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Articles

Changing God's Expectations and Women's Consequent Behaviors – How ISIS Manipulates “*Divine Commandments*” to Influence Women's Role in Jihad

by **Fernanda Buriil**



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Abstract

Given the evidence pointing to religiosity and gender as strong predictors of risk aversion, the recruitment of women into extremist organizations seems contradictory. This article is intended to help solve the puzzle of female behavior in terrorist groups by adding some nuance to the discussion: it is not religiosity itself that influences people's willingness to take risks, but their perception of god's expectations about their behavior. This is illustrated here with an analysis of ISIS's magazine Dar al-Islam and the evolution of their messages, from portraying a god that wants submission to a god that needs women's active participation in battle.

Key words: Terrorist recruitment; ISIS propaganda; women and ISIS; women in jihad

God's expectations and risk attitude

The gender gap in risk taking has been studied in the most diverse spheres of behavior, with overwhelming evidence suggesting that women are less likely to take risks than men. In contexts that range from financial decisions (Charness & Gneezy, 2012; Barber & Odean, 2001) to strategic decision-making in a simulated war (Johnson, McDermott, Barrett, Cowden, Wrangham, McIntyre, & Rosen, 2006), females are often less confident about their chances of success, they see higher risks in tasks than men do (Bromiley & Curley, 1992; Weber, Blais, & Betz, 2002), and are less willing to take risks altogether.

Another relevant finding replicated in several studies points to an inverse correlation between religiosity and risk taking (Miller & Hoffmann, 1995). Although different religious denominations have different effects on people's attitudes towards risk, the simple fact of being religious seems to increase the likelihood of risk aversion (Noussair, Trautmann, Van de Kuilen, & Vellekoop, 2013). The importance attributed to religion and participation in religious activities are also consistently associated with reduced risky behaviors (Sinha, Cnaan, & Gelles, 2007). Along similar lines, several studies have shown that, when primed with the idea of god or other spiritual terms, individuals are more likely to be prosocial (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007) and less likely to engage in immoral actions such as cheating in an exam (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2011).

In the light of such findings, ISIS's relative success in recruiting women using religious arguments is a curious phenomenon. Emphasizing religious ideas and priming women with divine concepts are constant strategies used in the group's propaganda. How, then, instead of driving them away from risky tasks, does ISIS's indoctrination motivate some women to support and even perpetrate actions with extremely high chances of harming or even killing them?



The answer to this apparent paradox lies in nuances that have been overlooked in many of these past studies. The correlation between religiosity and risk aversion may actually be mediated by another variable: perception of god's expectations. Believers take very seriously ideas of what god considers to be right or wrong, what is sacred and what is sinful, and they are supposed to follow the "good" path in order to get god's approval. In Sinha's and colleagues' study (2007), for example, most risky behaviors avoided by religious participants concerned issues about which religious doctrines almost always have very solid views, such as drug use and sexual activity. The same logic can be applied to cheating in exams, widely considered to be an immoral act.

What happens, however, when people are primed with the idea of god and face the possibility of engaging in morally-neutral risky activities such as skydiving? Kupor and colleagues (Kupor, Laurin, & Levav, 2015) have found that, contrary to previous studies' predictions, participants are actually more likely to accept the risks of skydiving. Another recent experiment has also shown a higher willingness to take financial risks among subjects primed with god concepts (Chan, Tong, & Tan, 2014). What these recent studies suggest is that the relationship between believing in god and being risk averse is not so direct or absolute.

The image people hold of god and especially what they understand to be god's expectations about their behavior on earth are important predictors of their attitude towards risk. Regardless of whether believers are counting on divine rewards in life or in an afterlife, or they fear god's punishment for disobedience, the fact is that the anticipation of god's reaction is a powerful motivation for behavior. By manipulating people's perceptions about what god expects, certain actors can influence the way believers calculate risks and significantly change their willingness to take them. The propaganda produced by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) illustrates well how this strategy is used, and how the representation of god's commands can change according to how ISIS leaders want their followers to act.

Does religiosity matter at all in terrorist groups' behavior?

Some of the first questions that can be posed are whether ISIS *raison d'être* really is directly tied to religion and what role (if there is one) Islam plays in the radicalization of youth (as opposed to poverty, social marginalization, or other political grievances). Although there is no consensus regarding these questions, better answers can be reached by understanding that all these factors can interact and intensify the effectiveness of extremists' narratives.

As Coolsaet (2016) remarks, before 9/11, it would take years and years of indoctrination to turn people into jihadis, whereas today they join ISIS more suddenly and impulsively. The involvement of "born-again Muslims" with extremist organizations can indicate that they are more interested in the adventure and the battles rather than in the spiritual purposes of the jihad. This new wave of terrorists would embrace violence as the ultimate act of rebellion against the Western world, not because of an inner religious passion or devoutness. What this perspective misses is that the socio-political and religious motives are not exclusive, and that adding god's authorization and encouragement to political action can enhance the purpose with which believers engage in it.

Even though these "born-again Muslims" do not have a history of religious devoutness and know little about the central texts of the religion they claim to profess, this does not mean that the belief in god and the images they create of him do not influence their behavior. In fact, this unfamiliarity with the broad teachings of Islam and the desperate need to please god after years of neglect can make new recruits much more vulnerable to the frames chosen by the extremist group. As Fareed Zakaria (2016) put it, "today's terrorists



are not religious extremists who became radicals but rather radicals who became religious extremists.” Even if these individuals are selected into extremist organizations because of their stronger desire for adventure and their willingness to take risks, the fact that they choose or end up being part of a *religious* one can affect their behavior in important ways. If a certain religious ideology is essential to the image of the group, members that decide to join or stay in it will feel compelled to conform. Presenting these individuals who have little knowledge of the very religion they then claim to profess with strong statements about god’s will can channel their predisposition to violence in ways that benefit the ultimate goals of the organization. Women, too, can be led to perpetrate violence to please god.

Are men and women in the West recruited the same way?

According to Marc Sageman (*in* Bloom, 2012), women are exposed to the same jihadist propaganda as are men. On the internet, they can participate in the forums and chat rooms just as men can. In fact, they can even not reveal their gender at all. This “gender neutralization” makes the virtual space a powerful tool for women, who feel they can fulfill the expectations of jihad by mobilizing, recruiting, and supporting individuals in the physical and ideological wars. Malika el-Aroud, widow of Abdessater Dahmane, who killed the leader of the anti-Taliban Afghan Northern Alliance in 2001, became famous among the jihadi community exactly because of her active role online. Using her status as a martyr’s wife and taking advantage of loopholes in Belgian law, el-Aroud ran pro-Al-Qaeda websites and became a role model for jihadi women as a “female holy warrior for the 21st century” (Bloom, 2012, p. 237).

Although it is true that the virtual space creates more opportunities for women to engage with other members and potential recruits of the terrorist organizations, there is no complete “gender neutralization” in the real world, as men and women are usually assigned to different roles in the organizational structure. Both men and women can have access to magazines like *Dar al-Islam*, but the articles within them are usually very clear about the sex of the people to whom they refer and address themselves. Excerpts selected from the Qur’an and the hadiths are equally clear about the obligations of male and female Muslims in society. The purpose of this analysis is to identify how the authors of *Dar al-Islam* played with believers’ perceptions of Allah’s expectations in order to influence their attitude and participation in jihad.

Why Dar al-Islam?

ISIS’ media branch, al-Hayat Media Center, specializes in producing and releasing videos, messages, and online magazines on their websites, Twitter, and Facebook accounts. The sophistication and prolificacy of al-Hayat Media Center is impressive. According to Matthew Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, ISIS currently operates the most sophisticated propaganda machine of any terrorist organization (Yan, n.d.). In July 2014, ISIS began releasing its most famous magazine *Dabiq* in English, Arabic, French, and German. Later in the same year, it released the first issue of *Dar al-Islam*, a French-language only publication. In 2015, ISIS continued its endeavor to target specific audiences by publishing *Istok* (in Russian) and *Konstantiniyye* (in Turkish). Since the end of 2016, all these magazines have been replaced by *Rumiyah* (Rome, in Arabic).

The choice of *Dar al-Islam* specifically for this study is not without a reason. France and Belgium especially have become fertile breeding grounds for ISIS militants, and at least 470 Belgian citizens went to Syria to join the fighting (Miller & Warrick, 2016). Perhaps more interestingly, female French speakers are more likely to



join ISIS than women from other countries. According to Jayne Huckerby's report (2015) published by the New York Times, roughly 10 percent of the Western recruits made by the Islamic State are female, while, in France, the estimate is that almost 20 percent of the people affiliated with ISIS are women.

Dar al-Islam can be a window to understanding the most successful strategies used by ISIS to recruit both males and females in Europe. It is important to analyze not only the general content of the magazine, but also how, by selecting certain passages and *hadiths*, ISIS propagandists manipulate people's perceptions of what Allah expects from men and women. The following is an analysis of the eight issues of the magazine that are available online on Archive.org and Jihadology.net. The translations from French to English were conducted by the author of this paper.

Dar al-Islam: rescuing Muslims from the World of War

The audience ISIS targets in Europe is certainly not one of lifelong devout Muslims with a thorough understanding of Islam and Islamic texts. In the very first issue of *Dar al-Islam*, almost all religious terms in Arabic are followed by a proximate translation and a thorough explanation of the concepts. Even some important regions like the Sinai get footnotes clarifying their geographical location.

