials. Indeed, throughout the video in question – and perhaps most clearly in the clerical garb of the unnamed Wilayat Salahuddin official – they are framed as quintessential examples of the "ideal" mujahidin, positioned as Islamic heroes fighting simultaneously on two fronts: physically, to protect and expand their Sunni Muslim in-group, and spiritually, to perfect their religiosity. In the context of this video and other, similar Islamic State content, their idealization occurs through the recurrent use of a series of distinct but overlapping image frames. The overarching picture that emerged is characterized by a duality: on the one hand, they are shown to be hyper-masculine, reveling in the chaos of battle and consumed by bloodlust; on the other, they are framed as thoughtful worshipers, able to spontaneously quote the Qur'an and Islam's other canonical sources at will.

Notably, while the specific form of this "warrior" ideal is unique to Islamic State, the stuff of which it is made is highly conventional. Indeed, its core ingredients conform to an ancient and durable warrior-hero mythology, one that is, to a large extent, cross-cultural and pan-historic.[44]

Out-Group Aggression

Two core, complementary out-group-focused narratives run through Islamic State execution propaganda and are particularly apparent in "Kill them wherever you overtake them." The first is the idea that, in killing these captives, Islamic State was staving off an attack on what it considers to be "true" Islam.

In conveying this, the video's various protagonists frequently assert that Islamic State's war is not being fought out of worldly desires or ambitions; rather, it is a war between good and evil, between "Islam" and its enemies. This proposition thereby justifies its violent actions by embedding them within a broader religious-political framework.

Essential to this claim is the way Islamic State refers to the captives it took at Speicher – as "*rafidah*," "*rafidi*" or "*rawafid*." These terms, which are used pejoratively throughout materials in this genre, are meant to indicate that these soldiers are Shi'ite Muslims hostile to the fundamental beliefs of Sunni Islam

(regardless as to whether or not the captives in question were all Shi'ite Muslims). In addition to "*rafidi*" and its derivatives, various other terms are used in the captions and speech overlays – for example: "from the filth of *shirk* and the *mushrikin*,"[45] "the grandsons of the spiteful Majus,"[46] "the evil Safawi project,"[47] "followers of the Majus,"[48] and "the grandsons of Abu Lu'lu', Ibn Saba', and Rustum [figures from the history of Islam that Islamic State considers to be prominent and primeval enemies of Sunni Muslims]."[49]

Each of these labels is steeped in ideological and theological connotations. References to shirk, or idolatry, are levelled at Shi'ite Muslims on account of what Islamic State considers to be the wrongful Shi'ite practice of worshiping the family and companions of the Prophet Muhammad.[50] In its view, this practice means associating others with Allah, something that is tantamount to a rejection of Islam and, inasmuch as that is the case, by definition an act of hostility. Separately, when there is mention of "the Majus" or "the evil Safawi project," Islamic State is attempting to tie these captives to the geopolitical and religious influence of Iran which is, in these two cases, metaphorically implied through references to Zoroastrian Magi and the Safavid Empire. In a similar vein, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi refers to "the grandsons of Abu Lu'lu'" et al., he is naming key figures from Islamic history who are for one reason or another notorious and considered a threat to Sunni Islam by the likes of Islamic State (Abu Lu'lu', for example, killed one of the early caliphs).[51]

Together, these labels are used to frame those being killed as primeval "enemies of Islam." To be sure, this is not a new practice, something that is rendered especially apparent in the various excerpts of speeches made by Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi, the long-dead leader of Islamic State's predecessor, the Islamic State of Iraq – consider, for example, when he can be heard saying, in reference to Shi'ite Muslims in Iraq, "Both their past history and present are filled with treachery and plotting against you. Do not trust them!"[52]

Out-Group Weakness

The last out-group narrative in Islamic State execution propaganda revolves around the purported cowardice and weakness (both physical and spiritual) of Islamic State's adversaries. In the Speicher case, this notion is grounded in both rational and religious terminology which positions the captives in question as physically weak on the one hand and ready to cast aside their religious beliefs on the other.

This idea is explicitly referenced throughout the video. The narrator, for example, notes in his introduction that those being captured "used to be savage lions against the masses of Ahlus-Sunnah and who were in the prisons like deadly wolves or likely hungry hyenas, except that they became, by the grace of Allah, in front of the mujahidin, submissive animals. They howled and whined."[53] For his part, the unnamed wilayah official, reflecting on the efforts of some captives to deny their status as Shi'ite Muslims, says, "Look at their lie while they are in Ramadan! And look at their weakness, cowardice and feebleness! How they lie! How they left their religion and abandoned their creed in fear of the fangs of the lions of Islamic State, and in fear of death!"[54] This specific point about deception and denial is also frequently raised by the executioners themselves. One of them, for example, says, "*taqiyyah* [deception] is your religion," to one of the men about to be executed.[55]

This narrative is continually emphasized through the visual framing of the video. At multiple points in it, captives are shown huddled together in vehicles, clearly outnumbering their captors yet showing no signs of resistance. Instead, they are shown up close and personal being taunted and mocked, tormented en masse.

This imagery, and the broader discourse of which it is emblematic, is extremely common when it comes to Islamic State's depictions of its adversaries. It is transparently aimed at demonstrating their weakness, the fact that they are resigned to their fate in the hands of Islamic State.[56] In this sense, it is meant to further entrench a sense of the essential power dynamic that was purported to exist between Islamic State and its opponents back between 2014 and 2019.

By producing such uncompromising visual accounts of its enemies, Islamic State shatters any presupposition of their superiority: they may be better armed, but, when stripped of their armor and fought with the "permission of Allah," they are framed as being as defenseless as they are irreligious.

Implications

The ideological and psychological narratives woven into Islamic State's propaganda machinery, particularly in the context of its execution-focused materials, are an essential resource for prosecuting individuals accused of participation in Islamic State. The importance of these elements lies not only in their potential evidentiary value, but also in the insight they provide into the mindset and motivation of those participating in, or drawn towards, the group's activities.

As set out above, Islamic State's propaganda was designed to elicit moral disengagement, convincing the audience that the "enemies" depicted in its execution videos were deserving of their fate due to their perceived hostility towards true Islam, their inherent weakness, and their spiritual and physical inferiority. Understanding these narratives is instrumental for comprehending the cognitive process through which many if not most individuals may be drawn to engage with or join Islamic State. It helps to explain how they might become desensitized to extreme violence and ultimately commit acts that most would regard as morally reprehensible.

In terms of evidentiary value, the prominent role of foreign nationals in Islamic State's execution-focused media provides a tangible link between individuals from different geographical regions and the atrocities committed by the group. The distinct thematic patterns and structures of these propaganda pieces, their timeframes, and the identifiable individuals that appear in them can all contribute to a solid evidence base for prosecution. Perhaps most crucially, they can be used to place accused individuals in specific locations at specific times, potentially tying them directly to crimes.

Additionally, demonstrating an understanding of the narratives employed by Islamic State can help in countering the defense that the accused were merely victims of brainwashing, coercion, or misinformation. By illustrating the repetitive, manipulative, and constructed nature of Islamic State's propaganda, prosecutors can argue that the accused, especially those who rose to positions of power within the group, were fully aware of the group's ideological position and actions.

Conclusion

This chapter has described in detail how and why Islamic State engaged in the production of propaganda during its peak years between 2014 and 2019. For reasons mentioned in the introduction, the sphere of propaganda has, and will continue to have, enduring relevance in the context of prosecutions of individuals believed to have been involved, either directly or indirectly, in Islamic State crimes against humanity in Syria and Iraq in particular. With this in mind, this chapter's description of why, from a strategic perspective, and how, from an operational perspective, Islamic State engaged in propaganda activity – especially when it came to execution-focused materials – is intended to furnish prosecutors with a more granular and tangible understanding of the context in which the individuals they are (or will be) prosecuting operated on a day-to-day basis.

[1] (2020). ISIS Militants Charged With Deaths Of Americans In Syria. United States Department of Justice. Accessible at: https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/isis-militants-charged-deaths-americans-syria; 2021). United States of America v. Mohammed Khalifa. FBI. Accessible at: https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Mohammed%20Khalifa%20Affidavit%20in%20Support%20of%20Criminal%20Complaint.pdf.

[2] (2015). Finland detains Iraqi twins over IS massacre in Tikrit. BBC News. 10 December. Accessible at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35067187.

[3] See, for example: (2020). Cumulative prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters for core international crimes and terrorism-related offences. EUROJUST. Accessible at: https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Partners/Genocide/2020-05_Report-on-cumulative-prosecution-of-FTFs_EN.PDF.

[4] Bockstette, C. (2008). Jihadist terrorist use of strategic communication management techniques. George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies. Accessed at: https://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDocs/files/College/F_Publications/occPapers/occ-paper_20-en.pdf.

[5] Ibid. 20, 14.

[6] Ibid. 20, 14.

[7] Ibid. 9.

[8] al-Muhajir, Abu Hamzah (2010). To those entrusted with the message. Furqan Foundation.

[9] Abu Hamzah states that jihadist media workers should expend a great deal of effort in analyzing any "books, reports, and analysis that the West publishes" that could "be useful for the mujahidin." These should be in turn digested and republished through "scientific technique forums" established by ISIL. Among the skills considered to be "useful" is media production, about which operatives should prepare bespoke "training courses" – both on- and offline – to hasten organizational learning. Moreover, they should also use the internet to monitor and evaluate the impact of their collective activities. By "register[ing] all reactions that arise from all the *mujahidin* and the leaders of *jihad* and […] the enemy," Abu Hamzah states that ISIL's media centers will then be in a better position to judge their efficacy, both on individual and collective bases. Muhajir. To those entrusted with the message.

[10] Anon. (2015). *Mujahid*, you are also the media operative. Himmah Library.

[11] Ibid. 13–14.

[12] Ibid. 32, 40, 25.

[13] Ibid. 44, 39, 42, 15.

[14] Ibid. 10; for another example of this content, see: Al-Zawahiri, A. (2005). Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi. Federation of American Scientists. Accessed at: https://fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_english.pdf.

[15] Ibid. 13, 16, 26.

[16] Ibid. 26.

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[35] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:03:03-00:04:12.

[36] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:00:06-00:00:30.

[37] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:07:34-00:08:49.

[38] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:17:07-00:17:30.

[39] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:18:57-00:19:48.

[40] Winter, C. (2018) Apocalypse, later: A longitudinal study of ISIL brand. Critical Studies in Media Communication 35:1. 113-116.

[41] These words are repeated throughout the video.

[42] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:00:42-00:01:34.

[43] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:13:36-00:14:14.

[44] See, for example, Campbell, J. (2004). The hero with a thousand faces. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 309-314.

[45] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:06:55-00:06:57.

[46] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:00:06-00:00:30.

[47] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:04:16-00:04:48.

[48] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:18:57-00:19:48.

[49] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:18:57-00:19:48.

[50] In, for example, the 15th issue of *Dabiq*, ISIL wrote that celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday were "a sinful novelty in religion." (2016). Issue 15: Break the cross. *Dabiq*. July 31.

[51] Sahih al-Bukhari, Chapter 66, Book of the Virtues of the Companions, Hadith number 3497.

[52] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:12:13-00:13:32.

[53] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:03:03-00:04:12.

[54] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:13:36-00:14:14.

[55] Kill them wherever you overtake them. 00:11:53-00:12:13.

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6

The "Mujahid's Bag": Digitally Curating the Legacy of Foreign Fighter Training Materials

Moustafa Ayad

As the story has been told, Abu Hamza al-Sudani died in a trench, kneeling with his forehead planted to the ground as if in the midst of prayer.[1] Sudanese by birth, al-Sudani, whose real name was Abdul Salam Mahmoud, was one of 230 Australian foreign fighters who travelled to Syria.[2] He had in fact travelled to Syria twice. The first journey was after witnessing the Egyptian military crush Muslim Brotherhood protesters in the 2013 coup that brought about the autocratic regime of Abdelfattah al-Sisi. Mahmoud — who was studying Islam in Egypt at the time — was troubled by the upheaval, violence, and "oppression," and decided he would "fight for the oppressed" in Syria. However, the infighting between groups, and his mother's illness back home in Australia forced him to leave.[3] A year later he would return, this time determined to join ISIL. It was 2014, and a battle of legitimacy was raging between Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's fighting force in Syria, and ISIL. Al-Nusra framed the fight as the "Great Fitnah," or civil strife. Like many Australians who had travelled to Syria, Mahmoud was also linked to the highest-ranking Australian ISIL commander Mohammad Ali Baryalei, an Afghan-Australian who allegedly recruited 30 to 60 others to fight in Syria.[4]

Just like Baryalei, Mahmoud began as a foot soldier in Sydney's "Street Dawah" movement. Camera in hand, and under the guidance of Baryalei, he and others attempted to convert people for the sake of Islam, including with their YouTube Channel with more than 12,000 subscribers. They were a group of young, Muslim men, who at one time were all deep into "thug life,"[5] and it was Islam, in their opinions, that had saved them from "the deceptions of the glittery Western lifestyle."[6] They became prolific propagators of the Salafi-jihadist cause.[7]

Mahmoud's Facebook account, under his *kunya*, or nom de guerre, Abu Hamza al-Sudani, had more than 3,600 followers. Along with videos of injured children,

and atrocities carried out by the regime of Bashar al-Assad, he used the account to post content like that of the Jund al-Sham, a Salafi-jihadist group linked to al-Qaeda in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, and the teachings of the spiritual leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Anwar al-Awlaki. While he publicly stated he supported none of the Salafi-jihadist groups in Syria,[8] Mahmoud also praised Numan Haider who stabbed two Australian counter-terrorism police before he was fatally shot by another.[9] Then, in 2015, *al-Risalah*, the premier English-language magazine of al-Qaeda at the time, reported his death during battle.[10] After more than a year of pronouncements that he was only providing "humanitarian aid" in Latakia, the mirage was shattered by a lengthy, stylized article of his life, and death, to entice more fighters from abroad to join their ranks.

Now, almost eight years after al-Sudani's demise, the author has a greater understanding of what he likely read, watched, shared, and ultimately, curated for other foreign fighters, based on researchers unearthing the largest, publicly available cloud-based storage drive of Islamic State propaganda on the open web. Using the end-to-end encrypted cloud-storage platform NextCloud, ISIL supporters over the course of the past six years created and curated a massive drive of content, representing some 2.2 terabytes (TB) of internal and external documents, videos, audio content, images, and ready-made social media posts.

The NextCloud site, which is being called "Cloud Caliphate,"[11] contains 97,706 folders and files of content, spanning the historical record of ISIL's existence. Al-Sudani,[12] and other Salafi-jihadists played a key role in compiling some of the content and creating a digital training camp environment for would-be fighters and attackers.[13] The content available through the drive goes back to 1999, beginning with ISIL's genesis as Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad under the leadership of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, to its current leadership in the post-Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi-era.[14]

There are 24 primary folders within the "Cloud Caliphate": Recent Content, Archives of the Genesis of the Islamic State, Archives of the Emirs of Jihad, Archives of the Chants of the Caliphate, Archives of al-Bayan Radio, Archives of al-Furqan Media, Archives of the Old States, Archives of al-Amaq Bulletins, Archives of Military Sciences, Archives of the Wills of the Martyrs, Archives of al-Nabaa Newsletter, Archives of the Scholars of Jihad, Archives of the Fatwas over the Airwaves, Archives of Himmah Library, Content of the Caliphate's States, Photo Stories, Quran for the Mujahideen, Supporter Groups, The Islamic State Curriculum, Non-Arabic Content, Single Pieces of Content, Sarh al Khalifah, Content for the Holy Month of Ramadan, and Various Content.[15]

Through the "Military Sciences" folder, the author located a subfolder believed to be curated in 2014 by al-Sudani, named the "Mujahid's Bag."[16] The files in the "Military Sciences" folder provide a snapshot of the key documents an ISIL recruiter either read or intended to read and curated in order to enlist, and ultimately, train new recruits. To understand the overall significance of the training material for potential fighters, this research seeks to understand where there is emphasis onin the "Military Sciences" training materials, and what materials currently exist that could be being used to prepare ISIL fighters for the battlefield and beyond.[17] The author seeks to use the "Military Sciences" as a case study on how fighters prepared themselves for travel, battle, and eventually death or imprisonment.

Based on the analysis of the "Military Sciences" folder, ISIL supporters have attempted to develop a well-organized virtual training program, built on intra-Salafi-jihadist knowledge which stretches the gamut to include Hamas as well as groups such as al-Qaeda. The "Military Sciences" folder includes material that focuses on ideological indoctrination, physical training, explosives development and weapons instruction. In total, the "Military Sciences" folder contains 4,333 documents, presentations and videos that detail various training precepts, which fall under the following classifications:

1. Legacy Training: ISIL supporters seek to build on and learn from rival Salafi-jihadist group training materials. This involves studying the history, strategies, and tactics associated with groups such as Hamas, al-Qaeda, and others, in order to build on concepts and knowledge presented in those materials. This includes videos, pamphlets, and social media content for training, battle, imprisonment, and counterintelligence.
2. Physical Training: ISIL supporters seek to prepare recruits and fighters for battle through vigorous physical training regimens to prepare them for combat. This includes endurance exercises, weapons handling, and hand-to-hand combat training. The group has been known to use obstacle courses and other physical challenges.
3. Weapons Training: ISIL supporters seek to educate recruits for understanding to understand a variety of weapons, including firearms, grenades, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The group also teaches its recruits how to build and use IEDs, which have been a significant part of the group's warfare tactics. There is also an emphasis on biological and chemical warfare, a violation of international criminal law.
4. Explosives and Specialized Training: ISIL supporters believe in the need for specialized training in areas such as sniper operations, bomb-making, and intelligence gathering. The group has also been known to train boys as child soldiers, who are indoctrinated and taught to fight for the group, a violation of international criminal law.

5. Web-based Intelligence Training: ISIL supporters believe that understanding intelligence gathering techniques is key for success on the battlefield as well as for plotting successful attacks. This includes studying the intelligence gathering techniques used by states for counterterrorism.