With a first introduction to key concepts of Sunni Islam also come very important arguments about the role of ISIS in the ultimate goals of the religion. Allah would have permitted the Islamic State to reestablish a caliphate and get support from other Muslims because the organization is fighting for the most fundamental concept of *tawhid* (oneness of god) by combatting the *shirk* (those who adore other idols). In their interpretation, Christians, Jews, Shi'a, and those who simply defend democracy and the laws of men fit into the latter group. *Dar al-Islam* argues that the Qur'an "proves" and legitimates the caliphate and that it is the responsibility of Muslims to either join their brothers in the lands governed by Islamic rules or to combat their enemies where they are, especially in France, the United States, and their allies. Throughout all other issues, guidance on how to fulfill those roles are provided.

By the fifth issue, *Dar al-Islam* finally figures out its style and structure. The different sections of the magazine all have clear purposes. Although the news and events covered in each publication are different, they all contribute to 1) "prove" the veracity of some selected religious excerpts and the wrongness of ISIS's enemies, 2) show how the Islamic State is establishing the laws of Allah by applying appropriate punishments to deviants, and 3) propagandize the benefits of living in the caliphate.

A More Personal Appeal

Publishing the magazine in French is not the only way ISIS leaders try to get closer to their potential francophone recruits in Europe. They make sure to use common social experiences, local events, and media references with which residents can empathize. In the second issue, they make a statement about the intended audience of the magazine combined with a call for a more active participation of those reading it:

"...[T]his magazine is not addressed to the researchers, to the miscreant journalists or the pseudo-Muslims that want to study the Islamic State and that will attack us anyway even if our orthography and syntax were perfect. We are also not addressing ourselves to the pseudo-partisans of Jihad who think that they do something for their religion by spending their nights on social media." (Dar al-Islam, n. 2, p. 2)

The words in the publication are addressed to people like Amedy Coulibaly, who was killed by the French



police in Paris after his attack to a kosher market. Coulibaly, known by other ISIS members as Abou Basir Abdallah al-Ifriqi, had lived a life of crime, punishment, and resentment in France. Becoming a “martyr” was his redemption:

“...[b]y the sword and the allegiance, brother Abou Basir Abdallah al-Ifriqi was preserved from the troubles of life in France, this mundane love, the fact of living among misbelievers, and finally the mass apostasy of those who solidarized with the enemies of Allah.” (Dar al-Islam, n. 2, p. 6)

A final example of the efforts made by ISIS to personalize the message is the section “L’État Islamique dans le Mots de l’Ennemi” (The Islamic State in the Words of the Enemy) that appears for the first time in the third issue of the magazine. The section is very similar to Dabiq’s “In the Words of the Enemy,” which featured world leaders and experts, especially Americans, talking about ISIS and its danger. In the French version, French personalities are prioritized, like international consultant and instructor of the Institut d’Études Politiques Samuel Laurent. The enemy’s words that ISIS chooses to publish usually combine antagonism to the laws of Islam and opinions about the capabilities of the organization that instigate fear in the West.

The Portrayal of Women in Dar al-Islam

Vulnerable and Victimized

One of the most interesting recent changes observed in the structure of terrorist organizations, more specifically in Islamic extremist organizations, concerns the participation and role of female members. Differently from their secular counterparts, religious terrorist groups have largely avoided using women in their armed operations. In 2008, Ayman al-Zawahiri, at the time Al-Qaeda’s second in command, clearly stated online that women could not join his organization (Sciolino & Mekhennet, 2008). Another Al-Qaeda leader in Saudi Arabia, Yussufal-Ayyiri, although agreeing with the interdiction of women in battles, has been very emphatic about women’s role in encouraging and supporting their husbands and sons in their efforts to join jihad. He explicitly says that women should not engage in physical combat, but reiterates that their motivational role is essential for the jihad and the Muslim *ummah* (community) (Von Knop, 2007, p. 406). But what is ISIS’s current ideology and organizational strategy towards women?

The broad message in the first issues of *Dar al-Islam*, published in the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015, does not seem to deviate much from that of Al-Qaeda. Women are rarely referred to and, when they are, it is usually in a condition of vulnerability. They are put in the same category as children and diseased people, who should be protected and kept away from the battles. They are also used to illustrate the horrors of what the West has been doing and motivate men to engage in the war:

“No planes were launched to defend the Sunni women in Iraq and their children that went through persecution and massacres.” (Dar al-Islam, n. 1, p. 8)

“Three days ago, nine women were killed in a bombing attack on a bus... Are you going to let the misbeliever sleep calmly in his home while the Muslims’ women and children tremble, afraid of the sound of the planes crossing over their heads all day?” (Dar al-Islam, n. 2, p. 6)

Women are also often represented as property of men. Whether daughters, sisters, wives or slaves, women should be kept far from the enemy. Several excerpts in the magazine remind the readers of the threat the enemies pose of taking away their women:



“They [the rawafid] came... to take your houses, your lands, and your goods, they came to kill your men and take you women in captivity, the Iranians came seeking revenge on the Iraqis for the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s.” (Dar al-Islam, n. 3, p. 6)

Two pages of the second issue of the magazine are dedicated to an interview with the widow of Abu Abdullah al-Ifriqi (Amedy Coulibaly), Hayat Boumeddiene, whose real name is not mentioned – she is referred to throughout the whole article as “wife” or “sister.” With a layout that significantly differs from the rest of the magazine, these two pages are framed with delicate flowers. The interview consists of only three questions: what Boumeddiene felt once she got to the caliphate, what her husband felt when the caliphate was proclaimed, and what message she has for Muslims in general and sisters in particular. Boumeddiene tells the readers how enthusiastic Coulibaly was about the caliphate, how happy she is to have arrived there, and how easy the trip to the Islamic State was. The third answer, the message to the sisters, takes three quarters of the whole interview, and is a call for women to be supportive of their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. She says that, if the first Muslims managed to spread Islam throughout large territories, it was because they had pious women behind them. Muslim women, finally, should follow the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ [1] and be chaste, decent, truthful, and obedient to Allah.

To this day, Boumeddiene is being sought by the French police for allegedly having helped Coulibaly with the Paris attacks, but the extent of her involvement in the operation is still unclear. Even though she has been described by the French Police as “armed and dangerous” (Gardner, 2015), the image portrayed in the message is that of an obedient woman, who is simply doing what Allah expects from her and other sisters: supporting their men.

Brave and Powerful

Allah’s rules regarding women’s behavior as presented by ISIS, at least initially, are very restrictive, which facilitates men’s control over them. The exceptions to this strict conservatism towards women’s attitudes begin to appear when loosening the rules would offer strategic gains to the organization. According to the Sharia, women are not allowed to travel without their husbands or a mahram (unmarriageable kin). Although some details like the length of the journey vary, the prohibition seems to be a consensus:

“Let no woman travel for more than three days unless her husband or a Mahram is with her.” (Sahih Muslim)

“It is unlawful for a woman who believes in Allah and the last day that she travels the distance of one day and one night without a Mahram accompanying her.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 1038)

Even for the purposes of the sacred pilgrimage (*hajj*), the prohibition should stand:

“One of the conditions for the permissibility of a woman travelling for Hajj is that she is accompanied by her husband or a Mahram. If neither of them is accompanying her, then Hajj will not be obligatory.” (Imam al-Kasani)

Dar al-Islam focuses its message, however, on another perspective of this issue, one that facilitates the migration of women to the regions dominated by ISIS:

“Has a woman by herself the right to travel to accomplish al-hijrah [exodus or migration to Islamic regions]? Al-Qurtubi said: “The savants are unanimous that it is an obligation for women to travel, even without a mahram, if she fears for her religion or for herself or if she emigrates from the land of



misbelief.” [Al-Mufham Sharh Sahih Muslim vol.3 p.450].” (in Dar al-Islam, n. 3, p. 10)

The most surprising words regarding how women should behave amid the conflict appear in issue number 10, the last publication of *Dar al-Islam* before it was apparently replaced by the newest magazine *Rumiya*. In this issue, pretentiously titled “Game Over,” ISIS claims that France has lost its war against Islam and the Islamic State, and that their soldiers in the enemy’s lands are running towards death to meet with the Lord. It is also in this issue that the message to Muslim women most dramatically change, with a clear call to the physical battles.

While, in Boumeddiene’s interview, the role model for Muslim women was Maryam (Mary, mother of Jesus), a symbol of decency and obedience, the female figures brought up by the author Umm Sumayyah al-Faranciya in her article have much more agency. “The Women Around the Prophet” starts off by saying how important it is for Muslims to dive into their history and see the sources of their success. This history, it continues, is full of strong women who “far from being passive, they integrated different spheres of society and contributed actively to its prosperity as well as to the diffusion of Islam” (*Dar al-Islam*, n. 10, p. 31). Over pages full of roses and pink headings, Al-Faranciya reminds her readers that, in the beginning of their religion’s history, Muslims had to resist waves of violent reprisals and hostility. Among those actors of resistance were women who actively converted their colleagues, brothers, and husbands, and guided their sons to embrace Islamism and martyrdom.

Al-Faranciya reminds Muslim women that they can follow the path of Aisha, one of Mohammed’s wives, known to be very educated and to play a crucial role in spreading Islam, as well as in unifying Muslims after the death of Mohammed. They could also be like the women who advised Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab on state affairs. After all, “How to deny the participation of women in the affairs of society when the caliph himself used to be advised by a woman?” (*Dar al-Islam*, n. 10, p. 31).