The training material contained within the "Military Sciences" folder is composed of a variety of resources that provide instruction on various aspects of ISIL-backed warfare, including jihad-based theology, military strategies and tactics, and propaganda. Key to understanding the use of training material in the "Military Sciences" folder is that not all the content is produced centrally by the ISIL;[18] instead, much of it is curated by those who have fought with the group or sought to compel others to fight. In fact, ISIL, as a group, and ISIL supporters seem to have built on the training curricula of adversarial groups to prepare their recruits. In this way, the content of the "Military Sciences" folder is varied, in that it provides a grab-bag of training materials from a range of groups, as well as ISIL itself. Similarly, the materials contained in the "Military Sciences" folder focuses on religious instruction (key fatwas by ISIL theological leadership on battle, as well as those in their ambit), including Quranic verses and interpretations that support ISIL's concept of jihad, e.g. the use of ISIL media outlet's branded Quran.

The material curated into the "Military Sciences" folder is multilingual, including Arabic, English, French, German, and other languages, to reach a global audience. The material provides a framework for understanding the role of ISIL violence in achieving political and religious goals, and sheds light on the significance of specialized knowledge. The impact of jihadist training material is not limited to radicalization and recruitment. It also plays a role in providing the basis for planning and executing terrorist attacks. Materials on guerrilla warfare provide practical guidance on tactics and strategies for conducting attacks. Propaganda materials, including videos and social media posts, help to inspire and motivate attackers.

The author's analysis of this supporter-curated digital archive indicates that the ISIL training program mimics and pilfers from the legacy of terrorist training materials on the open web, while similarly contributing specific ISIL-linked publications that are intended for committed fighters who are willing to die for the group's ideological precepts, whether on the battlefield or in high-profile attacks. The ISIL-supporter training regimen is part and parcel of a Salafi-jihadist history of using the internet for training purposes, dating back to as early as 1996.[19] The sharing of manuals to develop poisons, build explosives, or guidelines for potential attacks with an internet-based global audience at the end of the 20th Century was a watershed moment for the ability of groups like al-

Qaeda with global ambitions.[20] Salaf-jihadist training materials have remained a defining element of online terrorist ecosystems since.[21]

This chapter will provide a comprehensive analysis of the history and networking behind the sharing of online Salafi-jihadist training material, with a specific focus on the content contained in the "Military Sciences" folder. The analysis of "Military Sciences" will provide insight to prosecutors as they seek to understand content that foreign fighters were exposed to, or sought out, either prior to joining the group or preparing for battle in Syria and beyond. The chapter will delve into the scope of the content in the "Military Sciences" folder and attempt to provide an analysis of tactics or strategies that could have provided support to war crimes committed by ISIL foreign fighters.

The chapter is divided into five distinct sections. First, the author will highlight the centrality of digital archives both theoretically and to al-Qaeda and ISIL supporters for the overall terrorist digital ecosystem. Building on this section, the second section will dissect the specific ISIL-supporter digital network that has built, supported, and disseminated the "Cloud Caliphate" archive. The section will outline the genesis of the support group behind the "Cloud Caliphate's" development, and its centrality to the overall ISIL digital ecosystem on the open web, as well as its linkages to real-world criminal cases. The third section will outline the overall scope of the "Military Sciences" folder in the "Cloud Caliphate," to provide policymakers and prosecutors with insight into the military training material curated by and likely used by ISIL fighters and tacticians. The fourth section will highlight the key documents that can be categorized into the author's five-point framework for classifying ISIL military training materials.[22] The last and final section will provide recommendations for policymakers as well as prosecutors based on the analysis.

The Importance of Digital Archives: Remembrance to Revenge

Digital archives are key to imagined and real identities. Wolfgang Ernst, the German media theorist, wrote "the Internet extends the classical space of the archive, library, and museum by an extra dimension." That extra dimension is what drives us to create meaning out of loss. Following the devastating World Trade Center attacks of 2001, the September 11 Digital Archive was designed and developed to "create a permanent record of the events of September 11, 2001." The archive partnered with the Library of Congress a year later, and now represents one of the largest, most comprehensive digital archives of the terrorist attack to date. It contains some 150,000 pieces of digital content including about 40,000 emails, 40,000 first-hand stories, and 15,000 images.

Archives in this sense help to preserve the collective sensory memory of the most spectacular terrorist attack of the past two decades. However, just as digital archives provide us with the ability to come to terms with the past, they are similarly important because of their "substantially potentized present online accessibility." In this way, digital archives are central to the terrorist ecosystem on the internet and provide a global audience of supporters as well as foreign fighters with the ability to access training and other materials central to preparing for battle or other attacks. Tracing the development of terrorist archives online requires understanding the development and sustainability of websites and internet-based forums, anonymous sharing platforms, encrypted messaging applications, and lastly, open-source software leveraged to archive terrorist content.

Websites have been at the heart of Salafi-jihadist ecosystems since the 1990s.[23] In the early 2000s, al-Qaeda supporters had already begun developing their own stand-alone websites. Around the mid-2000s, internet-based forums linked to al-Qaeda and its affiliates began to appear with more frequency, and often linked back to websites that were developed a decade earlier.[24] With the advent of social media platforms, the terrorist ecosystem became increasingly decentralized decentralized, with supporters sprawling out across Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, creating their own networks and content. However, websites and internet-based forums stayed at the heart of the online ecosystem.[25] With the rise of ISIL, policymakers began focusing on stripping terrorist support off social media platforms and targeting terrorist websites for takedowns. In response to these counterterrorism efforts online, supporters of groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIL, began using anonymous sharing platforms for sharing current and legacy content. Hand and hand with this development, was the creation of stand-alone digital archives to curate and provide resources to online terrorist-support networks.

Researchers at the University of Wollongong delved into the use of "anonymous sharing platforms and Islamic State content" in 2018.[26] Their aim was to provide response "countermeasures against online propaganda operations," and to do that effectively, research would have to go beyond the Telegram, and dive into "anonymous sharing portals acting as black boxes for ISIL-related propaganda." At the time, the research effort was focused on sites such as Archive.org, Justpaste.it, Sendvid.com, and Dump.to, and specifically because ISIL "networks seem to have reacted to the degradation of their capabilities on popular social media networks and rapidly migrated to new anonymous portals." While anonymous sharing platforms were, and continue to be, central to ISIL and al-Qaeda supporters online, they were a precursor and not a replacement for expansive digital archives built out by terrorist support groups across the open web.

Bearing this in mind, the research community has understudied Salafi-jihadist archives, and their digitization, despite archives becoming central to a range of terrorist groups and their primary media outlets. For instance, the al-Qaeda-linked Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) uses a "proprietary file-sharing application," which is branded the Epic Drive, and once held digital territory on a .com top-level domain, and now on a .site URL top-level domain, uses NextCloud. "Gnews," another GIMF archive, also uses NextCloud. Al-Shabaab supporters man a similar drive, which is dubbed Kataib Drive, which similarly uses NextCloud. Then, there is the Shahab Archive, named after the official al-Qaeda media outlet, which is also using a decentralized open-source file hosting service like NextCloud, called OwnCloud. Similarly, Bangla-speaking al-Qaeda in the Subcontinent (AQIS) supporters use a NextCloud drive to store roughly 270 gigabytes of translated al-Qaeda content.[27] With the addition of the "Cloud Caliphate," there are five key drives that are commanded by affiliates and outlets of al-Qaeda and Islamic State supporters online. Four out of the five use the Nextcloud software to support their existence, and only one is currently accessible in full — the "Cloud Caliphate."

Utilizing SimilarWeb,[28] a proprietary website analysis service that provides traffic, social media engagement, and referral metrics data, the author found that the top three referring websites to the "Cloud Caliphate" in 2020-2021 were all ISIL-supporter run websites.[29] These sites accounted for 20 percent of all traffic into the "Cloud Caliphate" from April 2020 to April 2021. These three stand-alone platforms provide indication of the coordinated nature of ISIL support groups on the open web. They similarly provide a snapshot to the centrality of "Cloud Caliphate" and as a central aggregator for legacy and current ISIL content online. Understanding what the "Cloud Caliphate" holds, beyond its connections to support groups and sister websites, required the author to delve into its development and history, as well as the content it holds. Over the past year, the author has set up digital monitors and developed a data extraction tool to get granular insight into the training material available on the digital archive.

Tracing Cyber Support: Sarh al-Khliafah and the "Cloud Caliphate"

The "Cloud Caliphate" can be linked back to one ISIL support group amongst many named Sarh al-Khilafah, the Monument of the Caliphate.[30] The group's name is likely derived from an Islamic State al-Furqan 2016 media release by the same name, which was a detailed 15-minute video outlining the Islamic State's territories at the time, as well as its administrative and organizational structure.[31] Sarh al-Khilafah manned both a Telegram bot, which disseminates the "Caliphate Cloud" folders, as well as a now-defunct Hoop channel of 1,474 members, that

was created in April 2020, and removed by the site in September 2020. The author found numerous .txt files titled "readme" in several of the folders of the "Cloud Caliphate" that linked the site to the Sarh al-Khalifah group. Sarh al-Khalifah's site usage has a similar platform use pattern as The Electronics Horizon Foundation, both utilizing the druager.de messaging application, they are similarly using the same NextCloud technology.[32] It is unclear, however, beyond the use of the same platforms, if the connections go beyond a suite of similar applications to support their online presence.

What is clear is that Sarh al-Khalifah is linked to a recently redesigned ISIL al-Bayan Radio website, that provides live streaming services of Islamic State radio content, and links to the Sarh al-Khalifah's Hoop and Telegram channels in its "about us" section. The al-Bayan Radio website was rebranded in 2021 as Anfal Radio. However, it still carries the same URL as it did under the brand of al-Bayan. The site directly links to all but one of the primary folders available in the "Cloud Caliphate." Sarh al-Khalifah has similar connections to another site, "The Punishment," an Islamic State supporter website that transitions its top-level domains monthly in order to avoid takedowns. The site was once advertised by a fake Netflix account on Twitter in 2020, as a means to "watch realistic and enthusiastic films" to "show who will rule the world after this corona COVID19." The site's navigation bar has a drop-down menu under a heading "plus+" that allows users to visit a page on the site called "important links." The page has a similar format as the al-Bayan website, and links to each individual primary folder of the "Cloud Caliphate," leaving out links to all but one primary folder. The drop-down menu similarly links to the Hoop and Telegram channels previously manned by Sarh al-Khalifah.

These stand-alone platforms are primary referral nodes to the "Cloud Caliphate." Through monitoring of the site over the past six years, ever since the discovery of the "Cloud Caliphate," stand-alone ISIL websites function as funnels for users to access the drive. This constellation of websites, which on the surface seem like separate propaganda projects by disparate ISIL supporters, are a part of an intricate ecosystem of ISIL support on the open web. The sites link or feed into one another in different ways, but they all seem to provide differing functions. While one site is a virtual video bank of Islamic State content, another ISIL-linked site functions as an aggregator and archive for news bulletins and beyond, and the last is an audio streaming site that mimics Spotify. The "Cloud Caliphate" takes this one step further, functioning as an Islamic State archive — much like a virtual Library Congress — it allows users to access the continually updated content curated by supporters to keep Islamic State media in continuous circulation online. The "Cloud Caliphate" sits dead center in this constellation of ISIL sites.

The "Cloud Caliphate" and Terrorism Offenders

In 2018, Thomas Osadzinski posted TATP-making instructions into a chatroom named "Weapons," threatened an attack, and pledged allegiance to ISIL.[33] A year later, Osadzinski had designed a computer program to organize ISIL media into a 700 gigabyte (GB) digital library, easily transferable to other ISIL supporters across the internet. Mirroring the concept of the "Cloud Caliphate," Osadzinski had programmed his computer to copy ISIL propaganda from the internet and send to other users on social media platforms.[34]

The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested Osadzinski in November 2019 and found his library of hundreds of gigabytes of ISIL material, including magazines, manuals, speeches, and videos on his computer. The case, and Osadzinski's tactics, mirror many of the same strategies used to build and share the "Cloud Caliphate," which happens to be more than 800 gigabytes (GB) larger than Osadzinski's terrorist stash. ISIL supporters behind the "Cloud Caliphate" are in fact disseminating the content and the link to the content in much of the same fashion, using a mix of automation and proprietary tools to spread its reach. The Osadzinski case highlights the centrality of digital archives such as the "Cloud Caliphate" and training materials, such as explosive manuals. Research into how sites such as the "Cloud Caliphate" play a role in the radicalization process have revolved around whether the internet plays a central role or a tertiary role in the radicalization process.[35] Thus far, the author has been able to connect the digital archive to two ISIL cases in the United States, despite the fact that tens of thousands access the archive monthly. Based on the two cases, the "Cloud Caliphate" is itself not a radicalizing agent, but instead facilitates attack plans and builds knowledge in would-be attackers.

Another case, with a direct linkage to the "Cloud Caliphate," involved a 23-year-old American named Muhammed al-Azhari, from Tampa Bay, Florida, who was allegedly plotting an Omar Mateen-style shooting.[36] Al-Azhari – who was initially convicted of terrorism charges in 2015 in Saudi Arabia for attempting to join Jaysh al-Islam and disseminating extremist propaganda – ended up in California in 2018, and eventually moved to Florida, where he worked at Home Depot.[37] Al-Azhari had already acquired three handguns by 2019, and was attempting to modify those weapons, according to the U.S. Justice Department, to conduct a mass shooting.

When FBI agents unlocked his mobile phone in April 2020, they found the same shortlink to the "Cloud Caliphate" saved in his "notes" application. At the time, agents had not redacted the shortlink, and did not describe it other than providing a full link to the archive in the publicly available affidavit. What is clear is that al-Azhari was likely not radicalized by the material in the archive and may have

been accessing it for training materials within its "Military Science" folder, such as manufacturing silencers.

While only two cases, Osadzinski and al-Azhari cases highlight the centrality of digital archives such as the "Cloud Caliphate" to the overall ISIL digital ecosystem.[38] Coveted for their training materials, cloud-based drives, such as the "Cloud Caliphate" and other versions of them, support the ability of ISIL supporters to prepare for a potential attack and provide them with the knowledge and know-how to do so. Digital archives host specialized knowledge on attack planning, weapons, explosives, and training for battle. They teach ISIL supporters counter-intelligence methods and practices. The tactical and military knowledge in ISIL digital archives in the "Cloud Caliphate" is of central concern to this chapter. By delving into the "Military Sciences" folder, prosecutors and policymakers will have greater insight into the types of war crimes the tactical material is intended to facilitate, such as chemical and biological warfare. The next section outlines a five-point classification system used to classify the material in the "Military Sciences" folder. This classification system provides prosecutors insight into the central training and war-preparation material likely used to prepare foreign fighters for battle.

Between "Military Sciences" and the "Mujahid's Bag": Understanding ISIL Virtual Military Training

The "Military Sciences" folder in the "Cloud Caliphate" contains 1,188 images, 700 PDFs, 217 text documents, 223 videos, 9 PowerPoints, and 51 audio recordings. The materials span the gamut, from instructions and the technical specifications around the design and development of a "nuclear bomb," to building and fastening a silencer to your gun from easily found materials. The overwhelming focus of the materials in the "Military Sciences" folder is on the manufacturing of explosives. In fact, 56 percent of the "Military Sciences" folder is dedicated to explosive development, strategy, and conducting explosive attacks.

To classify this massive set of diverse materials, the author homed in on the "Mujahid's Bag" subfolder located in the "Military Sciences" folder. The author focused on the "Mujahid's Bag" based on its history of being curated by a foreign fighter. To assist this effort, the author developed a five-point framework for the classification of the materials contained in the "Military Sciences" folder. This framework is as follows:

- Legacy Materials: These are materials collected from a range of Salafi-jihadist groups dating back to the influx of Arab mujahideen to Afghanistan in the 1980s, and includes historical materials collected from training camps in Iraq and Afghanistan. Included in this band of materials are strategic documents developed by Salafi-jihadist tacticians.
- Physical Training Materials: These are materials that provide would-be fighters with training regimes that could prepare them for battle. These materials have been collected from training camps and distilled into PowerPoints. This similarly contains tutorials on administering first aid on the battlefield.
- Weapons Training Materials: These are materials meant to familiarize would-be foreign fighters, as well as current fighters, with the types of weapons, ammunition and other arsenal that could be used on the battlefield.
- Explosives and Specialized Training Materials: These are materials intended to teach would-be foreign fighters' military strategy, as well as practical guides for bomb-making and chemicals development.
- Security and Intelligence Gathering Materials: These are materials used to enhance the ability of foreign fighters to find enemy intelligence that can be useful to the group during battles or planning for attacks. These materials similarly include how to survive incarceration and deal with investigators.

Using this framework, the author analyzed the contents of the "Mujahid's Bag" since it was the largest and central sub-folders contained in the "Military Sciences" folder.

Legacy Material

The largest subset of materials used for training recruits and those intended to fight amongst the ranks of the Islamic State are folders dedicated to the legacy of military strategies of a range of groups. Roughly twenty-five percent of the content contained in the 'Mujahid's Bag' is focused on the military strategy, tactics, and "science" of combat. These folders include 117 documents, many of which are books not produced by the Islamic State or adjacent Salafi-jihadist organizations, and instead general military science and pseudoscience of fighting wars.

Examples include "The Military Vietnamese Trails" by Ali Fayyad. The book focuses on lessons learned from the Vietnamese as they fought occupying forces. The first page asks (then answers): "Why and How did the Vietnamese win?"

Similarly, the inclusion of the "America and Gang Wars," whose author is unknown. This book is intended to be used as a guide for brigade commanders and their sub-units in counter-guerrilla operations and builds on U.S. counter-gang tactics in urban settings. It similarly includes the work of noted Orientalists, such as Lawrence of Arabia.

Some of the key legacy Salafi-jihadist documents in this folder, include Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin's "A Practical Course for Guerilla War." Al-Muqrin was one of the central founders of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, and this work is based on his experience fighting, and training others, in Middle East, Africa and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The guide lays out the process behind conducting assassinations, hostage-taking, gathering intelligence, preparations for attack, as well as "selecting personnel, executing with quick, deadly precision, and withdrawing afterward. Throughout, the treatise stresses the long-term, unconventional nature of jihad and the need to survive to fight another day (the course makes no mention of suicide attacks), covering such details as types of operational cell structure and size along with the characteristics of personnel and job functions for a typical organization."[39] He was killed in June 2004 by Saudi counterterrorism forces.

The folder similarly contains two encyclopedias. The first encyclopedia is a simplified "Encyclopedia of Contemporary Religions, Sects and Parties." The encyclopedia provides an in-depth overview of different religious sects, and is likely used to provide fighters and commanders with the ability to understand why a religious war must be fought with against other sects. The second encyclopedia is titled "The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Jews," written by Shiekh Tareq al-Suwaidan.[40] This is a 453-page antisemitic tome on Judaism, and the history of the Jewish people. In the book, al-Suwaidan claims "the falsified religion of the Jews, itself, encourages them to practice treason and treachery, and feeds them to make them a special group among humans, and confers upon them the right to exploit others on the most hideous paths of duplicity."

In the folder is also a copy of a 58-page word document penned by the father of the original Salafi-jihadist caravan to Afghanistan, Abduallah Azzam.[41] Azzam's document details "the corruption of the Islamic ummah," and outlines those responsible for Muslims the divergence away from 'Allah'. In it, Azzam blames the moral corruption of the ummah on western influence. Azzam's treatise is stowed away in a sub-folder dubbed the "Guide for the Study of the Preparations for Wars," which in of itself is a compendium of material meant to prepare fighters for the battlefield. Much of the guide is focused on the development of military acumen, physical, weapons and explosives training.

Physical Training Materials

In the "Mujahid's Bag" there is a dedicated folder to physical fitness. The files range from self-defense lessons to weight loss tips, understanding the history and lessons of ninjas, and Karate 101. The karate file includes visual aids and detailed descriptions of how many sets of punches, kicks, and ducks are needed for practice. The history and lessons of 'ninjas' document covers tactics found in different schools of ninjutsu and focuses on knowing oneself. Highlighted sentences read "you must be keen to know yourself and your capabilities as much as you are keen to know your opponent and your enemy's capabilities."

According to a Word document located in the folder titled 'The Goal of Physical Training', physical fitness is key to "complete all his actions in the best manner" which is important because "even if his use of weapons does not reach the degree of perfection, he is able to maneuver and take the best positions for shooting, and is able to perform his tasks with all speed and lightness, and physical exhaustion will not disturb his thinking and the speed of his initiative." The rest of the files in this folder contain rigorous workout schedules with supporting JPEGS and GIFs intended to build strength and fitness in foreign fighters.

Part and parcel of physical training for the battlefield includes first aid. The author of the Word documents in the folder is unknown, but the PDFs were written by Qassem Abbas al-Zahrawi, known in jihadist forums as Dr. Healing and Abu al-Ka'ka' al-Shami. The materials the authors present focus on a list of the expected dangers in the battlefield such as chemical burns and poisoning (mercury, lead, antimony, phosphorous, benzole, manganese, sulphur, chromium). Based on this, the authors also provide detailed instructions on how to treat wounds, assessing the condition of an injury, stemming bleeding, finding, or identifying broken bones, and addressing burns.

Weapons Training Materials

Weapons training is a central element for any would-be foreign fighter, and hence this folder contains detailed schematics as well as manuals for various small and large firearms, and ammunition. The folder similarly includes three weapons encyclopedias:
- The Russian Weapons Encyclopedia, containing 21 PDFs on various weapons such as anti- tank missiles, and automatic grenades.
- Weapons Encyclopedia from Al Mujahedeen Service Office, containing five files of 'large weapons' such as artillery weapons.

- The Global Encyclopedia for Weapons- First Book — Land Weapons, containing eight Microsoft Word documents on various weapons.

One of the sub-folders in this folder details and contains documents from the Al-Battar Camp in Afghanistan.[42] The documents include a detailed gun course, and one on anti-armor, and a 69-page PDF on light weapons which introduces and compares Kalashnikovs, Klokovs, rifles, MP5s, Sniper rifles, and PK machine guns. Another folder focuses on manufacturing weapons and ammunition at home, with detailed descriptions and images of gun silencers (image 3.2), bullet manufacturing, and how-to guides on building blasting capsules.

Explosives and Specialized Training Materials

Key to the preparation of fighters prepared to travel for the Islamic State was both knowledge of explosives and other chemical production methods. Fifty-seven percent of the content contained in the 'Mujahid's Bag' links back to the production, or the understanding, of explosives and chemical manufacturing. One folder titled "Thu al-Bajadeen Encyclopedia" has eleven PDFs which contain detailed instructions on the production of explosives and poisons, including lists of chemicals, amounts and instructions on combining them along with images and visual aids. These were compiled by Kata'eb al-Firdaws Al'ala, one of "the global Islamic brigades fighting the Jews and Crusaders," according to the documents. The same folder contains another encyclopedia (a Word document) "Abduallah Dhu al-Bajadin[43] Encyclopedia" containing chemicals, ingredients, recipes, and instructions with images of the making of explosives.

Al-Bajadin is mentioned in the file names as a chemist and a thinker. Originally, the name belonged to a second-degree *sahaba* (friend) of the Prophet, a man known for his dedication to Islam. The folder contains seven Word documents. Each file is a different method of creating a remote detonator, including exploding home bells and aerosol sprays. Another PowerPoint in the series functions as "an intro to manufacturing explosives" and illustrates how to use produce to test the acidity of the home-made concoctions, specifically red cabbage to test the pH.

Other examples include ways to make aluminum powder through breaking down cooking aluminum sheets with water in a blender. Part of this specialized training element was the failed attempt at creating weapons of mass destruction, and specifically a low-grade nuclear bomb. In one of the folders within this subset was an eleven-page PDF comprising a set of instructions on how to "build a nuclear bomb." The series begins with the following introduction, "the Islamic ummah will not win the strategic power in the military against its enemies until they gain rich scientific advancement," which is why the document focuses on

the creation and manufacturing of explosives. Each lesson covers a different aspect of making explosives.

A sixty-seven-slide PowerPoint document titled "The Six Steps to Making a Grenade" is the equivalent of a how-to guide, including step-by-step instructions on crushing the heads of matches (potassium chloride), with visual aids on how to gather the crushed powder and sift it to the final steps of boiling and reducing manure (to obtain ammonium nitrate) and compiling the various ingredients to make the grenade.

Security and Intelligence Gathering Materials

The third largest folder of content relates to elements of security and intelligence; this includes espionage, general chicanery, and methods by which to surveil and ultimately outsmart authorities, such as lawyers, judges, and correctional officers. In the first file of this folder, the trainers suggest the purchase and use of "spy devices," to navigate the criminal justice system. The document describes discreet spy devices that the readers could use against their enemies – or ones that can be used against them, such as voice recording pens, and hidden miniature cameras. Each listed product comes with a price tag of how much it costs (in United States dollars) to order it online within the United States, and another price for international shipping. The document goes on to advise the reader "if you sit with a lawyer or an opponent of yours and find him pulling a pen from his inner pocket, then putting it back, then pulling it out.... etc., beware because the man may be armed with an odd device that records every word you say." This section ends with this: "the price of the device, including shipping to any city in the United States, is $199. The price of the device, including shipping to any city in the world, is only $299."

The folder similarly details prison strategies for survival, most of it from Palestinian resistance groups. The word 'prison' comes up in three different titles, a Word document called "Investigative Methods used in the Zionist Enemy Prisons and Ways to Confront them," a PDF named "The Enemy Prisons," and a Word document, "Traps of Agents in Prisons: Deceptive Methods of Extracting Information." The primary use of Palestinian documents for this advice harkens back to the intricate and intimate understanding Palestinians have of prison settings and the likelihood of entrapment. The documents detail methods by which to lie to investigators, play jailhouse confidential informants, and to conduct counter-surveillance on correctional guards and lawyers involved in the prosecution or defense of cases. This folder similarly contains the "Encyclopedia of Jihad: Security and Intelligence," which is split into parts one and two. While

part one is illegible, part two is composed of 581 pages focused on security and intelligence. The comprehensive guide to intelligence services and their tactics, the encyclopedia, may be dated, but it provides recruits with the knowledge on how to evade prosecution and to prepare themselves for deception inside of prisons to survive and gain freedom once more.

Recommendations: Prosecutors and Policymakers

What is clear from this chapter's analysis of ISIL training material in one of the largest drives of online terrorist content on the open web, is that digital archives play a central role in facilitating the knowledge and know-how for would-be foreign fighters and attackers. The focus of the materials seems to be primarily on explosives development and usage; however, there are substantive portions of the drive dedicated to security and intelligence that could have provided foreign fighters currently incarcerated with the tools and strategies to manipulate investigators.

The clearest example of potential war crimes facilitation in the "Military Sciences" folder seems to be training materials dedicated to the development of nuclear, chemical, and biological weaponry to use on civilians and members of opposing forces. While it is unclear how reliable the documents are that detail the development of nuclear bomb development, or chemical and biological agents, the idea that ISIL supporters can draw on ISIL-produced material and other content suggests intent on using these weapons in the future. Understanding who within the group oversaw either chemical or biological weapon development could shed light on if these were developed, and what they were intended for.

Digital archives have evolved substantially over the past two decades of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). All the primary Salafi-jihadist groups not only man stand-alone websites, but also digital archives that host training materials and "washups" of successful attacks that can be used to inspire and educate would-be ISIL foreign fighters and individual attackers. Prosecutors should seek to understand what websites ISIL foreign fighters visited to learn how to cross-reference material accessed with that in "Cloud Caliphate." Understanding the knowledge acquisition process by foreign fighters would allow prosecutors to make a determination on whether other individual offenders have similar patterns and are likely accessing illegal material. There is a significant gap in understanding the preparedness of foreign fighters and what materials they read, websites they visited, and other activities they undertook to prepare themselves for the battlefield.

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[1] "Victory loves preparation." *Al-Risalah*. Issue 2: October 2015. 90-94.

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[2] Doran, M. "Peter Dutton Wants to Stop Australian Citizens with Suspected Terror Links from Coming Home," 2019. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Accessed at: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-07-23/temporary-exclusion-order-explainer/11330566

[3] "Victory loves preparation." *Al-Risalah*. Issue 2: October 2015. Pg. 91.

[4] Mosendz, P. "The Death of an Australian ISIS Leader," 2014. The Atlantic. Accessed at: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/10/australian-isis-leader-killed/382058/

[5] "Victory loves preparation." *Al-Risalah*. Issue 2: October 2015. Pg. 90.

[6] "Victory loves preparation." *Al-Risalah*. Issue 2: October 2015. Pg. 90.

[7] Chambers, G. "Extreme Prejudice: Terror TV on Australian Security Agency Watch Lists," 2015. The Daily Telegraph (Australia). Accessed at: https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/national/extreme-prejudice-terror-tv-on-australian-security-agency-watch-lists/news-story/7cf99296b6d51184e43226ccb7e0300d

[8] Safi, M. "Australian Extremist Abdul Mahmoud Killed in Syria – Report," 2015. The Guardian. Accessed at: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/mar/11/australian-isis-supporter-abdul-salam-mahmoud-killed-in-syria-reports

[9] Chambers, G. "Muslim Radical Abdel Salam Mahmoud Praises Slain Aussie 'Martyr' Numan Haider," 2014. The Daily Telegraph (Australia). Accessed at: https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/muslim-radical-abdul-salam-mahmoud-praises-slain-aussie-martyr-numan-haider/news-story/e28e3c0b71453e46ec51b6a0c06ad0af

[10] Zelin, A. "The Age of Political Jihadism: A Study of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham," 2022. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Accessed at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/age-political-jihadism-study-hayat-tahrir-al-sham

[11] As named by the author.

[12] Based on analysis of an introductory document penned by Abu Hamza al-Sudani in the "Muhjahid's Bag" subfolder, located in the "Military Sciences" folder in the "Cloud Caliphate"

[13] Stenersen, A. "The Internet: A Virtual Training Camp?" 2008, Terrorism and Political Violence. 20:215-233.

[14] Zelin, A. "The War Between ISIS and al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement," 2014. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Accessed at: https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/34054603/ResearchNote_20_Zelin-libre.pdf?1403877729=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DThe_War_Between_ISIS_and_al_Qaeda_for_Su.pdf&Expires=1691335873&Signature=CTYrtz1tGj7eskx4S8M5LirzlGxJk-NCNDeDHt19yJVU71igh9WgVXxdfduEO5uImlYVsADG8YHieQa90jxTduOkzZr6m0Pbn2CFzYlfj~SnzHZS-0UttdAYWn~SZqk2h3QPmbsyQ~x433b0zUCAnFG2JhbrSAjKA1r3tmw~9b7VBdkRObPi2XG8HVtV8u1xh7R46k9857WIE2zcN-7jZ6zDUekAFMWG66pZSwD1j3dg9aLykPNGEP1EfrNhr1Xp6ro2lFGmSUNHa1KH~b-gY-F3kKMgWg4nLaj8JRFiQRfy-b-v6f6HmEQAwVUR6HUdQwUqPjNzYg2Ot1bVJ9IHeg__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA

[15] The data stored in these 24 folders is more than three times the amount of data the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) made public after releasing the material confiscated from Osama bin Laden's computer in 2017

[16] Based on the analysis of "an Introduction" document left in the digital "Mujahid's Bag," signed by Abu Hamza al-Sudani and containing "a date created" by in the metadata that lines up to when al-Sudani was in Syria.

[17] The author intentionally excluded the regimented school curriculum devised by ISIL and delivered in schools across the expanse of its territory.

[18] The ISIL-aligned Al-Saqri Foundation for Military Sciences has a specific folder for all of the content that it has produced over the years, beginning in 2018. Webber, L. "Islamic State-Aligned 'Al-Saqri Foundation for Military Sciences' Launches New Incitement Campaign with Bomb-Making Manuals," 2022. Militant Wire, Accessed at: https://www.militantwire.com/p/islamic-state-aligned-al-saqri-foundation

[19] Weimann, G." " 2004. United States Institute for Peace (USIP). Accessed at: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr116.pdf

[20] Post, J. "Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants: The al-Qaeda Training Manual," 2004. United States Airforce Counterproliferation Center. Accessed at: https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CSDS/Books/alqaedatrainingmanual2.pdf

[21] As recently as 2022, ISIL-linked support groups were leading incitement campaigns online using material contained within the "Military Sciences" folder in the "Cloud Caliphate."

[22] The author's five-point framework for classifying ISIL military training is as follows: legacy training, physical training, weapons training, specialized training, and web-based intelligence gathering training.

[23] Zelin, A. "The State of Global Jihad Online: A Qualitative, Quantitative and Cross-Lingual Analysis," 2013. New American Foundation. Accessed at: https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/policy-papers/the-state-of-global-jihad-online/

[24] Hegghammer, T. "Interpersonal Trust on Jihadi Internet Forums," 2014. Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI). Accessed at: https://osf.io/vyeuz/download

[25] 'The Threat of Terrorist and Violent Extremist-Operated Websites," 2002. Tech Against Terrorism (TAT). Accessed at: https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/2022/01/28/report-the-threat-of-terrorist-and-violent-extremist-operated-websites/ Researchers at Tech Against Terrorism found 198 websites linked to terrorist groups and violent extremism groups. Out of those 198 sites, 79 were linked to "violent Sunni Islamist" groups.

[26] Mitew, T. E. & Shehabat, A. "Black-boxing the Black Flag: Anonymous Sharing Platforms and ISIS Content Distribution Tactics," Perspectives on Terrorism 12 .1 (2018): 81-99. Accessed at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4675&context=lhapapers

[27] Based on analysis of the Bangla-language al-Qaeda drive conducted by the author in 2022.

[28] SimilarWeb is a proprietary service and hence does not provide detailed information on how it culls traffic to websites. The service claims to be General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant.

[29] At the time the websites were "Muslim News," a long-standing blog news site for official ISIL propaganda, "al-Bayan Radio," an audio archive and streaming platform, and "The Punishment," a media streaming archive.

[30] To date, the author has been able to track 62 different ISIL support groups on the open web.

[31] "The Monument of the Caliphate: The Islamic State Organization Explains its Administrative Structure for the First Time," 2016. Enab Baladi. Accessed at: https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/89976

[32] Bennet, C. "New ISIS 'Help Desk' to Aid Hiding from Authorities," 2016. Accessed at: https://thehill.com/policy/cybersecurity/268940-new-isis-help-desk-unifies-encryption-support/

[33] Triacetone Triperoxide, which can be used for explosive devices. United States Director of National Intelligence. "First Responders Tool Box," 2019. Accessed at: https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/jcat/firstresponderstoolbox/78--NCTC-DHS-FBI---Triacetone-Triperoxide-(TATP)-.pdf

[34] Masterson, M. "Former DePaul Student Sentenced to 7 Years For Attempting to Aid ISIS Terror Group," 2022. WTTW Chicago. Accessed at: https://news.wttw.com/2022/11/17/former-depaul-student-sentenced-more-7-years-attempting-aid-isis-terror-group

[35] Fürst, J.; Neumann, P; Melegrou-Hitchens, A; Ranstorp, M.; Vidino, L.; Winter, C. "Online extremism: Research trends in internet activism, radicalization, and counter-strategies." International Journal of Conflict and Violence. Vol. 14 (2) 2020. }With this in mind, most investigations into online extremism at the level of the user work with the assumption that radicalization, while it can be impacted by things that happen online, does not come purely as a result of online behaviors. Indeed, it is usually taken as a given that online processes, interactions and activities complement but do not substitute their offline counterparts, and that there is little sense in attempting to distinguish one sphere from the other." Accessed at: https://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/3809

[36] Surana, K. "Tampa Islamic State supporter rehearsed attach, tried to by gun before arrest, FBI says." "In his free time, he surfed Islamic State chatrooms that offered training on making suicide belts and bombs. He looked up details of Omar Mateen's 2016 shooting attack on Orlando's Pulse nightclub and googled 'Bayshore Boulevard' and 'busy beach.' One day, he drove out to Honeymoon Island in Dunedin, then turned around and drove straight back to Tampa." Accessed at: https://www.tampabay.com/news/crime/2020/05/29/tampa-islamic-state-supporter-rehearsed-attack-tried-to-buy-gun-before-arrest-fbi-says/

[37] Hassan, H. "The Army of Islam is winning in Syria." Foreign Policy, October 1, 2013. "On Sept. 29, at least 50 groups operating mainly around Damascus merged into Jaish al-Islam ("the Army of Islam"), thus undermining the FSA's dominance in a part of the country where it had long been considered the strongest rebel force." Accessed at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/10/01/the-army-of-islam-is-winning-in-syria/

[38] The author is currently reviewing all the publicly available affidavits in the United States to check if the archive is referenced in other cases.