The boldest revelation comes in the subsection about battles and the jihad. Al-Faranciya affirms that the battlefields were also full of women, and that examples abound to illustrate the courage of several role models among them. They accompanied Mohammed in military expeditions as nurses and also participated in both land and sea battles. If until then they had been portrayed as the vulnerable ones needing protecting, women now have their heroism unveiled by history. Not only could they participate in combat, they have protected Mohammed himself:

“The most fabulous story remains that of Nusaybah Umm Imarah al-Ansariyah during the battle of Uhud, who protected the prophet with all her body against the enemy. Mohammed himself would have said that ‘during the battle of Uhud, whichever way I turned my head, to the right and to the left, I saw Umm Imarah combatting in my defense.’” (Dar al-Islam, n. 10, p. 33)

Nusaybah would have participated also in the battles of Khaybar, Hunayan, and al-Yamamah, where it is believed she lost an arm and were stabbed over a dozen times. Far from being the exception, Nusaybah would be just one of the many women that followed men into wars.

Another interesting reminder in the article is that not only by the sword one can win battles. Umm Hakim, for instance, was said to have killed seven enemies by simply grabbing a hook that held the tent over them. Her example can inspire many women who want to contribute to defeating the enemy but lack the skills or courage to operate weapons. In case physical fights or subtler strategies to kill enemies do not appeal to them, the author makes sure to explain that there are still many other ways women can get involved in the war and in the development of the Muslim community. They can, for example, be nurses and medical doctors helping



the wounded, poets and writers spreading the Muslim message, and businesswomen and farmers who feed the community.

Desperate Times, Desperate Measures

One of the explanations proposed for the increase in female participation in terrorist organizations is that these groups would be pressured by critical conditions such as social dislocation, losses in conflict, and increase in law enforcement (Cunningham, 2003), which would essentially make them recruit women as a measure of last resort. Indeed, ISIS' call for women to be more active in jihad may stem from its difficulties in the conflict.

When the magazine released its first issues, in 2014, ISIS was in one of its best moments, taking over the cities of Raqqa, Mosul, and Tikrit, besides the Kurdish towns of Sinjar and Zumar, and announcing the establishment of the caliphate. In 2015, with the intensification of U.S. airstrikes and the stronger involvement of Russia and France in September and November, respectively, ISIS started to accumulate important losses, especially in Tal Abyad and Ramadi. In December, the U.S. announced that three senior ISIS leaders were killed in an airstrike, including its finance minister. In 2016, although ISIS continued to claim responsibility for terrorist attacks around the world, it accumulated battle losses. After two years of occupation, ISIS lost Hit and Fallujah to Iraqi and Kurdish forces. The number of male deaths could have finally made ISIS leaders resort to the employment of females.

But having organizations like ISIS becoming more acceptant of women's participation for a matter of survival is just half of the issue. They have to find ways of getting the attention and support of a group of people they have ignored for a long time and convince those women, as well as the male members of the organization, that including females in their operations is acceptable and beneficial for the whole community. How can such a shift in organizational dynamics take place without creating dissent or compromising trust in the group? The answer to this question seems to be exactly in the religious aspect of extremist organizations. Projecting the highest power and authority onto god takes away the responsibility and accountability from the physical leaders of ISIS. By attributing the discourses, the selected verses or interpretations of the Qur'an, and the sayings in the hadiths to Allah or Mohammed, they can benefit from the belief that these figures are unconditionally truthful and unquestionable. Especially because they are presenting these specific ideas to an audience of non-experts, people who did not have an extensive knowledge of the Islamic texts, they can manipulate these words more effectively in order to satisfy the organization's needs.

Ignorance regarding the mainstream literature on Islam makes indoctrination easier, as the target-recruits have little to compare the extremist ideas to, and no means of questioning them. The ability to make different text selections and to frame the same issues differently from one time to another (as in the case of women's role in jihad) while maintaining the respect and unquestionability of their sources is a powerful feature of ISIS. If members start losing their faith or question the veracity of the promises, they are reminded that everything is under god's control and defecting equals damnation.

Conclusions

As the case of ISIS shows, the openness of religious extremist organizations to women's participation is not exclusively dependent upon the religious rules for which they live, but also the context in which the organizations find themselves, their current capabilities, and their needs. Most of ISIS' propaganda had been



invoking Allah's commands that ask for women to be docile, obedient, and supportive of the men in their lives conducting the jihad. There are signs, however, that this exclusively supportive role will not stand. As the most recent issues of *Dar al-Islam* magazine show, Allah now "commands" that women must be much stronger and active. ISIS leaders have been focusing on women's role in the history of Islam and convincing them of their importance in the building and protection of the new caliphate. With the recent battles and territorial losses in Syria and Iraq, ISIS will likely be more acceptant of the use of females in their operations both in the Middle East and in the West, and their propaganda should continue to reflect this strategic change.

Even if currently representing just a small percent of the members of Islamic terrorist groups, women represent an important asset to them. The problems that may arise from ignoring women's capabilities and desires to engage in terrorism are already visible. Terrorist groups have realized that they can take advantage of the general belief that women are less threatening and dangerous than men, and they are now more willing to make use of females' presumed innocence to conduct their operations. Females can also make it through security checks easier (Huckerby, 2015), and they can more easily hide harmful objects underneath loose clothes. Relying on the idea that women are averse to risk and generally less likely to engage in terrorism might prove dangerous, as it neglects the ability of extremist groups to manipulate what god expects of them and the power these expectations might then have on the believer.

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Note

[1] In Islam, not only Jesus is an important figure (one of the prophets and messengers of Allah), his mother Mary (or Maryam) also assumes a very prominent position. Mary is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an as one of the most honored, respectful, and pure women in history.



The Hollow Hierarchy:

Problems of Command and Control in the Provisional IRA

by Antony Field



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Abstract

The Provisional IRA has often been characterized as a hierarchical terrorist group, particularly by proponents of the 'new' terrorist concept'. However, this does not adequately describe the reality of decision-making within the Provisional IRA. From the very beginning, important operational choices were made by PIRA volunteers at local level, without significant input from the senior leaders of the group. Despite a series of organizational reforms that were designed to reign in local volunteers, the leadership of the Provisional IRA was often unable to exercise effective command and control over rank-and-file members of the group.

While the Provisional IRA displayed many of the hallmarks of a hierarchical terrorist group, we need to be careful not to oversimplify its organizational behavior and conflate its formal structure with how it actually functioned. The Provisional IRA leadership tried to present the facade of an organized and disciplined guerilla army, but the internal workings of the group were much more complicated and chaotic. Despite the presence of hierarchical institutions, the leadership had constant problems controlling rank-and-file members. Indeed, many Provisional IRA operations were planned sporadically at a local level, without significant input from the hierarchical chain of command. Centralized command and control was frequently undermined by independent operational decision making and internal bargaining between different factions. In some ways, the leadership of the Provisional IRA presided over a hollow hierarchy.

This research has important implications for the 'new terrorism' debate. According to the 'new terrorism' school of thought, the terrorist groups that operated in the 1970s-1980s, such as the Provisional IRA, are substantively different from the terrorist groups of today.[1] More specifically, proponents of the new terrorism concept have argued the terrorist groups of the past were hierarchical entities, whereas contemporary terrorist groups operate as loose networks and leaderless resistance movements.[2] Leonard Weinberg, Ami Pedahzur and Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler observe that 'from an organizational perspective, the new terrorists have tended to rely less on hierarchical and more on horizontally articulated and network-based forms than those active in the 1960s and 1970s'.[3] Along the same lines, Albert J. Bergesen and Yi Han comment that 'newer terrorist organizations have moved away from the older model of professionally trained terrorists operating within hierarchical organizations with a central command chain toward a looser organization with a less clear structure'.[4] Mathew J. Morgan argues that 'terrorist groups have evolved from hierarchical, vertical organizational structures, to more horizontal, less command-driven groups'.[5]

In this context, the Provisional IRA has often been put forward as a leading example of a 'traditional' hierarchical terrorist group.[6] For example, Bruce Hoffman has described the Provisional IRA as a 'stereotype of the traditional terrorist group' characterized by 'pyramidal, hierarchical, organizational



structures'.[7] Similarly, Christopher Dishman characterizes the Provisional IRA as a 'typical hierarchical organization'.[8] In his analysis of 'old and new terrorism', Peter Neumann refers to the Provisional IRA as an example of 'old terrorism', because while decision making within the group was 'sometimes messy, the military hierarchy remained intact'.[9] Along the same lines, Thomas Copeland writes that 'old' terrorist groups 'had fairly well defined command and control structures' and that 'the PLO, IRA and ETA were typical of this type'.[10]

However, we should be cautious about putting the Provisional IRA into the category of a 'traditional' hierarchical terrorist group. As this article will show, the chain of command in the Provisional IRA was often notional rather than actual. Indeed, the ability of the leadership to exercise command and control over operations was frequently undermined by the rapid turnover of personnel, the disruptive effect of counterterrorism operations, disagreements between volunteers, and the parochialism of local commanders. Decision making within the Provisional IRA was much more complicated and fragmented than the organizational chart would suggest.

Building the Provisional IRA

The first time-period under analysis covers the formation and early years of the Provisional IRA (1969-1975) during which its initial organizational structure was laid down. From the very start, the Provisional IRA had a quasi-military structure that consisted of a central leadership committee which presided over subservient volunteers. However, the way the organization functioned in practice was much more complicated. During the early years of the Provisional IRA, the leadership struggled to manage a surge in recruitment and adapt to the disruptive effect of counterterrorism operations. As a result, the leadership's command and control was somewhat sporadic and they had considerable difficulty directing operations on the ground. In many cases, operational decisions were made at a local level with practically no input from the leadership. Despite its hierarchical appearance, the Provisional IRA was a disjointed and fragmented organization with inconsistent command and control mechanisms.