[39] Dobransky, S. "Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency: 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Muqrin's A Practical Course for Guerrilla War," 2011. Air & Space Power Journal. U.S. Air Force. Accessed at: https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/ASPJ/Book-Reviews/Article/1293341/al-qaidas-doctrine-for-insurgency-abd-al-aziz-al-muqrins-a-practical-course-for/

[40] Colombo, V. "Tareq Suwaidan, Predicatore Antisemita in Italia. Ecco Le Prove Del Suo Estremismo," 2016. Informazione Corretta. Accessed at: http://www.informazionecorretta.com/main.php?mediaId=115&sez=120&id=61964.

[41] Battiston, G. "Why Did Jihadism Go Global? Interview With Thomas Hegghammer," 2021. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. Accessed at: https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/why-did-jihadism-go-global-interview-thomas-hegghammer-31621

[42] "A Guide to Jihad on the Web." The Jamestown Foundation. Terrorism Focus Volume 2, Issue 7. Accessed at: https://jamestown.org/program/a-guide-to-jihad-on-the-web-2/

[43] Considered al-Qaeda's bomb-making expert.

Victory, Violations, and Investment: Inside the Islamic State's System of Slavery

Gina Vale

In August 2014, the Islamic State (IS[1]) group launched a campaign of violent persecution against the Yazidis in northern Iraq. In 2016, a report by the United Nations Human Rights Council concluded that IS' attacks and subsequent treatment of Yazidis were committed "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."[2] Importantly, the council not only acknowledged that these events amounted to genocide, but that the genocide continues through its long-term impacts.[3] IS used varied means to attack and fragment the Yazidi community, culminating in the mass murder, trafficking, and enslavement of thousands of men, women, and children. Media and scholarly attention have predominantly focused on the sexual element of IS' abuses; yet, this is only one piece of the puzzle. While this study maintains focus on the treatment of captive Yazidi women (and their children), it applies a wide-angle lens in order to contextualize and better understand their victimization within the holistic physical and biological annihilation of the minority community. Yazidi women were not only 'sex slaves'. Their status as *sabāyā* (female prisoners-of-war, sing. *sabiyya*) legitimated their subjugation through myriad – physical, psychological, sexual, domestic, emotional, and even economic – violences. They were targeted specifically and explicitly *as* Yazidis, *as* women, and some *as* mothers. The testimonies of survivors thus provide an 'inside' view of IS' system of slavery, with varied experiences both within and sometimes despite the group's central directives. However, the objective was consistent: eradication of the Yazidi community beyond the group's physical assault. Drawing from multiple data sources, the following sections of this report map the three-stage evolution of IS' policies and practices of genocide.

First, IS' strategy and tactics of genocidal violence were pre-meditated and ideologically driven. Considerable resources were dedicated to creating an enabling environment and legitimating narrative for each criminal act, with multi-

media propaganda published to justify its systematic persecutory treatment of captive men, women, girls, and boys. Tapping into long-held misconceptions and discriminatory narratives against Yazidis, IS' propagandists and bureaucrats demonstrate the power of the pen as a weapon of genocide. Couched in terms of a rite of passage and evidence of its pre-destined ideological and military superiority, the group's aim was the annihilation of the ethno-religious minority. The genocide was a holistic conquest that constituted multiple forms of physical and symbolic violences.[4] The treatment and abuses levied against one segment of the Yazidi community is thus inextricable from those perpetrated against others. Whether killed, captured, or forced to live as 'Muslims' within the 'caliphate', IS' actions centered on the eradication of the Yazidi community, including their future reproductive capability.

Second, IS established an extensive and highly regulated infrastructure to traffic and manage its thousands of captive women and children. The group's published edicts, notices, and pamphlets serve as breadcrumbs to track the process of its division and trade of captives from initial holding sites, through 'wholesale' distributors, retail slave markets, and finally to private 'ownership'. At each stage, the testimonies of liberated captives reveal the inner mechanisms, inconsistencies, and even violations of the group's regulations, particularly regarding the hidden and illicit abuses perpetrated in the home space of committed members. Consistent across their stories of captivity is what became clear as a 'divide and conquer' approach to IS enslavement. At the organizational level, Yazidi women were not abused indiscriminately. Their age, marital status and sexual 'purity', aesthetic beauty and even educational level were factored into their classification, value, and purpose. However, the abuses they suffered were the prerogative of their individual 'owner', highlighting a key distinction between official group policy and members' practice. Importantly, this included IS-affiliated women, whose involvement in the genocide spans ideological, psychological, and even physical violations.[5]

Third, IS' genocide has had long-lasting impacts on the Yazidi community, as it was intended to. The group designed and implemented its strategy to outlast its territorial assault. For individual group members, a slave was an investment that paid dividends – both literally and figuratively. 'Ownership' of a Yazidi captive was a privilege that marked militant rank and was formally remunerated in recognition of the importance of a slave's provision and 'protection'. As the 'caliphate' began to crumble, the profit to be earned by individual IS members from the illicit ransom of slaves back to their families became too lucrative for many to resist, resulting in the further impoverishment of an already displaced Yazidi community. Yet, the potential return of captives to their families presented another opportunity for the group. Its investment in captives was not purely financial, but also ideological, through the indoctrination and training of young

teen and pre-teen boys. The documented violences perpetrated by these young recruits served as the ultimate evidence of their successful forced 'conversion'.

This chapter's data and analysis can support efforts to prosecute IS-affiliated persons for crimes that go beyond group membership. Across these three phases, perpetrators of the genocide were not limited to those who directly inflicted violence by their own hands. Behind the scenes, members across the organization contributed to providing the ideological justifications, legal frameworks, and physical infrastructure to enable these abuses. Group members bought into and contributed to this system – whether or not they themselves 'owned' a slave. These actors and their actions must be recognized as integral components to the genocide.

Methodology

Since the start of the genocide, the plight of the Yazidi community has received significant attention in international policy, academia, and media. In addition to secondary sources drawn from these published literatures, the primary empirical basis for the study is IS documentation and original interview data. First, the group's published propaganda – in the form of multilingual magazine articles and videos – provide insight into its underpinning ideologies and motivations, presenting rose-tinted and legitimated arguments for slavery to appeal to its members and supporters. Second, internal administrative documentation, collated by archivists for scholarly analysis,[6] reveal the group's logistics and regulations for the trade, ownership, and treatment of slaves. Yet, these documents once again provide only the theoretical framework for IS policies; they do not attest to their implementation in practice. As such, third, the author analyses data from fieldwork interviews with twenty-two Yazidi women who experienced IS captivity and enslavement first-hand. Their experiences not only reveal inconsistencies in the group's regulations, but also provide a unique insider view of enslavement from the homes of their captors. These primary sources offer vastly differing perspectives, and so when examined together they can provide the most detailed picture of IS' official policies and informal practices of enslavement, its regulation, and its evolution.

Ethical implications of the study were carefully considered, including for desk-based research.[7] IS documentation contains (sometimes extremely graphic) imagery of the group's governed populations and its exploitation of captives in service to its cause. Whilst detailed examination is necessary for improved understanding and judicial process against perpetrators, the forthcoming analysis does not indulge in detail or description beyond analytical necessity. The same of

course applies to survivors' interview data drawn from the author's fieldwork in Iraqi Kurdistan in March and April 2019. The trauma experienced and sensitivity of the interview dynamic with liberated Yazidi women is well documented.[8] At the time of interview, the women were all displaced by IS. Nineteen women were located in four Yazidi-only internally displaced persons (IDP) camps – Esyan, Shariya, Shekhan and Mamrashan – two lived in unfinished buildings in the Kurdish village of Ba'adre; and one woman was visiting from Germany, where she had been granted asylum. The research was granted full approval from the author's university ethical review board[9] and the Duhok Board of Relief and Humanities Affairs (BRHA) responsible for the management and protection of the governorate's twenty-two IDP and refugee camps. Informed voluntary consent was obtained from all interviewees individually, as all conversations were facilitated by a female interpreter, translating between English and Kurdish Kurmanji. The interviews were conducted on the basis of full and automatic anonymization to protect their identities and personal security.

Victory: Beyond Sexual Conquest

In a matter of days following the initial invasion of Sinjar, an estimated 9,900 Yazidis were either killed or kidnapped,[10] and a further 400,000 were displaced in Iraqi Kurdistan.[11] Seizure of new territory provides a non-state armed group with tactical benefits, namely increased recruitment, taxation, and war spoils.[12] IS documentation and survivors' testimonies reveal that the aim and scope of the group's campaign of genocide extended beyond simply opportunistic rape and pillage of conquered territories. Rather, it constituted a pre-meditated strategy of conquest and holistic subordination of an ethno-religious minority. Perpetration of the genocide must therefore be understood not in purely militaristic or physically violent terms. While militants may have pulled the trigger in the Yazidi massacres or led the assault in the abduction of captives, behind them lies a web of ideologues, logisticians, and propagandists vital to the creation of an enabling environment, legitimating narrative, and pragmatic capability for IS' system of enslavement.

Scholars of rebel governance emphasize the crucial role that civilian support plays in the maintenance of control and order by a political actor that lacks the power to claim full sovereignty.[13] While this literature has largely focused on 'everyday' policies of security or welfare provision by an armed group, the same applies to its designation and persecution of an 'Othered' enemy. IS propagandists and bureaucrats sought to frame its barbarity against the Yazidis as both ideologically and socially legitimate. In doing so, it tapped into long-standing misconceptions of the Yazidi faith. First, Yazidism is antiliteral; its songs and

teachings are passed down orally by sheikhs as *qewl* (songs). As a result, unlike Judaism and Christianity, Yazidism is not a 'religion of the book', thereby excluding adherents from protection in exchange for the *jizya* (non-Muslim) tax under classical Islamic law.[14] Second, Yazidis venerate *Tawûsê Melek* – the Peacock Angel. Though considered a benevolent angel in Yazidi tradition, IS likened *Tawûsê Melek* to Satan, the traditional fallen angel, resulting in the designation of Yazidis as 'devil worshippers' and 'infidels'.[15]

In an edict published during its attack on Sinjar, IS provided 'scholarly' justification for its targeting of the Yazidis as 'original disbelievers' and 'idolaters'.[16] Two months later, in a multiple-page spread of its flagship English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, IS again explicitly legitimized the attack on Sinjar and the treatment of the Yazidis. It declared, "the Islamic State faced a population of Yazidis, a pagan minority existent for ages in the regions of Iraq and Sham [Syria]. Their continual existence to this day is a matter that Muslims should question as they will be asked about it on Judgment Day."[17] By couching the genocide in apocalyptic terms, and aimed at its international supporter base, IS signifies and legitimates its violence as a milestone of its larger ideo-military battles. Moreover, it is important to reflect on the fact that the article took great pains in emphasizing the 'research' of 'Sharī'ah students in the Islamic State' in determining Yazidis' classification (and punishment) 'prior to the taking of Sinjar'.[18] The influence and power of IS' ideologues and scholars in shaping the group's military and propagandistic exploits is well-documented.[19] The Yazidi genocide is no different, and importantly it extends to supporters whose unofficial social media content reflects approval or legitimation of the group's system of slavery.[20] The perpetrators of, and accessories to, the Yazidi genocide wielded a pen as well as a sword.

The aim of the Sinjar invasion was the eradication of Yazidis as an ethno-religious minority that must submit to the supremacy of IS' version of Islam. What transpired in practice was a highly gendered and ethicized persecution, with 'conversion' taking multiple forms. Considerable attention from within and beyond the Yazidi community has been paid to the sexual element of IS' abuse, notably the systematic trade and rape of young Yazidi women and girls as *sabāyā*. Lahoud notes that IS' policy of sexual enslavement legitimates "access to multiple sexual partners beyond the four wives that the Islamic institution of marriage allows."[21] Pragmatically, purchase of a *sabiyya* could circumvent the group's ruling of separate accommodation and equal provision for co-wives.[22] Indeed, an IS pamphlet entitled "From the Creator's Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement" explicitly presents *sabāyā* 'ownership' as "God's mercy on men who cannot find marriage or for whom the matter of marriage is difficult from expenditures and the like."[23] This certainly resonated with some male followers on social media.[24] However, sexual gratification was not explicitly promoted by

the group's central media outlets as a recruitment tool. In fact, one magazine responding to female critics of Yazidi slave 'ownership' takes pains to differentiate the practice from Western prostitution.[25]

The purpose and practice of enslavement of Yazidi women and girls went beyond sexual gratification. In other words, rape was not the goal; it served a wider strategic purpose. As biological reproducers and symbolic boundary markers of a community,[26] women's bodies and gendered identities are targeted and serve as a battleground for larger ethnic or nationalist struggles principally fought between men.[27] Whether recreational, security-driven, or genocidal, gender oppression is a prerequisite for the formal strategies and informal practices of wartime sexual violence that are reflective of hypermasculine and misogynistic organizational culture.[28]

Moreover, systematic and genocidal rape serves as a tool of 'ethnic cleansing', targeting females through their child-bearing capacity to destroy the 'purity' of an ethnic group.[29] IS documentation reinforces the role of rape in its broader vision of 'conquest', highlighting captivity and enslavement as means of both spreading *tawhīd* (monotheism) and increasing Muslim offspring.[30] Through rape of individual women, IS sought to psychologically and physically fragment the collective Yazidi community, exploiting its socio-cultural mores of endogamy. Marriage or sexual relations with non-Yazidis is strictly prohibited and punishable by excommunication, and even reported cases of honor killings.[31] Accordingly, rape served as means to crystalize women's captivity and their new identity as IS *sabāyā*.

It is a common misconception that all Yazidi captives were immediately and automatically sexually enslaved by IS. Six female interviewees – aged between twenty-two and forty at the time of their capture – reported that upon condition of their 'conversion', their families were permitted to live – temporarily until the spring of 2015[32] – with varying degrees of 'freedom' in IS-controlled villages.[33] One woman recalled an IS militant proclaiming, "Now you are free; you are Muslim and can live as you want. There is no risk to your life."[34] The families' compulsory participation and conformity to IS' religious codes and practices solidified their new status as 'Muslim converts'. While not themselves enslaved, they were denied freedoms of movement, religious belief, and expression. Most men were subjected to daily forced labor, carrying out tasks such as grave-digging and work to support IS' agriculture and manufacturing, only interrupted to attend the local mosque for the five daily prayers. One woman added that during Ramadan, "they forced us to fast and said to us that women and children who do not fast will be separated."[35] For a female-only family in Resala village, open-plan houses required women and girls to wear the IS-mandated *shariʿi* (legal) dress for women – black loose-fitting *abaya*, *niqab*, and twin-layered *khimar* – at

all times.[36] These instances highlight an understudied aspect of IS captivity through the eradication of the Yazidi faith and identity through replacement and immersion in new Islamic religious practices.

Approximately 3,100 Yazidis died in the invasion and siege of Sinjar; nearly half were executed *en masse* in mass graves encircling Yazidi villages.[37] The majority of Yazidis killed in these massacres were adult men and adolescent boys – identified as having reached puberty by factors including height, general appearance, and the presence of armpit hair.[38] Given that IS' 'caliphate' was established as an 'utopia' for Sunni Muslims,[39] Yazidi men's ethno-religious identity co-constituted their subordinated masculinity. Several interviewees recalled that their initial encounters with IS militants centered on forced conversion and threats addressed to husbands or fathers as the head-of-household or masculine protector responsible for feminine dependents: "You must belong to Islam, or we will slaughter you and take your children and wife."[40]

IS sought to emasculate Yazidi men, viewed as responsible for the adherence and reproduction of their families into perceived idolatry and sin. Their deaths were thus far from secret. Liberated Yazidi women describe militants taunting them with the sights and sounds of their male relatives' murder. One woman reported hearing sounds of gunfire, after which four IS men entered her family's home: "We saw blood on their shoes and blood running when they washed their hands in our house. We asked them what they did with all the men, they answered, 'We sent old men to paradise and youth to Sinūnī village.'"[41] She then described horrifying scenes as she was transported with other captive women in an IS convoy from Talʿafar into Syria: "I saw many crimes in the road, so I closed my eyes. Daesh told us to open our eyes and said, 'You will see more and more.'" This was echoed by another woman who witnessed first-hand the shooting of a Yazidi man from Khāna Ṣūr. He had a severe mental illness and was separated from the collective massacres. His body was left in the middle of the road "as an example to others."[42] The woman did not specify what this 'example' was. The abandonment of Yazidi men's corpses and the taunting of their female relatives and neighbors contributed to the group's psychological persecution.

The captivity and sexual abuse of Yazidi women and girls and the separation or murder of Yazidi men are inextricably linked within IS' strategy of genocide. Yazidi reproduction is contingent upon the Yazidi identity of both parents;[43] IS adhered to pre-existing local patrilineal culture whereby an infant inherits the national and religious identity of the father. Accordingly, the fertility of young women and girls was positioned as "means of increasing the offspring *of the Muslims.*"[44] IS documents reflect a profound concern for the issue of paternity of children born through rape. Upon capture, IS considered non-Muslims' marriages to be annulled: "the female captives […] were separated from their husbands by

enslavement. They became lawful […] even without pronouncement of divorce by their *harbī* (infidel) husbands."[45] The disruption of a group's legal institutions reinforces their inferiority and served to achieve IS' goal of "humiliation and degradation of the *kāfir*."[46] Across both Yazidi and Islamic reproductive norms, men's deaths were integral to the biological aspect of the genocide. Among a total of 12,000 victims buried in mass graves across Iraq and Syria,[47] eighty-one graves specifically of Yazidis have been discovered in Sinjar alone.[48] Formal excavation and identification efforts are underway but slow.[49]

IS' strategy and practice of genocide was pre-meditated and holistic. The group dedicated resources to research and 'scholarly' legitimation of its classification and persecution of the Yazidis as 'infidels'. Propaganda and administrative documentation reflect IS' aims to present the subordination of conquered ethno-religious minority populations as a rite of passage and symbol of the group's wider pre-destined ideological and military victory. However, this did not necessarily take the form of Yazidis' murder or enslavement. Liberated captives attest to an undocumented practice of forced 'conversion' of families, who were then permitted to live – albeit only temporarily – as 'Muslims' within IS-controlled territory. What is consistent across these texts and accounts is the group's genocidal policies and practices to physically and biologically eradicate the Yazidis, as well as the symbolic diminution of their identity. Exploiting both local patrilineality and Yazidism' endogamous culture, the fate of men and boys, elderly women, and young women and girls are inextricably linked to their reproductive potential. Forced 'conversion' thus took varied forms and required extensive management.