The Provisional Irish Republican Army was created in late 1969, following divisions between conservatives and reformists within the Irish Republican Army.[11] As the leaders of Provisional IRA were all veterans of the much older Irish Republican Army, it is perhaps unsurprising that they modelled the organization of the new group on the structure of its predecessor. At the top of the Provisional IRA hierarchy was a central leadership committee called the 'Army Council'. It was made up of eight positions: 'Chief of Staff', 'Deputy Chief of Staff', 'Quarter Master General', 'Adjutant General', 'Director of Organization', 'Director of Intelligence', 'Director of Engineering' and 'Secretary'. Collectively, the Army Council had overall responsibility for directing the armed struggle.[12] Most importantly, it had the authority to order operations and veto plans proposed by PIRA volunteers.[13]

Beneath the Army Council was a decision-making body called the General Headquarters Staff. This organization consisted of ten separate Departments: 'Quartermasters', 'Engineering', 'Training', 'Finance', 'Foreign Operations', 'Domestic Operations', 'Security', 'Intelligence', 'Publicity', and 'Education'.[14] The people from these different departments worked closely with the Army Council to plan and implement Provisional IRA operations.[15] One Provisional IRA volunteer described the General Headquarters as: 'the section of the IRA with operational control over all IRA activity, running the IRA on a daily basis'.[16] This enabled the Army Council to have 'operational and organization control over a number of levels within the movement'.[17] Notably, the General Headquarters played a key role in coordinating high-profile attacks –



sometimes referred to as 'spectaculars'. According to Christopher Drake, such operations were often 'planned by General Headquarters (GHQ) and executed by specially selected units'.^[18]

Further down the Provisional IRA chain of command, the rank-and-file volunteers were organized into geographical 'Brigades', 'Battalions' and 'Companies'.^[19] This mimicked the organizational system used by the Irish Republican Army in the 1920s.^[20] The four most active Brigades were in Belfast, Derry, East Tyrone and South Armagh. The largest was the Belfast Brigade, which consisted of three or four Battalions, divided into a number of smaller Companies.^[21] In addition, there were numerous 'local defense committees' and part-time members of the 'Auxiliary IRA' who would lend assistance as needed.^[22]

The quasi-military structure of the Provisional IRA was supposed to ensure that the leaders of the Provisional IRA had control over rank-and-file operations. However, in practice the situation was much more complicated. In the early 1970s, the command and control capabilities of the Provisional IRA leadership were severely stretched by a period of rapid expansion. Many of the new recruits were the product of sectarian violence between Protestants and Catholics.^[23] In 1968, the Irish Republican Army had few active volunteers and only consisted of only around 120 members across the whole of Northern Ireland.^[24] By the early 1970s, the Provisional IRA had over 1,000 members in Belfast alone.^[25] One Provisional IRA member recalls that: 'we had to turn people away' because 'they could not be vetted quick enough'.^[26]

The senior leadership's command and control over these new recruits was somewhat notional. Jacob Shapiro assesses that: 'at this early stage the PIRA's central leadership exercised little control over targeting choices'.^[27] Indeed, most of the attacks in Northern Ireland were opportunistic and planned on a local level.^[28] A Provisional IRA volunteer described this period as:

The chaotic years of the early seventies when IRA operations would be planned on the spur of the moment. IRA volunteers would just hijack a car, collect a couple of rifles, and take a few pot shots at the nearest army patrol. Planning, organization, and coordination were not familiar words in those days.^[29]

While the Provisional IRA leadership helped to coordinate big attacks, such as the 'Bloody Friday' bombings in Belfast, most operational decisions were taken at the Battalion, Company and Unit level with little reference up the chain of command.^[30] As Christopher Drake assesses: 'there was very little coordination between areas such as Belfast, Derry and South Armagh, or indeed within Belfast itself'.^[31] Some volunteers even circumvented GHQ and sought out their own sources of weapons so they could launch operations without help from the leadership.^[32] Martin Meehan, who was a volunteer in the Belfast Brigade, describes the overall situation:

People on the ground were to take action as they saw fit. I don't believe they were any orders sent or word from anybody in high rank. I think they were spontaneous gestures...I would say that the Volunteers on the ground would have been taking actions that were not authorized.^[33]

For the most part, communication between the Army Council and volunteers on the ground was intermittent.^[34] According to one volunteer from the General Headquarters Staff: 'the structure functioned only sporadically, depending on who was available to staff it, and existed mainly for the distribution of equipment and finance'.^[35] Even volunteers sent to England directly by the General Headquarters Staff had considerable discretion over operations and were only given very broad categories of targets.^[36] Despite the presence of a hierarchical chain of command, the leadership had trouble exercising operational control.

Problems of command and control within the Provisional IRA were aggravated by intensive counterterrorism



operations. The Provisional IRA had poor counter-intelligence methods and it was relatively easy for the security forces to track down Provisional IRA members. Between 1971 and 1974, thousands of PIRA suspects were arrested or subjected to internment, including many senior figures from the Army Council and General Headquarters Staff.[37] These detentions disrupted internal lines of communication within the Provisional IRA and eroded the chain of command.[38] According to a PIRA member who was active at the time:

This was a chaotic period, with arrests, particularly in the Belfast area, running at a furious rate, and the command structure of brigade, battalion and company staffs was under enormous pressure, with key positions continually having to be filled, in some cases by people who were patently not up to the job.[39]

The situation became even worse after the declaration of a ceasefire in 1975. The false sense of security created by the ceasefire led to a major lapse in security by PIRA volunteers – with many meeting in public and maintaining open contact with each other.[40] Careful surveillance of these gatherings enabled the security forces to identify many additional Provisional IRA members, who were subsequently detained when the ceasefire ended. According to a report by the Ministry of Defense, by the middle of the 1970s, most PIRA volunteers were known to the security forces.[41] In such an environment, it became very difficult for the Provisional IRA leadership to maintain a functioning system of hierarchical command and control.

During the early 1970s, the leadership of the Provisional IRA clearly struggled to control operations on the ground. Although in principle there was a clear formal hierarchy, the leadership was only able to be directly involved in a few high-profile operations. For the most part, the organizational structure could not cope with rapid expansion and aggressive counterterrorism measures. Consequently, most operations were planned at a local level with little input from the central leadership. This was especially the case in Belfast, where there was a massive influx of new recruits and young leaders who resented interference from the leadership south of the border. Overall, the Provisional IRA was far from a unified, hierarchical group with an effective chain of command. Instead, it was a highly-fragmented organization, with intermittent lines of communication, and competing centers of power.

Reforming the Provisional IRA

In response to the organizational problems of the early 1970s, there was a widespread reorganization of the Provisional IRA between 1976-1985. This was partly a response to pressure from counter-terrorism efforts, which forced the Provisional IRA to adapt to survive. However, organizational reforms were also undertaken to consolidate the position of the leadership and increase their influence over rank-and-file volunteers. There was an effort to create a more tightly focused organization with a smaller membership that could be more easily controlled by the Army Council. Overall, the leadership moved the Provisional IRA in the direction of a stronger hierarchical organization with stricter system of command and control. However, these reforms were only partially successful and the chain of command was undermined by power struggles, personal disputes and internal divisions among volunteers. In particular, there was significant resistance to leadership interference in operational matters. Some local commanders pushed back against central control and fought hard to maintain their operational autonomy. This meant that hierarchical command and control was inconsistent across the organization and the leadership was not always able to effectively exert its authority over volunteers on the ground.

During the late 1970s, the Provisional IRA went through an intensive period of organizational reform. One of the most important reforms was the creation of two coordinating committees – the ‘Northern Command’



and the 'Southern Command'.^[42] The Northern Command was a 'mini-Army Council with the authority to oversee all offensive operations in the North'.^[43] It was responsible for the 'war zone'—the six counties of Northern Ireland and the five Irish border counties of Louth, Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim and Donegal. ^[44] The introduction of the Northern Command signaled a move towards more centralized planning, operational coordination and joint training between the different Brigades in the North.^[45] It essentially shifted operational control away from the Army Council and GHQ and into the hands of Northern volunteers.^[46] After the 1976 reorganization, the 'Southerners' were left with responsibility for twenty-one counties of Ireland and their role was to provide logistical support for the 'war zone' in the North.^[47] This entailed fundraising, political campaigning, maintaining weapons stores, arranging safe houses and training volunteers.^[48] The overall effect was to strengthen a small cadre of leaders within the Army Council, the Northern Command and the northern Brigades.