Violations: The Policy and the Practice

Throughout its territorial rule, IS demonstrated an almost unrivalled level of bureaucratic output, having produced thousands of documents to manage and justify its control of its governed population.[50] The group's documented management of Yazidi captives is no exception. From 'caliphate'-wide edicts to provincial-level public notices, examination of IS' administrative content provides a detailed picture of the infrastructure – and even the personnel – that sustained the group's transnational system of human trafficking and slavery. Published regulations also extend to the permitted treatment of individual *sabāyā* by their 'owner'. At this point, the testimonies of liberated captives diverge from the written policies of their captors. They reveal cases of unharnessed abuses behind closed doors, as well as the undocumented involvement of IS-affiliated women in the genocide.

IS employed varied methods to traffic and trade thousands of captured women and children. The first stage was entering slaves into the IS economy as 'wholesale' chattel at holding sites across IS territory.[51] In groups of up to approximately 500, the names, ages, and characteristics of the women and girls were noted in order to record and track their re-sale and movement over time and space. Indeed, in her memoir, Nobel Laureate and liberated Yazidi captive Nadia Murad speaks of the photographs and logged characteristics of each *sabiyya* printed and hung at checkpoints like 'wanted' posters, with a $5,000 USD (~£3,720 GBP) reward for those who find and return the *sabiyya* to her registered 'owner'.[52] Such important data was the responsibility of one of the group's most senior officials. Held in separate holding sites, several interviewees overheard the name of the man surveying them with a notebook: Haji Abdullah.[53] A senior judge and one of the members of the infamous 'Delegated Committee' in 2014 to 2015, he was identified by the Commission for International Justice and Accountability as "one of the key architects of the Islamic State slave trade."[54] His responsibilities included overseeing the distribution of captive Yazidi women and children from Iraqi holding sites, and he is also reported to have "personally enslaved and raped captive women."[55] 'Haji Abdullah' later became the successor to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the group's leader or 'caliph'.[56] It is important to note here that liberated Yazidis can provide detailed and vital victim-witness testimony of their tormentors.[57] From the author's interview experience, women and teenage children have the *kunya* (*nom de guerre*) of each IS member responsible for their captivity and persecution seared into their memories. This applies to members from the group's highest echelons to its lowest rank-and-file, as evidenced in recent criminal justice proceedings.[58]

The second step in the group's trafficking industry was the distribution of captives for 'retail' at provincial *sabāyā* markets held in public halls or abandoned multi-story villas. For high-ranking militants, in-person attendance was not even a prerequisite for purchase. One woman recalled that she was collected by a proxy for her new 'owner' – 'Abu Ibrahim', a Syrian IS emir from Qamishli, who had been severely disabled in a car bomb.[59] However, this appears to be the exception to the rule. A chilling video published by the *New York Times*, entitled 'Slave Market Day', provides a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the management and atmosphere of these testosterone-filled arenas. The footage, filmed and published unofficially by individual members, shows (all male) militants are playfully discussing the prices and attributes of slaves for sale, stating their preference for young and pretty girls with blue or green eyes.[60] One young woman recounted that she and her sister, then aged just fourteen- and fifteen-years-old respectively, were sold through a weeklong *sabāyā* market in Galaxy Hall in Mosul. She noted that, "the price depended on specifications: eye color, height, and level of education."[61] Above all, almost all of the women interviewed recalled that

throughout their captivity, the youngest virgin girls were prioritized for sale and commanded the highest price.

The valorization of virgin *sabāyā* can be accounted for by revisiting the group's preoccupation with patrilineal reproduction. In addition to some young married women, all ten of the women who were single at the time of their initial capture were sexually enslaved. In accordance with Yazidism's religious and moral codes, this guaranteed that the women and girls were virgins, and were considered 'pure' by IS. Many girls as young as nine years old were detained in IS' holding sites as prospective sex-slaves. This aligns with a manifesto from the al-Khansā' Brigade – IS' female morality police –, which specifies that girls are eligible for marriage from the age of nine.[62] The preference for young, virgin girls conforms to histories of wartime sexual violence and ethnic cleansing through violation of those considered most innocent, pure, or symbolic of a nation or group. This is most frequently females of reproductive age. This trope of war practice was possibly even ingrained in the consciousness of IS' captive population, as one woman recounted that upon the initial siege of their village, "all young, unmarried girls hid in the bathroom and locked the door, so Daesh only saw old men and old women."[63]

Young prepubescent boys spared from mass-execution were largely held with their mothers in the initial stages of IS captivity. Several women described the screams and cries of the children who were hungry and frightened. Though, in two cases, it was suspected that IS put sedatives in the food to encourage the children to sleep.[64] Unlike young girls who were separated for sexual trade, boys were initially protected by the group's own guidelines. A pamphlet published in late 2014, entitled "Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves," aimed to provide a list of 'dos and don'ts' for IS' membership in the format of "frequently asked questions" (FAQs). It clearly states: "It is not permissible to separate a mother from her prepubescent children through buying, selling or giving away [gifting]."[65] Such rulings were not consistently enforced or adopted by individual IS members. One woman (then aged twenty), who was trafficked and 'owned' by seven different families inside Syria, remained with her two infant sons throughout her four years in captivity.[66] However, some IS members proved unable to resist the temptation to separate mother and child.

Separation of captive women from their children served three main purposes. First, an unaccompanied young woman would demand a higher value of sale as a (sexual) slave. Second, it reduced the likelihood of women attempting to escape alone. Third, it enabled the indoctrination and military training of young Yazidi boys (discussed in the following section). Held in Bādūsh prison, one young woman (then aged twenty-four) recounted her struggle to remain with her eight-year-old son. On account of her own youth, IS guards did not (want to) believe

she was his mother, as this would hinder her sale. They took him with other boys his age to another cell. However, she proudly exclaimed, "us women decided and said to the Daesh men, 'If you don't bring back our sons, we will all break the prison gate'. So […] they returned our sons."[67] This case echoes the findings of the author,[68] and Gowrinathan and Mampilly,[69] whose studies observe that women's resistance or negotiation efforts against non-state armed groups are met with greater acceptance if couched in gendered terms, and, in particular, a maternal framing. However, despite their efforts, others were not so fortunate. One woman recalled that on one occasion, her IS captor took her son to stay with his family, leaving her and her daughter unsupervised in the house with the doors unlocked. Despite having suitable conditions for her own escape, she awaited her son's return.[70] In other cases, they never came back. During four years under IS, one woman in her mid-40s was gradually separated from all of her captive family members: her husband, six sons, three daughters, mother-in-law, and daughter-in-law. She was told, "they aren't your children. We control you; everything is ours."[71]

The final step in IS' system of slavery could be repeated indefinitely: the purchase and abuse of a *sabiyya* by a group member as a private 'owner'. A proof of ownership certificate in Mosul in 2016 documents a re-sale agreement and payment confirmation.[72] The Yazidi woman is described as twenty years old with 'honey-like eyes, thin, short: 130cm'. She was sold for $1,500 USD (~£1,200.00 GBP). The document was issued by the 'Office of Marriage Contracts' within IS' Shariʿa Court and was verified by the names and fingerprints of the seller and new 'owner'. Once bought, young female captives experienced varying treatment; yet, consistent emphasis was placed on their subjugation, either through 'legal' marriage, the act of rape and resulting impregnation, and religious education.[73]

As an organization, IS did not have a stated position on marriage to slaves. Accordingly, the practice of individual militants appears varied. Three of the women interviewed stated that they were never legally married to their IS 'owners'; though this of course did not negate their experiences of rape. However, others were either themselves married, or aware of the marriage of other captives from the age of thirteen.[74] Forced marriage to an IS militant was seen by the women interviewed as a source of great shame,[75] solidifying their 'conversion' to Islam – an act forbidden in Yazidism. However, it also offered practical benefit under IS control. Then aged only fourteen, one woman was married to Salman, or 'Abu Suhaib', a twenty-year-old Palestinian militant living in Fallujah.[76] Their official marriage document, and her status as an 'IS wife', afforded (proportionate) protection and respect. On account of her legal 'commitment' and full 'conversion', her status changed from Yazidi *sabiyya* to a Sunni Muslim

woman. As a result, she could not be sold onwards, but was treated as a 'free' and an integral member of his IS family.

Within the private home space, IS' 'FAQs' pamphlet provides further regulations and expectations for 'owners' to follow regarding the correct treatment of their *sabāyā*. Of all documented abuses suffered by Yazidis in IS captivity, rape has received the overwhelming majority of scholarly, media, and policy attention,[77] and thus warrants only brief discussion here. The practice was quickly regulated, with early guidance released within three months of the Sinjar invasion regarding licit sexual relations with captives, including very young girls: "It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse; however if she is not fit for intercourse, then it is enough to enjoy her without intercourse."[78] Further regulations center on the potential for pregnancy resulting from these forced unions. IS' guidance prevents trade and sexual relations with pregnant captives, instead stating that "her uterus must be purified" beforehand.[79] IS' own edict acknowledges the 'violations' committed by some of the 'brothers' as private infractions of these regulations,[80] while reports from liberated women attest to forced ingestion of contraception[81] – also forbidden by IS.[82]

By contrast, some women reported that 'fatherhood' was ideologically fulfilling for their 'owners', and they recalled kind treatment in accordance with the "status of an *umm walad* (mother of the child); one who could no longer be sold."[83] Again, this ruling links to the group's preoccupation with patrilineal descent and reproduction for the Islamic 'caliphate'. Evident in their social media content, militants appear to support an individualized, unofficial practice of forced impregnation as means of 'conversion' of slaves. One foreign militant tweeted that the women are "Very obedient *akhi* I know a bro who has one and she is already pregnant alhamdulilah many revert bro."[84] Whether or not 'Abu Aiman Al Kinyi' ever owned a slave himself, he has clearly promoted this practice for others, sustaining and legitimating the group's industry and narrative of enslavement.

Of all the regulations regarding the rape and abuses of Yazidi women and girls, one stands apart as the most revealing of the group's motivations and methods of slavery. In the 'FAQs' pamphlet, answer number eleven states, "A man may not have intercourse with the female slave of his wife, because [the slave] is owned by someone else."[85] This is the only document (known to the author) that makes reference to an IS-affiliated woman's legal right to slave 'ownership'. Several interviewees attest to this practice. In addition to IS-affiliated women's auxiliary role of standing guard over captives in the group's holding sites, several women stated that they had been bought as a 'gift' by the husband or brother of IS women for her exclusive 'ownership'.[86] Importantly, these Yazidi women were

significantly older than the young and unmarried women and girls traded for sexual exploitation by IS men. Their purpose was domestic servitude, and their primary functions were cooking, cleaning, and caring for the IS family's children.[87]

Indeed, a directive issued in 2016 by the 'Delegated Committee' reinforces the purpose of slavery to "restore piety in slaves, teach them the correct doctrine, *shari'i* rulings, prayer, and fasting."[88] IS-affiliated women had a vital and heavily under-reported role in fulfilling this purpose.[89] For undivided families living under surveillance as 'converts', some female Yazidis were regularly visited by IS women who taught them how to pray at home.[90] Similarly, within the private home of an IS family, IS-affiliated women were responsible for teaching *sabāyā* the Qur'an and the Shahada, and forcing them to wear Islamic clothes to finalize their 'conversion'.[91] While some IS-affiliated women were integral to the care, protection, and even escape of Yazidi captives from their homes, others were key to their continued detention, as well as the denial of their fundamental right to freedom of religious belief and practice.[92]

The role of IS-affiliated women in the genocide importantly extends beyond ideological support and into psychological and even physical abuses. The group's guidelines mainly focus on the treatment of young *sabāyā*; however, one more general edict states, "the owner of a female captive should show compassion toward her, be kind to her, not humiliate her, and not assign her work she is unable to perform."[93] Testimonies of liberated Yazidis demonstrate frequent infraction of the rule of 'mercy', in particular by IS-affiliated women as official 'owners' of older captives. One woman described her harsh duties: "In the winter [. . .] the Daesh wife ordered me to wash the carpets in the rain, and in the summer, she ordered me to wash many things under the sun. Because of the hot weather my body was burned; my fingers bled."[94] Another woman was told, "your children make the house dirty. If you don't clean the house well, we will sell your children."[95] IS' own official propaganda chastises female members whose jealousy and resentment of sharing their husband's attention and affections led them to "hit and curse' their *sabāyā*."[96] Despite IS regulations, the treatment of individual Yazidi women was clearly the prerogative of individual group members, whose violations have been concealed by the privacy of the home space and by gendered stereotyping of female criminality. To date, only a handful of legal cases against IS-affiliated women have included crimes committed against Yazidis (and other minority or civilian groups under IS rule).[97] The overwhelming narrative of the 'jihadi bride' who was 'just a housewife' continues to present a barrier to justice.

Examination of IS' official policy documentation and propaganda, cross-referenced with interviewees' testimonies, reveals a highly organized system of

human trafficking, enslavement, and genocide. The registration and division of thousands of captured women and children was overseen by the group's highest-ranking officials and conducted through a web of provincial markets and court registries. Yazidi women were not abused indiscriminately. Their age, marital status and sexual 'purity', aesthetic beauty and even educational level were factored into their classification, value, and purpose.[98] The lack of documentation regulating the treatment of older female captives is reflected in the disparity of their experiences and treatment by their 'owners', including IS-affiliated women. It is clear that some individual IS members defied the group's guidelines that prohibit the mistreatment of captives and their separation from young children. Across all cases and to varying degrees, physical and psychological abuses combined to forcibly erase their Yazidi identity, with some of the most profound abuses concealed within the private sphere.

Investment: Looking to the Long-Term

Throughout its rule, IS dedicated significant resources to its system of slavery – from establishing its ideo-legal basis to the infrastructure of trafficking and trade of captives. The above section also attests to Islamic education instilled by 'owners' and their families within the private sphere. Each of these stages reflect a long-term investment in the group's strategy to physically and biologically eradicate the Yazidis as an ethno-religious minority. For individual IS-affiliated families, captives reflected both a financial and personal investment. Their later liberation presented an opportunity for financial gain, but at the cost of their 'service' and exploitation. For captive teen and pre-teen boys, successful 'conversion' in the form of Islamic and militaristic training offered tactical benefits that could out-last physical territorial control.

IS commoditized all in its path, from the sale of abandoned housing and excavated antiquities, to the taxation and even enslavement of minority populations. In line with their designation as '*ghanīma*' (war spoils), Yazidi captives constituted a precious financial asset and marker of status for individual 'owners'. In a magazine article, IS confirmed that following their capture, 'the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Sharī'ah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations, after one fifth of the slaves were transferred to the Islamic State's authority'.[99] Those responsible for the military conquest of Sinjar were thus rewarded with the opportunity to purchase the female captive of their choice. One woman attested to this practice. Held among a group of young women in an abandoned Shiʿa house in Mosul, she witnessed an IS militant claim her friend. A "Daesh man, called Abu Dhiab from Bāaʿj, came and said he chose her. As he had been the fighter to first control and

kidnap [her] in Sinjar, he liked her and decided he wanted to own her."[100] Thus the virility and militancy of IS combatants was directly rewarded. IS' policy of slavery conforms to a common narrative of warring, in which "the victorious (male) soldiers [are rewarded] with the rape of the women of the vanquished (male enemies)"; it sends a "symbolic message of dominance to the conquered [and ethnically inferior] (men)."[101]

Once available in open markets, purchase of *sabāyā* was highly regulated, and represented a transaction that was both financial and custodial. The customer's formal registration – by IS court records[102] – as the 'owner' literally paid dividends. Within the 'caliphate', a man's adoption of the masculinist 'protector' role – of both Muslim and captive Yazidi dependents – was remunerated via a highly gendered pay scale. An official monthly wage slip reveals that a male IS militant was paid according to the number of women and children in his care: $50 USD (~£32.10 GBP) for each wife, $35 USD (~£22.47 GBP) for every child under 15 years old, $50 USD per sabiyya, and even $35 USD for each dependent child of a captive slave.[103]

It is unsurprising that IS members went to great lengths to protect their investment. Several women stated that they were tightly guarded in initial holding sites and were often locked inside the house or even room of their private 'owner'.[104] One young woman recounted that an IS militant from Talʿafar taunted and threatened her group to deter their resistance:

> [H]e specialized in explosives and many times he showed us on his phone how he bombed Yazidi houses and people. He also told us that there were special houses in the desert in Bāaʿj, Mosul, and Talʿafar that specialized in punishment and torture of [...] Yazidi men who were with government forces. He took us there to show us to be afraid so we wouldn't try to escape.[105]

Despite this, many of the women attempted escape; some succeeded. Such activism was the only path out of the physical 'caliphate'. In theory, a captive could be 'liberated' from slavery through formal emancipation by their 'owner',[106] but this did not constitute true freedom. Moreover, the group attempted to spin a positive narrative for members, citing a Hadith that states, "Whoever frees a believer Allah frees every organ of his body from hellfire."[107] In practice, this policy was rarely implemented. One woman reported that her 'owner' "provided a testament to his wife that if he is killed one day, she should save me and not allow anyone to buy or sell me, but to free and liberate me."[108] However, the wife did not honor his directive, keeping the woman as her own slave within the home for a further three months. This case reinforces the role of IS-affiliated women in the genocide. Not only did they stand to inherit captives

as part of their husband's estate through widowhood, but some also actively prolonged Yazidis' enslavement for their own benefit.[109]

Other Yazidis were physically liberated by their 'owners' through necessity. At the group's rise and peak of power, 'ownership' and trade of Yazidis – particularly women and girls – constituted a lucrative boost to individual militants' monthly income. However, during the group's latter phase of diminishing territorial control, in which IS militants were increasingly detained by Iraqi and Kurdish forces, the 'possession' of a Yazidi became an incriminating marker of group membership. In some cases, IS members – including women – arranged or even directly participated in smuggling networks to liberate Yazidis.[110] In some cases this was driven by financial incentive. As early as 2015, IS released a document summarizing monthly administrative decisions from across the 'caliphate'. This included a ruling in August that prohibited "selling *sabāyā* to the masses or their family. The person who sells one will be reprimanded by taking the entire sum for which he sold her."[111] However, with time and greater pressures on IS' territorial holdings, the lucrative practice of illicit re-sale of female captives became commonplace. Arranged either via phone or online 'marketplace' pages on Facebook and Telegram, four women said that their brothers each paid 17–22 million IQD [~£11,750–15,200 GBP] for their release and are still in debt to other families who provided loans.[112] Such extortion has economically devastated an already impoverished, displaced community; yet, many would consider these families to be fortunate.[113] What these testimonies reveal is the forbidden yet relatively widespread practice of ransoming Yazidis. While the presence of a captive was potentially costly if discovered by local counter-terrorism forces, their financial value increased exponentially, the gains from which likely facilitated the escape and perhaps further criminal activity of IS members beyond the group's territory.