The reform of leadership structures was accompanied by a reorganization of rank-and-file members. The Provisional IRA was streamlined and became a much smaller organization. During the 1980s, the Provisional IRA was scaled back to around 30 leaders and 200-350 active volunteers.^[49] J. Bowyer Bell observes that:

The days of the big IRA were passing. Along with sound Republicans and idealists, the Provos as a big force had, as does any army, attracted the marginal, criminals and psychotics, bullies and braggarts, informers and incompetents. Most, as with real armies, were discarded, dismissed, shot in the case of treason, and eased out when hopeless. Increasingly, the process of entry became more selective, fewer needed, fewer volunteering, fewer to be discarded as useless.^[50]

This downsizing was accompanied by the strengthening of hierarchical command and control at the Brigade level. Each Brigade had a designated 'Officer Commanding', who was assisted by a 'Brigade Council' of senior Provisional IRA volunteers, and a 'Command Staff' that had specific roles, such as 'Operations', 'Intelligence', 'Quarter-Master', 'Engineering', 'Finance' and 'Internal Security'.^[51] Collectively, these senior volunteers were expected to control Provisional IRA operations in their territorial area.^[52] Ultimately, the Brigade OC was accountable directly to Northern Command.^[53]

Beneath the Brigades, volunteers at the Battalion and Company level were reorganized into 'Active Service Units' (ASUs).^[54] The ASUs were supposed to be small units with specialized roles, such as sniping, bombing, robberies, internal security and intelligence work.^[55] According to M.L.R Smith, there was a:

Dissolution of the old system of battalions and companies to be replaced by a network of cells, or active service units (ASUs), which would operate independently from each other and receive information from an anonymous hierarchy.^[56]

The Active Service Units were designed to be more accountable and easier to control.^[57] They typically consisted of between four to ten members chosen by the Brigade staff.^[58] In charge of each ASU was an 'Officer Commanding' (OC) who would liaise directly with the Brigade Command Staff and receive orders when necessary.^[59]

To further enforce the chain of command, many weapons were taken out of the hands of volunteers and transferred to the Brigade leadership.^[60] Specially designated Brigade Quartermasters were charged with issuing Active Service Units with weapons before operations and ensuring they were returned afterwards. ^[61] Only the senior Brigade staff were supposed to know the location of major arms caches.^[62] One PIRA volunteer observed how this impacted rank-and-file volunteers: 'whenever they had an idea for an operation they had to apply for equipment, and then go through a vetting procedure to determine whether the guns



were going to be put to proper use'.[63] Ultimately, the Brigade Quartermasters were accountable to Northern Command, General Headquarters and ultimately the Army Council.[64]

Despite these significant organizational reforms, the Provisional IRA remained a deeply divided organization and there was a tendency for hardline volunteers to resist control from senior leaders. There was considerable factionalism within the IRA that often led to operational disputes and schisms.⁶⁵ As Page and Smith comment: 'splits, tensions and disputes more often than not rotate around one issue in particular: the question of political control over the means of violence'.[66] Many volunteers simply wanted to get on with the armed struggle without interference from the senior leadership.[67] According to J. Bowyer Bell:

The Army Council is largely a validating organization, seldom meeting more than once a month... it almost never votes formally, rather authorizing and recognizing the initiatives that arise from the independent units or from the staffs...control from the top is seldom exercised.[68]

Throughout its existence, the Provisional IRA leadership struggled with internal divisions, parochial decision making and a dysfunctional chain of command. In the view of Brendan O'Brien, the leadership had to accept with the reality of 'local commander prerogative' and this created a 'less tightly controlled Army, with more loose cannons'.[69]

The introduction of the new organizational structures did not curtail the operational independence of many Brigades. Kevin Toolis summarizes the arrangements:

Although the IRA purports to be a national army, its command structure is fragmented. The actual fighting in Northern Ireland is undertaken by individual units reporting to a brigade...the role of the Army Council is really just to supply those brigades with weapons, explosives and training facilities. [70]

In many instances, Brigade commanders questioned the authority of senior leaders and embarked on their own operations. According to J. Bowyer Bell, operational decisions 'were for the most part left to local units' and were 'shaped by the movement consensus as to what was proper and justified'.[71] When consensus broke down, the leadership's strategic control of violence faltered. For example, in the early 1980s, the Belfast Brigade became hostile to the leadership of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. Under the direction of Ivor Bell and Eddie Carmichael, the Belfast Brigade conducted attacks that were designed to embarrass the Provisional IRA leadership and undermine their electoral strategy.[72] Such tensions were not unusual. As Jacob Shapiro assesses, the leadership's 'control over violence remained elusive' and volunteers sometimes launched 'poorly thought out operations'.[73]

In particular, many of the rural Brigades resented interference from senior leaders and worked hard to safeguard their independence. Many of the volunteers in the rural Brigades were reluctant to subjugate themselves to external control from untrustworthy outsiders.[74] According to one volunteer: 'there were a few of these little fiefdoms across the North, which saw GHQ and the Army leadership generally as little more than an unquestioning source of arms, explosives and cash'.[75] The rural Brigades tended to be close-knit units with strong links to each other and weak connections to the rest of the Provisional IRA.[76] They typically consisted of people from the same local community who often had family ties to one another. [77] Recruitment and vetting of volunteers was handled at a local level with minimal input from General Headquarters.[78] Indeed, some of the most parochial units simply refused to work with volunteers they did not know personally.[79] According to Kevin Toolis:

IRA men grow up together in the same area, drink together and socialize with each other from



their teenage years, riot together, and intermarry with other republican families. They are a unique product of that particular community; other IRA men from different areas in Northern Ireland would be viewed with caution and treated with suspicion. There is no place for outsiders to be slotted into this complex web of social and extended family relationships.[80]

This created a situation where the rural Brigades were theoretically responsible to the PIRA leadership, but often planned and conducted operations independently.[81] Christopher Drake assesses that 'local commanders, especially in the borders areas, have a great deal of discretion in carrying out operations'. [82] For example, many of the ambushes against British armed forces in South Armagh were undertaken spontaneously at a local level.[83] As J. Bowyer Bell argues: 'no one was going to be able with any effect to tell the Republicans of South Armagh to restrain themselves'.[84]

Further down the chain of command, the implementation of Active Service Units was patchy. In many places the traditional structure of territorial Battalions and Companies was retained. These territorial units policed Republican neighborhoods on behalf of the PIRA, disciplined suspected collaborators and provided operational support to Active Service Units.[85] Particularly in the rural areas, the ASU structure was never embraced and they continued to use their traditional method of organization.[86] According to a Provisional IRA volunteer: 'some areas, such as Crossmaglen and Tyrone, still maintained the old Battalion/Company structure while paying lip-service to the reorganization'.[87] Similarly Ed Moloney observes that: 'the cell system was largely a Belfast phenomenon' and that 'some rural areas successfully fought to maintain their old structures and the operational spontaneity and local control that came with them'.[88] By maintaining these traditional structures, local commanders protected their position and prevented interference from senior leaders.

Even in places where Active Service Units were introduced, many volunteers continued to operate with little input from senior leaders. Mark Urban points out that 'ASU commanders expected to have considerable operational freedom'.[89] While in theory volunteers were locked into a hierarchical system of command and control, in practice operational decision making was often left to individual Active Service Units.[90] According to Taylor and Quayle:

The cell structure on which the organization is premised can act as a pressure towards local rather than national control. There is undoubtedly tension at times between the independence of operational local units, and the continuity and control of action within a broader organizational framework.[91]

Many of the ASUs conducted their own fundraising, procured their own transportation and organized their own safe houses.[92] Some even had their own weapons caches and launched their own operations.[93] In the opinion of Tom Baldy, there was a tendency for 'nearly autonomous cells...to operate independently of the Belfast central command'.[94] Many attacks, including the Enniskillen, Harrods and Shankill Road bombings, were conducted without a prior authorization from the Army Council or Northern Command. [95] In the aftermath of a reckless operation there was often 'dismay and disbelief among senior IRA figures that local commanders could have sanctioned such a mission'.[96]

That is not to say that PIRA volunteers were completely autonomous from the leadership of the organization. The hierarchical system of command and control did enable the leadership to exercise some influence over PIRA operations.[97] As one PIRA member makes clear:

Although all IRA units have a large degree of autonomy in choosing the operational who-what-when-and-where, they must always give precedence to orders from GHQ even if that means



abandoning other operations that are ready to go.[98]

It was generally understood that volunteers needed to consult the Army Council on major operations and that leaders should 'sanction any operation that was a departure from the norm'.^[99] Bradley and Feeney assess that the leadership wanted to control operations because 'local initiative, whether in Belfast or London, had the potential to derail political strategy'.^[100] However, command and control was more difficult than suggested by the maintenance of a quasi-military hierarchy. As J. Bowyer Bell comments, the Provisional IRA 'is an army with remarkably few orders...the IRA fits neatly on a chart...but the chart is not of the real world'.^[101] While individual Brigades and Active Service Units were ostensibly under the control of the Army Council, they often demonstrated a great deal of independence. In reality, the effectiveness of the chain of command varied immensely according to the profile of the target, the level of disruption by counter-terrorism forces, and the personalities of the volunteers involved in the operation. Indeed, as the Provisional IRA Greenbook makes clear: 'the I.R.A. volunteer, except when carrying out a specific army task, acts most of the time on his own initiative'.^[102]

Conclusion

This analysis of the Provisional IRA alerts us to the dangers of conflating formal organizational structure with actual organizational behavior. Even though the Provisional IRA had many of the bureaucratic trappings of a hierarchical command and control system, the members of the organization often functioned in a much more decentralized way. To think of the IRA as hierarchical in the traditional sense would be to ignore the existence and importance of informal centers of decision making within the organization. Operations were frequently planned without any input from the senior leadership of the organization and hierarchical command and control was often notional rather than actual. Indeed, there was a high degree of operational autonomy both before and after organizational reform in the late 1970s. This was due to the necessity of operating as a secret organization and because some units of the PIRA dared to act independently without express permission. Over the years, factional disputes and internal negotiations consistently complicated the leadership's attempts at hierarchical command and control. In many instances, the targets and tempo of operations were dictated by local commanders rather than national leaders. To the frustration of senior figures, the hierarchical command and control structures of the Provisional IRA often proved to be somewhat hollow.

More broadly, the organizational behavior of the Provisional IRA demonstrates the problem of placing terrorist groups into neat categories. As this research has shown, the organizational distinctions between 'traditional' and 'new' terrorists do not reflect how terrorist groups actually function. In truth, ostensibly hierarchical terrorists often display confusing and fragmented operational decision making processes, which more closely resemble informal networks of autonomous action than strict military chains of command. This brings into question the analytical usefulness of the 'new' terrorism concept. Simply put, the idea of the 'new terrorism' oversimplifies the organizational architecture of terrorist groups and over exaggerates the degree of change in organizational behavior. Instead of sharply differentiating between the terrorist groups of the past and present, we should view all terrorist groups as organizational hybrids that combine different approaches in dynamic ways. This is an important task, as only by recognizing the complexity of terrorist organizations, will we be adequately prepared to respond to contemporary terrorist threats and prevent future terrorist attacks.



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Notes

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ISIL'S Battlefield Tactics and the Implications for Homeland Security and Preparedness

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Abstract

This proposed article investigates the emergency management implications of a terrorist attack directly planned and executed by ISIL in the United States. To do so, we operationalize the Department of Homeland Security's National Preparedness Goal (NPG) to demonstrate how ISIL-directed attacks might stress national preparedness Core Capabilities. In so doing, we provide a proof of concept, demonstrating how viewing the ISIL threat through an emergency preparedness lens can help better benchmark existing national preparedness activities and policies against emerging threats.

Introduction

Of the numerous tactics that ISIL has cultivated on the battlefields of Iraq and Syria, could any present threats in an American domestic context? Relatedly, once we understand what types of threats ISIL could employ in an attack against the United States,^a how can we discuss them in a manner that proves meaningful for policymakers at all levels of government?

Answering the first question requires, at the outset, an understanding of the tactics ISIL has employed on the battlefield. Fortunately, a report written by CNA's Center for Stability and Development, *Adaptive and Innovative: An Analysis of ISIL's Tactics in Iraq and Syria*, expertly navigates this landscape. Leveraging its findings, we isolated 10 of the report's 14 tactics that exhibit the greatest relevance to the domestic context. To select these ten, we filtered out those tactics in the report that were geographically bound to unique Iraqi and Syrian contexts. This primarily resulted in excluding tactics related to capturing and holding cities. We also considered the process by which tactics might be transferred from the battlefield to the United States, paying particular attention in our selection process (and subsequent vignettes below) to the knowledge component of ISIL's tactics. For example, the knowledge of how to conduct an attack (e.g. how to construct chemical weapons) is more easily transferred to the United States—either through returning foreign fighters or electronic communications—than actually transferring chemical weapons. This selection process was validated both through consensus among the authors and in consultation with a research team leader from the original CNA report.

The ten tactics are listed below, and will be explored in individual vignettes in turn. These vignettes serve principally to describe the tactics, as well as to offer a perspective (though not a comprehensive assessment) on how such tactics might manifest in an attack in the United States.

^a ISIL-directed attacks, as defined here, are those where conceptual or tactical aid is provided by ISIL members to attackers (perhaps by encrypted messaging or through the direct return of foreign fighters to the United States). Lone wolves and those self-radicalized by ISIL, but not in communication with or organized by the group, do not constitute ISIL-directed attacks.



1. Operations Security
2. Intelligence Apparatus
3. Shaping the Battlespace
4. Tunnels
5. Waterways
6. Theatrical Brutality
7. Cyber Command and Control
8. Drones
9. Improvised Explosive Devices
10. Chemical Weapons

To make this identification of tactics useful for practitioners at all levels of government, we mapped each tactic to the emergency preparedness framework set in place by the Department of Homeland Security, the National Preparedness Goal. DHS (led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA) developed the National Preparedness Goal to help ensure that all levels of government could work towards common homeland security objectives using a common language. The Goal codifies all preparedness activities into five Mission Areas—Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery—which include a total of 32 Core Capabilities (see Table 1). Core Capabilities comprise the operational elements of each Mission Area. Each Core Capability is further characterized by Critical Tasks, which represent the various tactical-level tasks that collectively define a capability. It is specifically to these tasks that we mapped each tactic. Our primary consideration when matching tactics with tasks was to capture, in our assessment, whether tactics would likely stress the delivery of a given capability.^b This mapping was informed by the authors' experience contributing to the development of FEMA's 2016 and 2017 *National Preparedness Reports* and was validated through consensus.

^bStress is defined as the potential for a tactic to overwhelm a jurisdiction's independent capacity to counter a threat. Core Capabilities specific to the Recovery Mission Area were excluded from this article in the spirit of analytical humility, as including them would require making judgements on the potential fallout from an attack, not simply on the tactics employed.



Prevention		Protection		Mitigation		Response		Recovery	
Planning									
Public Information and Warning									
Operational Coordination									
Intelligence and Information Sharing				Community Resilience		Infrastructure Systems			
Interdiction and Disruption				Long-term Vulnerability Reduction		Critical Transportation		Economic Recovery	
Screening, Search, and Detection				Risk and Disaster Resilience Assessment		Environmental Response/Health and Safety		Health and Social Services	
Forensics and Attribution		Access Control and Identity Verification		Threats and Hazards Identification		Fatality Management Services		Housing	
		Cybersecurity				Fire Management and Suppression		Natural and Cultural Resources	
		Physical Protective Measures				Logistics and Supply Chain Management			
		Risk Management for Protection Programs and Activities				Mass Care Services			
		Supply Chain Integrity and Security				Mass Search and Rescue Operations			
						On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement			
						Operational Communications			
						Public Health, Healthcare, and Emergency Medical Services			
						Situational Assessment			

Figure 1. Core Capabilities and Mission Areas of the National Preparedness Goal[1]

In addition to providing practitioners a common language for preparedness activities (no small feat, considering preparedness efforts span everyone from small-town part-time emergency coordinators to FBI agents), these capabilities also provide a means for the government to track spending on grants and programs related to emergency preparedness, which are often categorized by relevant capability. As a result, by mapping ISIL's tactics to Core Capabilities, we can provide a means for practitioners to reflect on whether their jurisdiction's level of proficiency or spending in a given capability is sufficient to meet the threat. Our mapping simultaneously offers practitioners an opportunity to reflect on the tactics that map to the greatest variety of Core Capabilities, to see if their jurisdiction's overall distribution of proficiency or funding meets the complex threat of some particularly multidimensional tactics.

Importantly, we cannot make these judgements for practitioners. ISIL is only one of a variety of threats and hazards that emergency management and homeland security professionals face. As a result, we cannot simply



look at spending on a Core Capability that our mapping identifies and say whether this level of resourcing is or is not sufficient. Practitioners must factor in, using their professional judgement and a host of risk assessment tools, how large a portion of scarce resources they choose to devote to the threat of an ISIL-executed terrorist attack in their community. Nevertheless, we believe that providing this mapping offers practitioners a more educated starting point in their self-evaluations.

Finally, this mapping depicts a relatively novel approach. While the Goal sets the standard language and operations for emergency preparedness cooperation and planning, it includes no explicit mechanism for benchmarking how a given threat relates to operational capabilities. The mapping we employ provides a means of operationalizing the Goal. This, in turn, makes it simpler to discuss emerging threats in the context of the nation's shared preparedness lexicon, bringing counterterrorism and emergency management professionals from all levels of government into a single conversation on countering ISIL.

ISIL Tactics

In this section, we discuss the 10 ISIL tactics, originally cultivated on the battlefield, that we assessed were potentially employable in an attack in the United States. Each tactic includes a description and explores how its employment in a U.S. attack could stress national preparedness capabilities. Charts throughout this section illustrate the Core Capabilities that these tactics might stress.

Tactic 1: Operations Security

On the battlefield, ISIL has not only adapted its methods of operations security (OPSEC) in response to coalition force actions, such as airstrikes, but it has also learned how to protect operational information leading up to an attack. In the 2015 assault on Ramadi, Iraq, for example, ISIL fighters arrived to the area in groups of two or three in nondescript vehicles, instead of using military caravans, reducing the likelihood of forces being identified en route.[2] Fighters also began moving within the wider flow of civilian traffic, sometimes using their own families as concealment.[3] In addition to its evolving ability to employ OPSEC in practice, ISIL's OPSEC policy is pointedly elucidated. The group has used a modified written OPSEC manual from a Kuwaiti company, which has been distributed to troops throughout the terrorist organization, as a model for how to employ OPSEC.[4] OPSEC has even stretched into cyberspace, with the embrace of encrypted messaging services by ISIL operatives (more on this below).

In a domestic context, this robust and institutionalized knowledge of OPSEC could serve to complicate interdiction operations by concealing directed attacks on western targets. Already, in the aftermath of successful attacks in Paris and Belgium, it is evident that the use of OPSEC tactics has stressed intelligence and law enforcement agencies' capacity to detect, interdict, and disrupt potential attacks. According to a report on the attacks in Paris released by French authorities, for example, ISIL operatives used disposable phones and encrypted laptops to avoid detection or compromising future operations.[5]

Tactic 2: Intelligence Apparatus

Within their controlled territory, ISIL operates a thriving intelligence structure. The group's middle and upper echelons, former Saddam-era military and intelligence officers, provide it with an experienced Ba'athist infrastructure on which a functioning security apparatus was constructed.[6] As a result, these professional underpinnings have helped to form a solidified intelligence system within ISIL, undergirded by



documentation and experience-driven practices.[7] In Iraq and Syria, this network has been used to root out dissent and launch preemptive attacks on massing Iraqi forces.[8]

Focused abroad, ISIL's intelligence structure could, in theory, be deployed to support recruitment, extortion, targeting, and criminal activities. Some reports suggest that this is already occurring.[9] If leveraged in the same professionalized manner as seen in Iraq and Syria, this intelligence apparatus could pose a serious challenge to intelligence agencies, cyber security operators, and western governments attempting to counter violent extremism and interdict planned attacks. An interview conducted by *The New York Times* with a returning foreign fighter incarcerated in Germany details how ISIL's bureaucratized and professionalized process is already being employed to identify, recruit, train, and deploy foreign fighters for attacks in Europe.[10] The former ISIL recruit also notes that those same forces focus extensively on online communication and guidance for those undergoing radicalization in the United States, raising the prospect for an attack orchestrated by ISIL using homegrown extremists.[11]

Tactic 3: Shaping the Battlespace

ISIL has shown a depth of tactical patience in its approach to shaping operations. The group has infiltrated sleeper cells into targeted cities and villages, a few people at a time, over weeks—and even months—prior to planned attacks.[12] Efforts such as smuggling in fighters and pre-staging weapons, conducting reconnaissance, and perhaps even making contact with sympathizers have helped to provide ISIL with a depth of support even before a campaign is launched.[13] This detail-oriented approach to long-running intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance prior to an assault presents counterterrorism, intelligence, and first responder personnel with a strategically adept adversary.