Beyond financial gain, IS invested in children as the group's inter-generational future. Children under the age of fourteen constitute a third of all Yazidis captured by IS during the Sinjar offensive.[114] The mode of their abduction and their expected roles within the 'caliphate' are similar to traditional forced recruitment techniques for child soldiers, wherein girls are largely confined to domestic and sexual service and boys are trained as frontline combatants, (suicide) operatives, and even executioners. Such large-scale involvement of children in an extremist or rebel movement does not occur by chance. Studies of child soldiering have noted the utility and benefits of child recruits, including cheap labor; physical or psychological characteristics; undivided allegiance; and ideological malleability.[115] In fact, it is important to note IS' inheritance of the practice of child militarization from Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime, which in the late 1970s formed the Futuwah (Youth Vanguard) movement, and in the mid-1990s established extensive military training camps for children and the special Ashbal

Saddam (Saddam's Lion Cubs) unit.[116] Through its own 'Cubs of the Caliphate' youth military training program, IS sought to reassign ideological belief, communal identity, and group allegiance of teen and pre-teen boys – including Yazidis – to its own militants. The sites of these practices of Islamic and militaristic socialization extended from the group's official training camps into the private homes of IS-affiliated families.

The removal of Yazidi maternal influence through physical separation of the mother and child enabled IS militants to assume responsibility for the boys' 'conversion' to Islam and IS' ideology. Forced conversion served to reinforce the superior masculinity and ethno-religious identity of IS' membership, who were uniquely positioned to offer 'correct' religious guidance, as opposed to the teachings of Yazidi (male) elders. One woman's son was taken to IS' local headquarters for 15 days with no contact. There, he was forced to learn Arabic and the Qur'an, and to grow his hair long and wear a Kandahari (Afghan style) tunic and trousers in line with the group's male dress code. When he returned, he was no longer allowed to sleep alongside his mother, only IS men.[117] This was echoed by another woman, who was punished for speaking Kurdish with her eldest son and for preventing him from learning the Qur'an. Again, she was not allowed to sleep with her son, who was sometimes taken away for 10 days at a time without explanation.[118] This ideological instruction and 'mentorship' by male militants constitutes an important duty in fulfilment of the first stated objective of IS enslavement: 'spreading *tawhīd*'.[119]

The ideological training of young Yazidi boys increased their value to the group and was flaunted by some IS supporters on social media as an expression of their commitment. An example is the infamous Australian Sharrouf family. Then 14-year-old Zaynab tweeted a photo of a male toddler in military fatigues with his finger raised and a rifle in the background. The caption of the photo reads: "From Yezidi to ISIS <3 [heart emoji]."[120] The gesture of the raised index finger by IS militants frequently appears in the group's propaganda and has come to symbolize their fight for *tawhīd*.[121] Behind closed doors, the visual symbolism of young Yazidi boys' 'conversion' also featured in their private trade among militants. One woman lamented that her sons were forced to pose for photographs in IS military fatigues, raising their index fingers and grasping assault rifles. In contravention of the group's official regulations, the photos were used to advertise boys for re-sale informally through encrypted messaging apps, thereby circumventing the required court registration and also separating the boys from their mother and each other.[122]

At the behest of their 'owner', Yazidi boys joined their Sunni counterparts in IS' military training programs. Several women recounted their fear and sadness of their sons' forced enrolment into training camps. The group's propaganda

extolled the results. One woman recounted that IS forced her two twelve-year-old male cousins to wear explosive vests and detonate them in Talʿafar in 2017. She explained that the same had happened to two other young Yazidi boys from Dugri village, whose attacks were reportedly recorded and published with the caption 'two martyrs'.[123] The most chilling evidence of IS' militarization of Yazidi boys are two videos showing – or, rather, celebrating – their perpetration of camera-recorded executions.[124] One boy is identified through on screen captions under the IS *kunya* 'Salman al-Sinjari' followed by '*mawlā*', a term indicating a freed ex-slave who is a client of their 'master'. Importantly, this boy – then aged approximately between ten and twelve years old – was the last in a series of six youths to carry out an execution in the video. As the others conducted shootings, he was the only one to behead his victim.[125] Contrary to the quick shots of his peers, the Yazidi boy's slow, manual killing of a 'Syrian regime collaborator' invites the viewer to reflect on IS' ability to instill commitment among children whose own communities have been persecuted by the group.[126] Such acts served as the ultimate 'graduation' assessment for the 'Cubs' program. They also served to demonstrate the reassignment of identity and belonging to IS – a process that has been shown to have long-term consequences for the psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration of Yazidi boys.[127]

The above cases and documentation demonstrate that despite their classification as 'war spoils' or 'merely property', the value assigned to captives went beyond purely the financial. 'Ownership' of a Yazidi slave was a marker of (masculine) status, rank, and wealth. Certainly some 'owners' were driven by greed and thirst for violence and exploitation, even in some cases in defiance of IS' official regulations. Yet, others sought to fulfil their duty of ideological proselytization. The ideological and physical training of Yazidi boys reflects the inter-generational ambitions of IS' state-building project. Reflecting feminist research on the military as an institution of masculine socialization, their training – from ideological instruction to weapons handling – constituted an "important rite of passage in making men out of boys."[128] IS' hegemonic jihadist masculinity was marked by, and performed through, military dominance and ideological commitment, thus naturalizing religious 'conversion' as an expression of power over subordinated men and communities. Through denial of maternal, Yazidi, and Kurdish influence, and the re-assignment of allegiance and group belonging, IS educated and armed young boys to one day themselves become IS militants and enforcers of the community's continued persecution.

Conclusions and Implications

IS' genocide of the Yazidis evolved and was shaped by the group's changing territorial infrastructure and the individual circumstances of group members. From its initial invasion, the group sought a holistic conquest of the ethno-religious minority – a victory that went beyond purely sexual exploitation. As standard-bearers of Islamic monotheism, IS militants demonstrated their religious and masculine dominance over the weak 'infidel' community. Men were executed. Their lives would serve little purposes within the 'caliphate'; their deaths enabled severance of the Yazidi reproductive capability. The capture and rape of young women and girls was intended to fracture the ethno-religious minority, as sexual relations and marriage with non-Yazidis – and particularly the birth of 'IS infants' from forced unions – constituted forbidden acts in accordance with the community's socio-cultural mores. At its peak of power, IS dedicated significant resources to the 'correct' management and treatment of its captives, with the protection of Islamic patrilineal descent as a consistent theme running through its edicts and propaganda. However, increasing territorial defeats transformed captives' purpose from projects for ideologically driven subjugation to (illicit) sources of income. The above accounts attest to multiple cases of militants that defy IS' rulings on the treatment and detention of *sabāyā*, including the direct facilitation of their escape. Eventually, the liberation, resale, or ransom of Yazidi females became a critical signifier of the group's impending territorial collapse.

As a non-state actor, IS created an almost unrivalled bureaucratic record. Its propaganda succeeded in creating a rose-tinted lens through which supporters could learn about its ideo-legal justifications for slavery and reflect this official narrative through their own social media content. Even if they never owned a slave themselves, both official and unofficial propagandists – IS-affiliated men and women – promoted the practice for others and played a significant role in creating and legitimating the group's theoretical framework for its slavery policies. Moreover, guiding the pragmatic management of trafficked captives were administrative notices, edicts, and pamphlets produced by some of the group's most senior officials, while court records, marriage contracts and sales 'receipts' certified by provincial governors and clerks provided a seal of approval to each transaction and abuse. Yet, irrespective of their detail and quantity, these documents rarely provide evidence of regulatory infractions, and certainly cannot attest to the treatment of slaves behind the closed doors of the individual IS family home space.

Under IS rule, Yazidi women's bodies were reduced to mere 'property'; assigned a value by and for men; and subjected to psychological, physical, and sexual abuse by IS-affiliated men and women – both of whom were legally entitled to

slave 'ownership'. Beyond their liberation, these women face acute trauma, in part shaped or exacerbated by the patrilineal systems of both IS and the Iraqi state. Infants born of rape by IS militants are a painful and enduring symbol of the genocide. Not only are they the physical product of sexual violence, but these children cannot be legally – or culturally – identified as Yazidi. Women who wish to remain or reconnect with their IS-born infants now face a life in exile or continued concealment of their own Yazidi identity.[129] In this regard, IS continues to fragment and disempower the community through the past violations of individual captives.

Arguably the group's greatest long-term investment was the forced militarization and 'conversion' of young Yazidi boys. As part of its ambitions for inter-generational survival, IS prized young, malleable minds, which were not limited to the children of supportive members or Sunni Muslim civilians. Indoctrination and training of young boys was facilitated through the illicit separation of mother and child, removing maternal, Yazidi, and Kurdish influence. The results of intensive Qur'anic education and militaristic physical training were promoted in the group's propaganda videos through the most grotesque displays of ultra-violence. Following physical liberation, access to psychological support to address childhood and conflict-related trauma is acutely needed.[130] However, the bleak reality is that the likelihood of boys receiving this specialized care is low.[131] Now returned to a minority community that has become more isolated than ever before, the focus of liberated Yazidis is fixed on existential survival.

The common trope of IS enslavement centered on sexual violence has obscured the wider ideological motivations for and means of the group's persecution of 'infidel' populations. This needs to be corrected through adoption of a wider-angle lens that recognizes the holistic nature of the genocide and the actors involved. The journey to secure 'justice' for the victims of IS' crimes has been wrought with political and procedural hurdles. Interviews with Yazidi survivors of the genocide serve to demonstrate that cursory trials and blanket convictions provide no solace.[132] Instead, international recognition and contribution to convictions for the genocidal crimes committed against themselves and the wider Yazidi community constitutes the first step to recovery.[133] Momentum is building but remains slow.

[1] Also known as ISIS or its Arabic acronym 'Da'esh'.

[2] UNHRC, '"They Came to Destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis' (New York: United Nations Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 15June 2016), https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en%20(2).pdf.

[3] An independent investigation by UNITAD also made a finding of genocide, as reported to the Security Council in May 2021. See 'ISIL/Da'esh Committed Genocide of Yazidi, War Crimes against Unarmed Cadets, Military Personnel in Iraq, Investigative Team Head Tells Security Council', United Nations, 10 May 2021, https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14514.doc.htm.

[4] While not included in the definition of genocide set out in the Geneva Convention or Rome Statute, it is also important to acknowledge throughout this paper that IS' efforts to symbolically eradicate Yazidi identity and culture were an integral component of, and complement to, the physical and biological attack on the community.

[5] Germany is leading on the issue of prosecuting IS members of their involvement in the Yazidi Genocide, with two convictions of genocide of the Yazidis and a further five convictions for war crimes and crimes against humanity secured to date. All except one are female perpetrators. See Ewelina U. Ochab, 'How One Yazidi Woman Helped To Secure The Second Genocide Conviction Of A Daesh Member', *Forbes*, 2 August 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2022/08/02/how-one-yazidi-woman-helped-to-secure-the-second-genocide-conviction-of-a-daesh-member/.

[6] The primary sources for these documents are the archives collected and translated by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, the 'ISIS Files' held by the George Washington Program on Extremism, and records declassified by the Combatting Terrorism Center's Harmony Program. See: Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, 'Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents', 27 January 2015, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents; Devorah Margolin and Charlie Winter, 'Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence' (Washington, DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2021), https://doi.org/10.4079/poe.05.2021.00; Gina Vale, 'Piety Is in the Eye of the Bureaucrat: The Islamic State's Strategy of Civilian Control', *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 1 (2020): 34–40, https://ctc.usma.edu/piety-eye-bureaucrat-islamic-states-strategy-civilian-control/.

[7] Amelia Hoover Green and Dara Kay Cohen, 'Centering Human Subjects: The Ethics of "Desk Research" on Political Violence', *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa029.

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[9] Approval was granted from the Ethics Review Board of King's College London, the author's institution at the time of data collection.

[10] Valeria Cetorelli et al., 'Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates for the Yazidi Population in the Area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A Retrospective Household Survey', *PLOS Medicine* 14, no. 5 (2017): 1, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297.

[11] Bayar Mustafa Sevdeen and Thomas Schmidinger, eds., *Beyond ISIS: History and Future of Religious Minorities in Iraq* (London: Transnational Press London, 2019), 5.

[12] Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[13] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

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[15] Thomas Schmidinger, 'The Yazidis: Religion, Society and Resentments', in *Beyond ISIS: History and Future of Religious Minorities in Iraq*, ed. Bayar Mustafa Sevdeen and Thomas Schmidinger (London: Transnational Press, 2019), 168.

[16] Islamic State, 'Fatwa 11. Ruling on Yazidis: Is the Yazidi sect in Iraq original disbelievers or apostates?' (Head of the Department of Research and Fatwa Issuance, 9 August 2014).

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[18] Ibid, 14.

[19] For example, see Graeme Wood, 'What ISIS Really Wants', *The Atlantic*, March 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/.

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[30] Islamic State, 'From the Creator's Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement'.

[31] Schmidinger, 'The Yazidis', 170.

[32] UNHRC, 'They Came to Destroy', 9.

[33] Gina Vale, 'Liberated, Not Free: Yazidi Women After Islamic State Captivity', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 31, no. 3 (2020): 516–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2020.1726572.

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[39] Charlie Winter, 'Documenting the Virtual Caliphate' (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2015), 30–37, http://www.quilliaminternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf.

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[41] Interviewee 3, 2 April 2019.

[42] Interviewee 12, 5 April 2019.

[43] Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, 'The Yazidi—Religion, Culture and Trauma', *Advances in Anthropology* 7, no. 4 (2017): 335, https://doi.org/10.4236/aa.2017.74019.

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[82] It is not clear whether this was a widespread or sustained policy, but an available document indicates the prohibition of contraception in Deir al-Zour province in late 2014, thus timed alongside the group's central guidance on slavery and treatment of Yazidi captives. See Islamic State, 'Decree (2)' (Medical Administration, Deir al-Zour Province, 5 November 2014).

[83] Interviewee 20; Nicolaus and Yuce, 'Sex-Slavery', 205.

[84] Abu Aiman Al Kinyi, 'Very Obedient Akhi I Know a Bro Who Has One and She Is Already Pregnant Alhamdulilah Many Revert Bro', Tweet, *@poorslave5050*, 19 May 2015, https://www.memri.org/reports/sex-slavery-islamic-state-%E2%80%93-practices-social-media-discourse-and-justifications-jabhat-al.

[85] Islamic State, 'Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves'.

[86] Interviewee 13.

[87] Ibid; Interviewee 3; Interviewee 17; Muslimah4Life, 'My Maid (Slave) Taught Me How to Bake Syrian Bread, Finally i Made One on My Own Today [Smiley Face Emoji] Alhamdulilah', Tweet, *@Seeking4Good243*, 4 March 2015.

[88] Islamic State, 'Guidelines on the Possessions of One's Right Hand [Slaves]' (Delegated Committee, 24 July 2016).

[89] Gina Vale, 'Intersectional Analysis of Rebel Governance: Impacts of Islamic State Rule on Local Women in Iraq and Syria, 2013-17', PhD thesis (unpublished), King's College London, January 2021, chap. 6.

[90] Interviewee 8.

[91] Interviewee 19, 9 April 2019; Interviewee 15; Interviewee 22; Interviewee 3.

[92] 'Nadia Murad Escaped Sexual Slavery at the Hands of ISIS. This Is Her Story.', Nadia's Initiative, 5 October 2018, https://www.nadiasinitiative.org/news/nadia-murad-escaped-sexual-slavery-at-the-hands-of-isis-this-is-her-story; Seivan M. Salim, 'The Yazidi Women Who Escaped ISIS', *The Daily Beast*, 7 June 2017, https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-yazidi-women-who-escaped-isis.

[93] Islamic State, 'Fatwa 64'; Islamic State, 'From the Creator's Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement', 11.

[94] Interviewee 3.

[95] Interviewee 17.

[96] Islamic State, 'Allah…Allah…While You Have Faith', *Al-Nabā' (47)*, 20 September 2016, 13; Lahoud, 'Empowerment or Subjugation', 18.

[97] See note 5. Although still few in number, to date, the majority of cases of crimes against Yazidis have been brought against female, rather than male, IS-affiliated defendants.

[98] Nadia Al-Dayel, Andrew Mumford, and Kevin Bales, 'Not Yet Dead: The Establishment and Regulation of Slavery by the Islamic State', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 45, no. 11 (2022): 940, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1711590.

[99] Islamic State, 'The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour', 14.

[100] Interviewee 22.

[101] Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, 'Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC)', *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2009): 498, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2009.00543.x.

[102] Islamic State, 'Statement for Distribution No. 1' (Ḥoms Province, 15 June 2015).

[103] Islamic State, 'Pay Slip' (Financial Administration, al-Ḥasaka Province, 14 January 2016); Devorah Margolin and Charlie Winter, 'Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence' (Washington, DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2021), 91, https://doi.org/10.4079/poe.05.2021.00.

[104] Interviewee 1; Interviewee 4.

[105] Interviewee 15.

[106] Islamic State, 'Certificate of Emancipation' (Judge Abu Yaser, Islamic Court, Department of Justice and Complaints, al-Jazīra Province, 4 March 2015); Islamic State, 'Statement for Distribution No. 4' (The Wālī, Ḥoms Province, 19 June 2015).

[107] Islamic State, 'Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves'.

[108] Interviewee 3.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Interviewee 16; Interviewee 17.

[111] Islamic State, 'Condensed Summary of the Statements for Distribution and Directives Issued by the Delegated Committee August-October 2015' (October 2015).

[112] Interviewee 1; Interviewee 3; Interviewee 13; Interviewee 16.

[113] Nicolaus and Yuce, 'Sex-Slavery', 208.

[114] Cetorelli et al., 'Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates', 7–8.

[115] Mara Redlich Revkin, '"I Am Nothing Without a Weapon": Understanding Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in Syria and Iraq', in *Cradled By Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*, ed. Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven (New York: United Nations University Press, 2018), 112–13, https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6409/Cradled_by_Conflict.pdf; Gina Vale, 'Cubs in the Lions' Den: Indoctrination and Recruitment of Children Within Islamic State Territory' (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, July 2018), https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-Cubs-in-the-Lions%E2%80%99-Den-Indoctrination-and-Recruitment-of-Children-Within-Islamic-State-Territory.pdf.

[116] Noman Benotman and Nikita Malik, 'The Children of Islamic State' (London: Quilliam Foundation, March 2016), 25, https://www.quilliaminternational.com/shop/e-publications/the-children-of-islamic-state/.

[117] Interviewee 16.

[118] Interviewee 1.

[119] Islamic State, 'From the Creator's Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement', 4.

[120] Umm Hafs, 'From Yezidi to ISIS <3', Tweet, *@71a48fa7eff14ad*, 20 March 2015.

[121] Nathaniel Zelinsky, 'ISIS Sends a Message: What Gestures Say About Today's Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, 15 September 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-03/isis-sends-message.

[122] Interviewee 13.

[123] Interviewee 3.

[124] *To The Sons of the Jews* (Media Office of Deir al-Zour Province. 3 December 2015); *Repent And You Will Have Safety From Us* (Media Office of al-Jazīra Province. 9 November 2016).

[125] *To The Sons of the Jews*.

[126] Gina Vale, '"You Are No Longer Cubs, You Are Now Lions": Examining the Constructed Masculinities of Islamic State Child Executioners and Their Victims', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 15, no. 4 (2022): 838, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2022.2116155.

[127] Jan Ilhan Kizilhan and Michael Noll-Hussong, 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Former Islamic State Child Soldiers in Northern Iraq', *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 213, no. 1 (2018): 425–29, https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2018.88.

[128] Lauren Wilcox, 'Gendering the Cult of the Offensive', *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 227, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410902900152.

[129] Serri Mahmood, 'Challenges of Children Born of ISIS Rape in Iraq' (Geneva: University of Geneva, September 2017), https://www.cerahgeneve.ch/files/1715/0963/3793/WP49-Challenges-Children-Born-by-ISIS-Rape-Iraq.pdf; Josie Ensor, '"She'll Never Know She Had a Mother Who Loved Her" - Yazidi Women Forced to Abandon Their Babies Born to Isil', *The Telegraph*, 6 July 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/07/06/could-give-two-children-good-life-bad-one-three-yazidi-women/.

[130] Kizilhan and Noll-Hussong, 'Post-traumatic stress disorder'.

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[131] Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, 'Providing Psychosocial Care to Child Soldiers Living in Post-IS Iraq' (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 27 May 2019), https://icct.nl/publication/providing-psychosocial-care-to-child-soldiers-living-in-post-is-iraq/.
[132] Payam Akhavan et al., 'What Justice for the Yazidi Genocide?: Voices from Below', *Human Rights Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2020): 1–47, https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2020.0000.
[133] Vale, 'Case Note - Justice Served?'.

8

The Islamic State Pillage Economy: The Policy of Confiscations

Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi

Since the period 2014-2016, when the Islamic State attained the height of its power and controlled swaths of territory spanning the borders of Iraq and Syria, much ink and discussion have been devoted to the topic of the group's finances and how the group was generating money inside those territories.[1] This focus on financing is largely intended from a policy perspective of counterterrorism, aimed at choking the group's sources of revenues and thus reducing its ability to conduct military operations against its local enemies and terrorist attacks abroad in places like Europe.

In the overall picture, reducing the Islamic State's territorial control was the only real means of cutting access to the multiple new channels of financing it had acquired through its conquests in 2014. For example, the group could not generate revenue through formal taxes imposed on civilian populations under its rule without territorial control, nor could it generate revenue through sales of crude oil without territorial control of oil wells. Despite the Islamic State's loss of territory in Iraq and Syria, concerns remain about the group's financing on a more global scale.[2]

Yet rather than focus on this policy angle of countering terrorist financing, this chapter looks at an important policy pursued by the group that underpinned some of the newer means the group had acquired to finance itself: namely, the confiscation of mobile and immobile property, which has implications for justice and accountability.

It is important to stress from the outset that confiscation was not solely a means of generating revenue for the group through renting out, selling or auctioning real estate, as will be shown in this chapter that draws on internal Islamic State administrative documents and the group's own literature. Rather, confiscation

was also important as a means of providing property for the group's members and their families to dwell in, and an examination of relevant documents in this context may also be helpful for prosecutors in determining membership of the organization.

This chapter's examination of the group's confiscations of property will be divided into two main parts. First, it will consider the group's justifications for confiscating property. These justifications can primarily be understood as targeting perceived enemies of the Islamic State and Sunni Muslims (the only legitimate denomination of Islam in the Islamic State's eyes, and the denomination whose interests it claims to represent). These enemies are deemed unworthy of rights to property and life under the Islamic State, and thus confiscation of their property is a natural and logical outcome of the group's worldview. But confiscations also targeted the properties of those the group deemed Sunni Muslims, but were outside the group's territories: a move that was effectively justified as a 'temporary' measure, which would be more controversial in the context of the group's ideology.

Second, this chapter will examine how the group made use of this confiscated property in various ways for generating revenue. In other words, this chapter concentrates on the link between the group's ideology and its policy of confiscation within the context of war crimes committed by the group, rather than focusing on determining the relative importance- qualitatively or quantitatively- of confiscation to the group's financing.

In order to ensure that the information upon which the conclusions are based is as reliable as possible and can be used by prosecutors in the context of justice and accountability, this chapter primarily relies on internal Islamic State records and the group's own literature (propaganda and otherwise) to elucidate the group's justifications for and practices of confiscation. This is not to discount the potential value of other methods of gathering information such as conducting interviews with victims or witnesses, but the latter poses multiple limitations (e.g. inaccurate descriptions and exaggerations of confiscation policies, or fading of memories with the passage of time) and seems unlikely to add more information beyond what can be found in internal documents and the group's own literature.

Concepts of In-Group and Out-Group in the Islamic State's Worldview

Although the concept of in-group versus out-group in the Islamic State's ideology is already discussed in greater detail in another chapter,[3] it is helpful to recap the matter briefly here. The Islamic State's worldview fundamentally divides the

world into believers (the in-group) and disbelievers of various kinds (out-group) and also, crucially, posits that the relation between these two groups must be one of hostility with no possibility of conciliation and dealing with each other as equals in humanity. Rather, the out-groups of various kinds in general have a three-way choice: (i) they must eventually convert to Islam (at least Islam as considered acceptable by Islamic State) and thus become part of the in-group, (ii) they must be subjugated under the Islamic State's authority and agree to abide by its restrictions and regulations in return for protection of life and property, or (iii) they must be killed. There is an abundance of Islamic State literature that attests to this outlook.[4]

Not all out-groups have the exact same three-way choice. For example, among the various out-groups, a crucial distinction in the Islamic State's worldview is between original disbelievers (i.e. those born disbelievers) and 'apostates' (i.e. those considered to have been believers at some point and then abandoned the faith in some way), the latter of whom might be dubbed the 'ineligible in-group' in that they were once part of the in-group but now are longer so. In turn, original disbelievers can be divided between 'People of the Book' and those that do not belong to this category. The former, who can be afforded a kind of 'toleration' as second-class citizens under the Islamic State, are followers of religions deemed to have received scriptures revealed by God prior to the mission of Muhammad and the revelation of the Qurʾān. Jews and Christians are the two main groups who come under this category. The other original disbelievers are not afforded toleration.

It is important to bear in mind this general context of the group's worldview regarding the in-group and out-group distinctions and its ramifications for much of the justifications behind the group's policies of confiscations.

Confiscating Property of Disbelievers and 'Apostates'

As noted, the focus here is with the confiscation of both mobile and immobile property. Examples of the former would be household items like fridges, beds, and tables, while examples of the latter would include houses, farmland and also assets such as government buildings and shops. There is ample evidence of the Islamic State's confiscation of mobile and immobile property belonging to perceived out-groups, whether plain disbelievers or 'apostates', and that the confiscation policy reflects an ideological and systematic approach rather than being the product of *ad hoc* decision-making.

 The ideological justification underlying this confiscation policy is that it is deemed an appropriate hostile measure to take against out-group original disbelievers and ineligible in-group 'apostates' who are not afforded toleration under the Islamic State. If such people are not entitled to protection of their lives or property under the Islamic State, then logically the Islamic State deems it permissible to confiscate their properties located within territories conquered by the group as well as their other property that might fall into the organization's hands.

Thus, the only means these out-groups have for protecting their lives and property are conversion to Sunni Islam or (in the case of the Christians as 'People of the Book') the contracting of a *ḏimma* pact that would effectively amount to second-class citizen status but at least ensure the protection of life and property.[5] The guarantee of life and property is explicitly mentioned in the text of the *ḏimma* pact drawn up for Christians who came under the group's rule and agreed to live under the pact.[6]

Conversely, people who were residing in Islamic State lands and who were then arrested and judged "apostates" by the judiciary for whatever crimes they were accused of having committed would have no way of protecting their lives and property; they would simply be sentenced to death and have their property confiscated by the Islamic State. Indeed one judicial ruling document, obtained from Raqqa and dated June 17, 2017, shows the certification of a death penalty ruling by one Abu Ḥuḏayfa al-Tūnisī (whose kunya/nickname suggests a Tunisian origin) on a woman judged guilty of apostasy, with confiscation of her wealth for the "*Bayt Māl al-Muslimīn*" (literally "House of Money of the Muslims," and referring here to the treasury department of the Islamic State).[7]

In addition, it should be noted that the approach to confiscation outlined above applies not only to individuals from these different out-groups, but also organizations and institutions that are considered to be part of said out-groups. For example, the Iraqi, Syrian and Libyan governments are considered by the Islamic State to be 'apostate' or '*Ṭāġūtī*' (idolatrous tyrant) governments by virtue of their mere existence as nation-state governments (among other things) and it would not be possible for them to be considered Islamic by the Islamic State. As such, any buildings and assets that are considered the property of these governments and fall into the hands of the Islamic State are to be confiscated by the group.

There is a significant quantity of Islamic State material that makes clear this outlined justification for confiscation of property with regards to original disbelievers and 'apostates,' as well as its implementation. For instance, reference has already been made to the *ḏimma* pact that was drawn up and included a

guarantee of protection of property and life for Christians living by it; a refusal to abide by it would thus mean losing that protection, as noted at the end of the document. This loss of property is precisely what happened to the Christian communities and institutions in northern Iraq that refused to live under the *ḏimma* pact. While the Islamic State's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi gave them permission to leave the group's territory in July 2014 (contrary to the more usual three-way choice of conversion, death or the *ḏimma* pact), their departure meant the loss of their property, and agricultural rental contracts from Ninawa province show that the group confiscated farmlands that had belonged to a Christian monastery.[8]

Fatwas issued by the fatwa-issuing department of the group, similarly make clear the approach of the group with regards to the property of 'apostates.'[9] For example, fatwa no. 974, broadcast on the group's al-Bayān Radio, outlines the following question on the property of an apostate:[10] in a situation where someone inside Islamic State territory borrows money from someone who subsequently 'apostasizes', should the debt be repaid to the latter? According to the fatwa, the money should not be repaid, but rather should be handed over as 'booty' to the Islamic State. The full translation is below:

> "Q: A caller says: I am a *mujāhid* and borrowed a sum of money from a Muslim man, but he apostatized and joined the *Ṣaḥwāt*,[11] and now I have money to pay off the debt, so do I return the money to him after his apostasy or is this debt invalidated?
>
> A: The blood and wealth of the apostate who separates from the group of the Muslims are fair game. The Shaykh of Islam Ibn Taymiya (may God have mercy on him) said: "Whoever goes to the camp of the Mongols and joins them has apostatized, and his wealth and blood become fair game."
>
> Ibn Hazm[12] (may God have mercy on him) said: "Whoever willingly joins the abode of disbelief and war, waging war on the Muslims next to him, becomes an apostate by this action. All the rulings of the apostate apply to him, including the obligation to kill him wherever power is gained over him, making his wealth fair game, the invalidation of his marriage, etc."
>
> This wealth mentioned in the question is considered *fay'*[13] and not *ġanīma*[14] because it has come into the questioner's possession in the abode of Islam without vanquishing or fighting, and all *fay'* belongs to the property of the Muslims, to be placed in the Bayt al-Māl and to be disbursed by the walī al-amr in the interests of the Muslims.[15] This is

the view of Mālik, al-Šāfiʿī and Aḥmad.[16] Therefore, the brother asking the question must not return the money to the apostate, but rather should rather pay the money to the Bayt Māl al-Muslimīn."

A similar view on confiscating the property of 'apostates' emerges from a fatwa issued in late 2014 CE by the same body, answering a question about whether zakat (alms taxation) is to be applied to "agricultural projects belonging to the apostates."[17] In this case, there are three scenarios. In the first scenario, the "apostate" was vanquished (i.e. militarily defeated) in the abode of Islam and it is known that this apostate would be obliged to pay zakat if he/she were Muslim, in which case zakat is levied, while the rest of the apostate's "wealth" goes to the *Bayt al-Māl* on the basis that the apostate has no rights to bequeath inheritance. In the other two scenarios, where it is either not known when zakat would be levied on the apostate, or the apostate fled to the "abode of disbelief," zakat is not levied and the entire property becomes "*fay*ʾ for the Muslims," which should be "disbursed in their interests." What the stipulations in all three scenarios effectively say is that these agricultural projects -as a form of real estate- should be confiscated by the Islamic State. The outline of these different scenarios illustrates the considerable thought that the group devoted to explaining and justifying its policies of confiscations in accordance with its ideology.

Similar stipulations also become apparent in the Office of Research and Studies' treatise "Wealth of Authority: Types and Rulings," which makes the *ġanīma* and *fay*ʾ distinction seen in fatwa no. 974 and offers distinctions on how to deal with them. When things are seized as *ġanīma*, four-fifths of the seized property goes to the fighters, being divided by the imam (i.e. the caliph) as he sees fit. As for *fay*ʾ, four fifths of it must be disbursed by the imam "in the general interest of the Muslims." However, lands, real estate, and other public property "should probably not be divided and should be used in the general interest of the Muslims."[18]

The upshot of all this is that immobile property of apostates and original disbelievers not entitled to 'protection' should be confiscated and used by the Islamic State as an organization in the way it sees fit for the 'interest of the Muslims.' Likewise, mobile property that comes within seized immobile property (e.g. household appliances and furniture) is to be confiscated by the Islamic State. Similarly, most other mobile property, seized when disbelievers and apostates flee and do not put up a fight for it, is to be confiscated by the Islamic State.

In contrast, most mobile property seized directly in battle as 'war spoils' is to be distributed among the group's fighters to be owned by them as personal possessions rather than as property of the Islamic State as an organization. This distinction between ownership by the organization itself and private ownership

by individual Islamic State members is important to bear in mind when considering how the Islamic State made use of confiscated property.

Confiscation of the Property of those Abandoning Islamic State Territory

The other main justification the group had for confiscation of mobile and immobile property was that whoever abandoned Islamic State territory or left beyond an authorized period of absence from its territory would have his or her property confiscated. This threat of confiscation would also apply to those the group deemed to be Muslim. According to Abu Muslim al-Iraqi, a former *amni*[19] who defected from the group and who originated from the Ninawa area, this sort of confiscation was essentially justified as "temporary *waqf*."[20] Thus, the original (Muslim) owner would still technically be considered the owner of the property seized, but would be denied the right to make use of it until returning. The concept of temporary *waqf* in Islamic jurisprudence seems to be far more contentious than the idea of confiscating property of apostates and original disbelievers not entitled to protection, with three of the four main schools of Sunni jurisprudence forbidding temporary *waqf*.[21]

There are numerous documents of the Islamic State that attest to a policy whereby the one who was living in or came to reside in Islamic State (e.g. the 'muhājir' who 'migrated' to the group's territory) would not be allowed to leave the group's territory except on a set temporary basis and only for a reason the group deemed justified. Conversely, people originally residing outside Islamic State territories could visit the group's lands for the purpose of business and transportation transactions, and would not be forced to stay.