The porous nature of borders in parts of Europe may facilitate the access of poorly vetted individuals into international transportation flows. ISIL's skill in shaping operations could, therefore, stress domestic interdiction and disruption operations; screening, search, and detection programs; and access control and identity verification (with respect to accessing critical locations, like airports or border crossings). A deliberate, inconspicuous planning process also portends sophisticated coordinated attacks, which further complicate physical protective measures and related operations.

Public Information and Warning			×
Intelligence and Information Sharing	×	×	
Interdiction and Disruption	×	×	×
Screening, Search, and Detection	×		×
Access Control and Identity Verification			×
Cybersecurity		×	×
Physical Protective Measures			×
Threats and Hazards Identification	×		×
Situational Assessment	×		



Tactic 4: Tunnels

In response to aerial surveillance and coalition airstrikes, ISIL has moved to exploit existing Saddam-era (and some ancient) tunnel networks in the territory it holds, as well as to excavate new tunnels.[14] While tunnels are frequently used to conceal and protect the movement of people and resources (e.g., Hamas activities in the Gaza Strip), ISIL has also exploited the subterranean domain as a staging ground for covert assaults. In the attack against Ramadi, for example, the organization used a tunnel to detonate a massive improvised explosive device (IED) underneath a fortified Iraqi Army base.[15]

While it is unlikely that an 800-foot tunnel and mounds of explosive material would go unnoticed in a U.S. city, the nearly 50 tunnel-based IEDs deployed by ISIL in Iraq and Syria reflect tactical ingenuity with respect to operational space.[16] Moreover, since tunnels have long been used on the U.S. southern border to facilitate the illicit movement of people and contraband into and out of the country, the prospect of similar uses by a terrorist organization may not be unreasonable. ISIL's conception of operational space is similarly reflected in the group's use of "urban tunnels" (holes blasted between adjoining buildings),[17] a tactic similarly used by the Israeli Defense Forces in Gaza to minimize exposure to ambush.[18] In a potential confrontation with law enforcement in the U.S., ISIL's operational familiarity with subterranean and urban spaces could afford the attackers greater capacity to evade capture or prolong the engagement. In addition, unobserved movement could threaten controlled access to critical infrastructure or facilities. Ultimately, failure to adequately identify and prioritize such threat vectors in protective and risk management programs may leave infrastructure and populations vulnerable.

Tactic 5: Waterways

The operational utility of employing waterways for terrorist attacks was made glaringly evident in the 2008 Lashkar-e-Taiba attack on Mumbai, wherein attackers entered India from Pakistan by boat. ISIL has already ventured into the maritime space by using waterways both as supply and infiltration routes.[19] ISIL has demonstrated an interest in using Iraq's rivers both to transport people and to stage attacks. On January 10, 2015, ISIL launched an offensive on Kurdish forces by crossing the Tigris and Great Zab Rivers in boats.[20] While the attack was ultimately unsuccessful, Peshmerga forces were outflanked by the riverine assault.[21] Ultimately, U.S. Central Command recorded destroying 21 ISIL boats by air in support of Kurdish forces in that assault, demonstrating the breadth of ISIL's utilization of waterways.[22] Moreover, ISIL's attacks on Dhuluiya (Iraq) in September 2014,[23] Ramadi (Iraq) in May 2015,[24] and villages near Kobani (Syria) in April 2015,[25] similarly reflect their use of waterways during operations.

ISIL has also demonstrated an interest in controlling or destroying waterborne critical infrastructure, such as dams[26] and bridges[27]—tactics with clear implications in an attack on western targets. Boat-borne explosive devices were reportedly destroyed by Iraqi forces in March 2015,[28] and Shia militia forces similarly destroyed a waterborne bomb on a collision course with the Tigris River's Saamarra Dam.[29] In a domestic scenario, the use of waterways not only threatens maritime critical infrastructure, but places a jurisdictionally complicated domain at the center of an attack. Waterways often serve as dividing lines between states or municipalities and are subject to a variety of authorities, from the Coast Guard to local police. As a result, coordination and communication in response to a waterborne attack could prove complicated in certain environments.



Tactic 6: Theatrical Brutality

ISIL is infamous for its barbarity; the organization has thrived in part by brutalizing and striking fear into the populations it seeks to control. While specific tactics, such as mass executions, are not a common threat in regions free of ISIL control, the group's broader focus on theatrical brutality informs the likely nature of potential terrorist attacks. Barbarity serves as a force multiplier,[30] augmenting the group's impact by projecting an image of unbridled violence. If fear is the ultimate tactic in any terror campaign, ISIL's mastery of psychological warfare (not only the gruesome nature of its beheadings, for example, but the use of excessive violence as a central marketing tool) suggests that attacks carried out by the group would be refined to cause maximum panic.

Because of the barbarous quality of a potential attack and subsequent distribution of violent images online, western authorities could be challenged on a number of fronts. For example, a focus on disturbing and 'marketable' attacks impact risk management and community resilience programs, which may fail to consider ISIL's radical risk profile (e.g., the targeting of a nursing home or daycare facility). Moreover, if the fear generated by an incident was manipulated to create widespread panic, the result would threaten authorities' ability to message to the public and control the narrative during an attack. Even the mere rumor of gunfire at New York's Kennedy airport in August 2016 (and then at Los Angeles's LAX only weeks later) prompted mass hysteria. As rumors of a suspected shooter emerged, travelers broke through secure doors onto the tarmac, and airport employees reportedly removed their uniforms and fled.[31] This environment challenged response officials trying to manage the panic,[32] even without a concerted campaign by a group like ISIL attempting to leverage violence to maximize havoc.

Tactic 7: Cyber Command and Control

Much has been written on ISIL's unprecedented success on social media. This success feeds into the fear mentioned above, and serves to inspire attacks by self-radicalized individuals in the West (as occurred in San Bernardino, CA). Less, however, has been written on the group's understanding of the role of cyberspace as a tactical tool. In battles waged across Iraq and Syria, as well as online, ISIL has leveraged social media and online forums as "command and control" (C2) platforms.[33] During the ISIL operation to take Mosul, Iraq in 2014, for example, leadership used such tools both to direct the campaign and, simultaneously, to obfuscate local situational awareness through a massive propaganda assault including 40,000 tweets.[34]

The implications of using social media to conduct real-time command and control in a potential terrorist attack cannot be overstated. In the 2008 Mumbai attacks, operators staged in Pakistan leveraged social and traditional media information platforms to glean operational and response details and feed orders and targets to attackers on the ground, to a devastating effect.[35] With the adoption of encrypted social messaging apps,[36] ISIL will continue to use technology to coordinate its operations, wherever they take place. This will ultimately stress domestic capacity to leverage cyber assets to interdict and disrupt planned attacks in the West.



Core Capabilities	Tunnels	Waterways	Brutality	Cyber C2
Public Information and Warning			×	
Operational Coordination		×		
Interdiction and Disruption	×	×	×	×
Access Control and Identity Verification	×	×		
Cybersecurity				×
Physical Protective Measures	×	×		
Risk Management for Protection Programs and Activities	×	×	×	
Supply Chain Integrity and Security		×		
Community Resilience			×	
Infrastructure Systems		×		
Critical Transportation		×		
Facility Management Services			×	
Mass Care Services			×	
Mass Search and Rescue Operations			×	
On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement	×		×	
Public Health, Healthcare, and Emergency Medical Services			×	
Situational Assessment			×	

Tactic 8: Drones

ISIL has exploited commercial drones in support of its operations in both Iraq and Syria. This support has manifested into three different functions. The first is for the purpose of propaganda development, in which ISIL uses drones to capture footage of its attacks for use in propaganda videos.[37] By providing footage such as aerial views of coordinated assaults and suicide attacks, ISIL demonstrates its technical capacity while enhancing fear of the organization and promoting recruitment.[38] The second function is for conducting reconnaissance before an attack. In August 2014, for example, ISIL used a drone to conduct surveillance of the Tabqa military airfield in Syria before the group moved in and captured the base.[39] The third—and, arguably, most daunting—function of ISIL's drone practice is to provide real-time command and control and targeting for the organization. This was demonstrated in ISIL's assault last year on the Baji oil refinery complex in Iraq, in which ISIL commanders sitting in an operations room used drones to direct the assault and provide real-time targeting for fighters on the ground.[40]

The skills necessary to use drones in these fashions are potentially transferable, certainly portable, and may even be deployed remotely, thus raising the potential for drones to play a role in an ISIL-planned attack on domestic targets. ISIL's ability to perform functions such as live targeting and reconnaissance has the potential to severely strain first-responder capabilities and threaten responders with highly coordinated assaults and follow-on attacks as they seek to provide on-scene security and protection. Drones could simultaneously stress interdiction and disruption capabilities, as the use of drones informs the movement of terrorists during an incident. In addition, the use of drones could cause confusion over jurisdictional



responsibility, as regulations continue to evolve outlining which entities—whether local, state, or federal—assume responsibility for low-altitude airspace or regions near certain pieces of infrastructure. Finally, the ease and affordability of obtaining commercial drones raises the potential of ISIL using them for coordinated IED attacks, given the group's level of expertise in constructing novel IEDs (see below).