As an example of these stipulations, a specimen document that was supposed to be issued by the Hijra Commission (the Islamic State body responsible for managing migration of foreigners into the Islamic State as well as management of border crossings with the outside world) included the following note of warning to those who might think of deciding to leave the lands of the Islamic State: "In the event you desire to leave the state of the Caliphate, that will not be fulfilled as you wish, and you will expose yourself to security investigation and *Šariʿī* [religious legal] accountability."[22]

 In a similar vein, a document issued in the Mosul area and probably dating to 2015 defined the following "necessities" as allowing for temporary travel outside the group's territory: illness that could not be treated inside Wilāyat Ninawa, pension matters that could only be transacted in Baghdad, and negotiations over agricultural property authorized by the group's agricultural department.[23] It was

further outlined that the period of travel would be set in advance, and that a guarantor would have to pledge the traveler's real estate or car as a guarantee for return. In the event of violation of the agreed period of absence, then the real estate or car would be confiscated. Other documents exist that illustrate how the Islamic State was facing a shortage of qualified medical professionals in its lands, as many of them abandoned the group's territories, and thus issued threats to confiscate their property in the event that they did not return.[24]

The group used its judiciary department to give the rubber stamp of approval for such confiscations in the event of abandoning Islamic State territory or unauthorized absence. This was made clear in the ultimatum to doctors for example.[25] There is also a document obtained from an Islamic State court in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zūr, in which the role of judiciary and the idea of technically 'temporary' confiscation are highlighted: the document is entitled "announcement of temporary confiscation" and declares that the order for this "temporary confiscation" is being made for real estate belonging to a person working as a teacher in Kuwait, requiring the person to present himself at the court in 15 days from the date of the announcement.[26] Otherwise, the confiscation would continue and the person would have to engage in a process called *istidrāk* (i.e. bringing a case with sufficient evidence to annul the confiscation). The role of the judiciary is also mentioned in an Islamic State treatise issued by the real estate department in Ninawa on the structure and operations of the department, noting that among the types of confiscated residential real estate are those whose homes have been confiscated by a "*Šariʿī* order issued by judiciary department [*Dīwān al-Qaḍāʾ*]."[27]

In some cases, it is not wholly clear whether a person whose property was confiscated belongs to the category of a perceived out-group or to the category of the in-group but who is outside the Islamic State territory for a prolonged or unauthorized period. Most notably, some individuals whose property was confiscated and who appear in the ISIS Files collection were described as having "Turkish affiliation." It is not yet clear how this constitutes a justification for confiscating property. Is the individual perceived as having ties to the Turkish state and is thus deemed an apostate, or is it simply that the individual is resident in Turkey and thus has his/her property confiscated as a consequence of their being outside the Islamic State's territories?[28]

Dealing with Confiscated Property

As noted in the preceding section, most confiscated mobile and immobile property would go to the Islamic State's treasury, which was supposed to deal

with the property in the "interest of the Muslims." What this meant was that the Islamic State could deal with the seized property as it saw fit. Not all of the ways of dealing with such property were for the purposes of raising funds. In overviewing the group's handling of confiscated assets, it is helpful to divide property according to the type of property seized.

Housing for Members

Perhaps one of the more common claims about the benefits that Islamic State members enjoyed was that the group provided them with free housing in some way or another. There is indeed considerable truth to this assertion, though it needs to be qualified. Specifically, the Islamic State allowed many of its members who did not own their own property to live rent-free in accommodation, but it did *not* grant its members ownership of those properties. Rather, it was understood that the seized properties that the organization granted for accommodation were to remain under the ownership of the Islamic State. In other words, the providing of accommodation constituted no more than a loan.

A useful illustration of this point comes in a document issued by the group's *Dīwān al-ʿAqārāt wa al-Ḫarāj* ("Department of Real Estate and Land Tax").[29] The document, classified as Specimen B/15 in the coding of specimens by the department, is entitled "Loaning Out of Real Estate Contract." The form constitutes an agreement between the Islamic State real estate office in a local area (affiliated with a provincial center, which is part of the greater *Dīwān*) and the "user" of the real estate to be loaned by the office. The details of the "user" include the requirement to supply the "provincial number," which is another name for the survey/ID number - a form of identification carried by members of the Islamic State.

The document also includes specifications of the type of real estate to be loaned out, and that the user has been granted authorization in a letter by his amir to obtain accommodation from the real estate office.[30] The real estate office, for its part, has handed over the property to the user to "make use of it without recompense, in the form of loaning out." This agreement is then certified by the "judge of the Islamic court" in the relevant area, and the user agrees to abide by specified conditions, the first being that the user cannot change or alter the loaned-out property in its specifications except by permission of the real estate office, which is the "authority delegated by the imam." In addition, the user cannot make such changes without permission because the property is "wealth of the Muslims" (i.e. the property of the Islamic State). Any violation of the rules would result in referral to the judiciary for investigation and then referral to the *wālī* (provincial

governor), who would rebuke the user for violating terms and then oblige said user to pay compensation.

As mentioned earlier, mobile property in the form of appliances and furniture seized within confiscated real estate would be considered to belong to the Islamic State. This mobile property would either be left inside the homes, or would be transferred to a storehouse belonging to the *Dīwān al-Ġanāʾim wa al-Fayʾ*.[31] The user of the immobile property would either be supplied an inventory of the mobile property within it, or be supplied with necessary mobile property for the furnishing of the home.[32] In the event that an Islamic State member believed that some additional items or furnishings were needed, a request could be submitted to the "Office of the Affairs of the Mujāhidīn," a body responsible for meeting household necessities for Islamic State members.[33]

It becomes apparent from other documents that the granting of rent-free accommodation was not universal for the group's members. For example, one of the documents in the ISIS Files collection of the George Washington University Program on Extremism concerns regulations on property owned by the group's real estate center in Ninawa: in particular, the document notes that Islamic State members working in Wilāyat Ninawa and residing in homes belonging to the real estate center are exempt from paying rent.[34] This suggests that not all Islamic State members who were residing in confiscated homes were exempt from paying rent. For example, if one resided in a home in Wilāyat Ninawa but worked in a more distant different *wilāya* like Kirkuk or Anbar, then it seems likely the Islamic State member would have had to pay rent.

Leasing Houses to Local Civilians

Although some locals from the civilian populations living under the Islamic State might also have been loaned accommodation by the organization in circumstances whereby they were displaced and also entitled to zakat distributions, the general policy seems to have been that locals could rent housing from the Islamic State in exchange for paying fees.[35] This is shown in rent receipts of the ISIS Files collection that feature rental fees being paid by locals to the real estate department.[36] This phenomenon constituted one of the many new ways in which the group could finance itself following its conquests of large swaths of territory.

Leasing Agricultural Land to Local Civilians

Besides renting out houses, the Islamic State could also lease confiscated agricultural land to local civilians in exchange for fees, or a share in agricultural produce, which might then be sold on by the Islamic State to traders. This phenomenon has already been alluded to previously. As is the case with the contract for loaning out real estate to Islamic State members, the agricultural rent contracts also make clear that the confiscated land is considered the property of the Islamic State, for among the conditions specified in the rent contracts: "The user must preserve the property as it is the property of the *Bayt Māl al-Muslimīn*."[37] In many cases, the arrangements constituted a continuation of rental agreements prior to the Islamic State's takeover; the proclaimed owner had simply changed.[38]

Leasing Property via Auction and Selling Property

Documentary evidence also attests to the leasing of confiscated property via auction and the selling of confiscated property. The concept of auction for lease is mentioned in an Islamic State treatise issued by the real estate department in Ninawa on the structure and operations of the department, which divided confiscated real estate according to whether it was residential or commercial.[39] In turn, commercial real estate was divided into three sub-types: (i) "real estate of *Ṭāġūtī* governments" that is large in nature and in the renting of which "mafias, gangs and clans" were involved to the exclusion of the wider population, (ii) governmental commercial real estate that is small (e.g. restaurants and shops), and (iii) commercial real estate confiscated by "special judicial orders."

For the first sub-type of commercial real estate, it was decided that a mechanism for public auction should be put in place, with the setting of a maximum price ("ceiling" price) by an appraisal committee. If no one won the initial rounds of auction, then a phone number would be posted on the wall of the confiscated real estate to give anyone the opportunity to participate in the auction. If no phone number existed, the auction would be repeated and would remain open until the maximum price set by the evaluation committee should be reached. The second type would be leased at the original prices, while the third would be evaluated by the appraisal committee and could be sold or leased.[40] Some early documents found in the Ninawa area attest to the process of auction for leasing, including a mall and markets (under the imprint of the real estate office) and the leasing of petrol stations (under the imprint of the *Dīwān al-Rikāz*, which managed oil resources, though the stations would still have belonged to the real estate office).[41]

Management of Oil and Gas Resources

Technically speaking, oil and gas resources were not considered within the framework of confiscated property, but rather put under the framework of *rikāz* (i.e. what is found and extracted from the ground). However, considering that such resources are originally considered as belonging to the sovereign state in whose territory they are located, this chapter considers the Islamic State's seizure and exploitation of them within the context of confiscation and the pillage economy. The general principle that emerges from the documentary evidence is that the oil and gas resources on-site were considered as belonging to the Islamic State, and as such, the revenue generated from any oil and gas sold directly at the fields would go to the Islamic State, and on-site investments by non-members were forbidden. Conversely, there were no restrictions on where a trader could take and sell the purchased oil and gas, just as one could independently refine oil derivatives after purchase of the crude oil. These ideas are outlined in a position paper from Islamic State territory and penned under the name of "Abu Abdullah al-Masri."[42] These policies are also attested in receipts for the sale of oil and gas.[43]

Conclusion

This chapter has explored both the justifications for confiscations and how confiscated mobile and immobile property was used by the organization. While there are no publicly available comprehensive financial records of the group that would allow for researchers to make precise calculations about revenue generated from confiscations and how important such revenue was in the group's budgeting (and indeed such records may take a long time to come to light, assuming they still exist and have not been lost), it can nonetheless be said in a qualitative sense that confiscations were an important logical consequence of the group's extremist worldview and an important aspect of the group's *modus operandi* in both providing accommodation for its own members and those it believed were entitled to free or subsidized sheltering, and as a way of generating revenue through leasing out of property. The revenue aspect becomes even more important if one considers the seizure of oil and gas resources and the resultant sales of oil and gas as part of the wider process of confiscation and pillaging.

In any event, there is sufficient documentary evidence to establish that the group engaged in serious property rights violations against members of out-groups, including minorities like Yezidis and Christians, 'apostates' and sovereign governments. Further, members of the Islamic State and those who interacted with the group in renting property from it in particular would have known that the mobile and immobile property had been illegally seized by the organization from others.

[1] See e.g. "The Business of the Caliph," Zeit Magazine, December 3, 2014 (https://www.zeit.de/feature/islamic-state-is-caliphate); "Money Matters: Sources of ISIS' Funding and how to Disrupt Them," CGSRS, October 25, 2015 (http://cgsrs.org/publications/27); Daniel L. Glaser, "The Evolution of Terrorism Financing: Disrupting the Islamic State," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 21, 2016 (https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/evolution-terrorism-financing-disrupting-islamic-state),

[2] E.g. "Counter ISIS Finance Group Leaders Issue Joint Statement," U.S. Department of the Treasury, June 16, 2023 (https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1549).

[3] Refer to the chapter "The Islamic State and its Treatment of Out-Groups: A Comparative Analysis."

[4] See e.g. "Why do we wage jihad?", al-Naba' issue 293, p. 3 (June 2, 2023).

[5] Theoretically, this option should also apply to any Jews who might come under the Islamic State's rule. In practice however, the group does not realistically expect that this scenario will take place. Accordingly, the group's discourse on Jews is genocidal in nature, urging for Jews to be attacked and killed everywhere. See, for example, "Kill the Jews," al-Naba' issue 376, p. 3 (February 2, 2023).

[6] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham's dhimmi pact for the Christians of Raqqa province," Syria Comment, February 28, 2014 (https://www.aymennjawad.org/14472/the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-ash-sham-dhimmi).

[7] Specimen 42X in Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents, aymennjawad.org accessed here: https://www.aymennjawad.org/2017/08/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-3

[8] These files are part of the ISIS Files archive of the George Washington University and have been reviewed by the author. See ISIS Files 07_000537 and ISIS Files 07_000542 cited in Devorah Margolin et al., "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to the Islamic State's Governance Strategy," George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2021, pp. 22 and 52. Accessed here: https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/downloads/765371328?locale=en.

[9] This entity went through three names: The Fatwa-Issuing and Research Department (*Dīwān al-Buḥūṯ wa al-Iftāʾ*), then the Fatwa-Issuing and Research Commission (*Hayʾat al-Buḥūṯ wa al-Iftāʾ*), and the Office of Research and Studies (*Maktab al-Buḥūṯ wa al-Dirāsāt*). Despite the name changes, its responsibilities appear to have remained broadly the same in terms of issuing fatwas and conducting research on Islamic issues. While the entity no longer exists and there was significant ideological controversy surrounding it in the period 2017-2018, the body of output produced by it remains important for the Islamic State's supporters, who continue to disseminate and archive its work. On the ideological controversies, cf. Cole Bunzel, "Ideological Infighting in the Islamic State," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, February 2019, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 12-21. Accessed here: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26590504

[10] Fatwa no. 974 in a compilation of fatwas issued on al-Bayān radio, Ṣarḥ al-Ḫilāfa Foundation, Safr 1442 AH (September-October 2020 CE].

[11] Likely referring here to Syrian insurgent factions that fought against the Islamic State, used derisively on analogy with the Iraqi Sunni Arab tribal fighters and insurgents who turned to work with the Americans and Iraqi government against the Islamic State's predecessor (Islamic State of Iraq).

[12] A prominent Andalusian Islamic scholar (994-1064 CE).

[13] Booty seized without fighting.

[14] War spoils seized in fighting.

[15] Lit. "Trustee of the affair," referring here to the caliph of the Islamic State.

[16] i.e. Referring to imams Mālik bin Anas, Muhmmad al-Šāfiʿī and Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, who are deemed the founders of three of the four main schools of jurisprudence.

[17] Fatwa no. 36 of the *al-Buḥūṯ wa al-Iftāʾ* Commission, December 19, 2014 (accessed here: https://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/IS-fatwas-35-38-40-53-55-57-59-62-65-71.pdf).

[18] "Wealth of Authority: Types and Rulings," issued as part of a collection of 25 writings and messages of the office by the Office of Research and Studies, August-September 2016 (vol 4, p. 1445).

[19] An official or member of the security apparatus. The term can also be applied in an 'external' sense to mean a member or official involved in conducting attacks against enemies within their own territories. For example, Islamic State members who conduct attacks in Europe are considered 'external' amnis.

[20] "Opposition to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: The Testimony of a Former Amni (II)," aymennjawad.org, September 29, 2019.

[21] For discussion of temporary waqf, see e.g. Faliq Asraf Jafri and Azman Mohd Noor, "Temporary Waqf Model for Islamic Private Retirement Scheme in Malaysia," Journal of Islamic Finance, Vol. 8 No. 1 (2019), pp. 23-35.

[22] "General Rules and Regulations for Foreigners Seeking to Join Islamic State (Iraq and Syria/2014)," Islamic State Archives, July 30, 2023 (https://islamicstatearchives.com/2023/07/30/general-rules-and-regulations-for-foreigners-seeking-to-join-islamic-state-iraq-and-syria-2014/)

[23] Specimen 6G in Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents. Accessed here: https://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents

[24] E.g. Specimen 5I in Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents. The ultimatum dates to May 18, 2015. Accessed here: https://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents

[25] Ibid.

[26] Specimen 12W in Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents. Accessed here: https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-1

[27] "Islamic State: Caliphate on the Prophetic Methodology: Centres of the real estates of the wilāyas," 4 Safr 1436 AH (November 27, 2014), p. 4 (accessed here): https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/downloads/sf268508b?locale=en

[28] Devorah Margolin et al., "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to the Islamic State's Governance Strategy," p. 22.

[29] "Contract for Loaning of Real Estate to Islamic State Members," Islamic State Archives, July 20, 2023.

[30] Literally, "commander." Referring to the member's direct superior.

[31] "Islamic State: Caliphate on the Prophetic Methodology: Centres of the real estates of the wilāyas," p. 4.

[32] Ibid., cf. "Inventory of Household Items in Real Estate as Part of Investigation," Islamic State Archives, July 30, 2023.

[33] For discussion, cf. Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "The Islamic State's Real Estate Department: Documents and Analysis," George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2020 (accessed here: https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/concern/reports/8336h188j)

[34] Instructions Memo issued by the Real Estate Centre in Ninawa, July 8, 2015.

[35] The term "civilian" here means a person who is not affiliated with the Islamic State. An affiliation with the Islamic State either took the form of formal membership with an ID number or being designated a munāṣir ("supporter"), effectively an intermediate stage for a local to become a member. See Daniel Milton, "Structure of a State: Captured Documents and the Islamic State's Organizational Structure," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, June 28, 2021 ()

[36] Registry of Receipts, Dīwān al-ʿAqārāt, March 29-April 1, 2015.

[37] See "Temporary Agricultural Rent Contract," Islamic State Archives, March 10, 2022.

[38] Devorah Margolin et al., "You Reap What You Sow: The Importance of Agriculture to the Islamic State's Governance Strategy," p. 22.

[39] "Islamic State: Caliphate on the Prophetic Methodology: Centres of the real estates of the wilāyas," pp. 4-6.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Aspects of Islamic State (IS) Administration in Ninawa Province: Part II," aymennjawad.org, January 20, 2015.

[42] Although *The Guardian* covered these documents as an "Islamic State 'masterplan'," it would be more accurate to see the work as the product of an individual effort within Islamic State territory and not necessarily reflective of the organization and all its policies. For the document and translation, see "Principles in the Administration of the Islamic State: Full Text and Translation," aymennjawad.org, December 7, 2015.

[43] See e.g. Specimens 5T and 5U in the Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents. Accessed here: (https://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents)

Additional Resources

The Islamic State Archives: in Collaboration with Jihadology

This website is a collaboration between Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi and Aaron Y. Zelin from Jihadology. It provides an extensive archive of internal Islamic State documents that are different from its propaganda materials. This front page will highlight recently added documents to the archive while also featuring interesting pieces of note.

Website: https://islamicstatearchives.com/

The ISIS Files

In 2018, The New York Times and George Washington University announced an exclusive partnership to digitise, translate, analyse, and publish over 15,000 pages of internal ISIS files obtained by Times investigative journalist Rukmini Callimachi and her Iraqi colleagues during embeds with the Iraqi army.

Extensive work has been done by the George Washington University to preserve and present the information contained in The ISIS Files in an accurate, accessible, secure, and impartial manner.

Website: https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/

Foreign Terrorist Fighters Knowledge Hub by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

The Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) Knowledge Hub is a trusted source for quantitative and qualitative data on FTFs who travelled to Syria and Iraq in support of terrorist or violent extremist groups and government responses to the FTF challenge. It is a valuable resource for policymakers, researchers, and the media.

The Knowledge Hub contains individual country pages where visitors can find country-specific FTF-related data. Additionally, it includes a policy matrix containing detailed information on national prevention policies, administrative measures, criminal proceedings, surveillance measures, and rehabilitation and reintegration measures. The Hub also showcases the legal framework governing these responses, relevant international standards and guidance concerning FTFs. A separate library provides relevant academic research and policy briefs.

Website: https://www.foreignterroristfighters.info/

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