Tactic 9: Improvised Explosive Devices

ISIL has built a robust institutional knowledge in the construction and deployment of IEDs. One prominent example is in the construction of super vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (super-VBIEDs), which are deadlier and more powerful versions of previous VBIEDs used by terrorist organizations in the region. While traditional VBIEDs were sedans or occasionally trucks with an explosive charge, super VBIEDs are typically up-armored bulldozers, dumpsters, or even tanks. And whereas IEDs have been used historically as traps or for small operations, ISIL is increasingly relying on super VBIEDs (such as bulldozers packed with explosives comparable to the Oklahoma City bombing) as a primary front-line weapon.[41] In April 2015, for instance, ISIL launched approximately 27 super VBIEDs in its assault on Ramadi, which effectively penetrated Iraqi defensive perimeters and destroyed entire city blocks, allowing ISIL forces to flow into the city amid a haze of fear.[42] ISIL has heavily relied on employing IEDs for defensive purposes, as well, in an effort to secure cities or curtail the advancement of Iraqi and Kurdish ground forces. As these forces have pushed to retake ISIL-captured cities such as Ramadi and Tikrit, troops have encountered serious difficulties moving through areas littered with IED booby-traps.[43] The ingenuity with which ISIL attaches IEDs to people, cars, trucks, boats, tunnels, roadways, and potentially drones—both to stage attacks and to routinely control the flow of pedestrian or vehicle traffic—suggests an organization with adaptable and transferable explosives expertise.

One area of national preparedness that this expertise could strain is in developing physical protective measures for critical infrastructure. With a range of potential targets, from nuclear power plants and military bases (high-profile facilities) to mass-populated areas like malls or businesses (soft targets), infrastructure owners and operators may be forced to consider the consequences of creatively deployed IEDs (or even super VBIEDs) in their communities more than ever before. ISIL's ability to construct IEDs at a low-cost and rapid rate also complicates domestic detection efforts for chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive weapons, especially if this expertise were to be transferred to people who are geographically dispersed. The use of super VBIEDs, in particular, may also strain medical and law enforcement first responder efforts in the event of an attack, due to the extent of injuries and fatalities and the threat of follow-on and defensive IEDs to on-scene law enforcement personnel.

Tactic 10: Chemical Weapons

ISIL's territorial holdings and confiscated military stores provide the organization with considerable leniency to experiment with chemical weapons.[44] The product of this experimentation has resulted not only in chemical IED attacks, but also in the construction of chemical mortar shells, which have been used to target both security forces and civilians.[45] Though ISIL's crude chemical weapons are less lethal than those of military grade, as well as in comparison to other weapons such as guns or explosives, chemical attacks can have a profound psychological impact.[46] Reports that the organization is recruiting experts in chemical weapons lend further credence to the concern that ISIL could employ chemicals in a terror attack.[47]



Such knowledge is highly transferable, particularly if ISIL attracts university students or graduates in the West. A chemical terrorist attack in the United States could strain a number of capabilities, including public information and warning and first responder capacities. In either a suspected or attempted chemical attack—successful or not—the challenge of monitoring public information and providing information to calm public fears and reach affected populations would be increasingly demanding. The effects of a chemical attack (or radiological attack, for that matter) would also significantly complicate the response of law enforcement and medical personnel, given the threat of exposure to chemical (or radiological) agents when arriving on scene and the number of medical countermeasures that may be required for the exposed population.

Core Capabilities	Drones	Chemicals	IEDs
Public Information and Warning		×	×
Operational Coordination	×		
Interdiction and Disruption	×	×	×
Screening, Search, and Detection		×	×
Forensics and Attribution		×	×
Physical Protective Measures	×		×
Risk Management for Protection Programs and Activities			×
Community Resilience			×
Threats and Hazards Identification		×	
Critical Transportation			×
Environmental Response/Health and Safety		×	
Facility Management Services			×
Mass Care Services			×
On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement	×	×	×
Public Health, Healthcare, and Emergency Medical Services		×	×

Results

The three Core Capabilities impacted by the widest variety of potential ISIL tactics are Interdiction and Disruption; Physical Protective Measures; and On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement (see Figure 2).

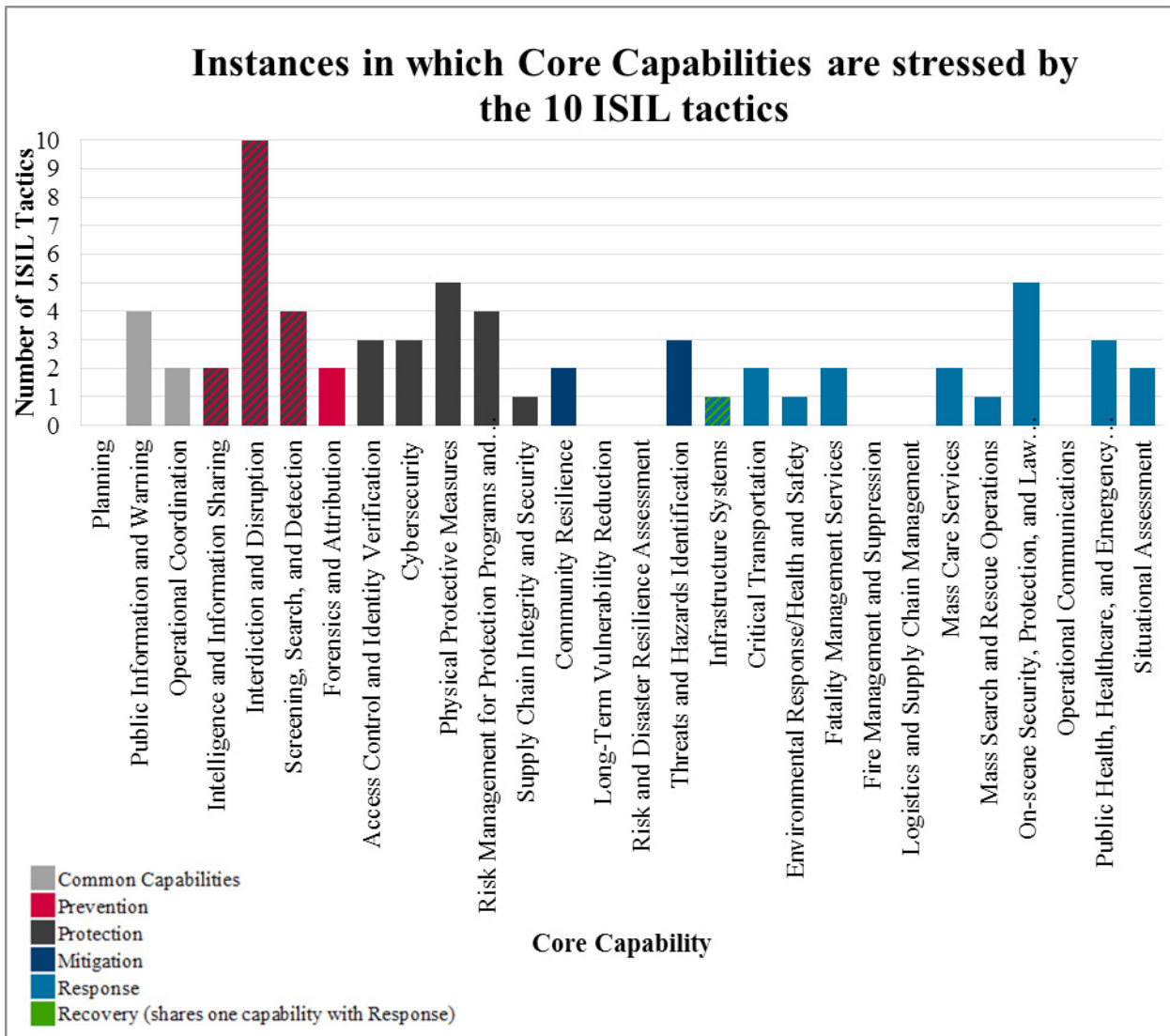


Figure 2: All ten ISIL tactics were mapped to Interdiction and Disruption in our crosswalk, while half of all tactics were mapped both to Physical Protective Measures and On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement.

Interdiction and Disruption, a responsibility shared between the Prevention and Protection Mission Areas, addresses the need to “delay, divert, intercept, halt, apprehend, or secure threats and/or hazards.”[48] The connections to potential terrorist attacks are relatively straightforward. ISIL’s shaping operations, combined with innovative uses of technology and a sophisticated understanding of operational space, make detecting and disrupting an ISIL-directed attack a complex endeavor.

Physical Protective Measures, under the Protection Mission Area, address the need to “implement and maintain risk-informed countermeasures, and policies protecting people, borders, structures, materials, products, and systems associated with key operational activities and critical infrastructure sectors.”[49] Again, the connections are relatively straightforward. ISIL’s tactical flexibility makes it difficult to maintain timely, risk-informed countermeasures, as the risk is in a state of perpetual evolution. Moreover, the unique



tactics with which ISIL approaches hard targets (adaptive uses of IEDs, tunneling, or employing waterways, for example) complicate traditional means of evaluating and securing critical infrastructure, further stressing this capability.

Finally, On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement (under the Response Mission Area) addresses the need to “ensure a safe and secure environment through law enforcement...for people and communities located within affected areas and also for response personnel.”[50] Tactics that inflame public panic, involve hazardous materials, conceal attackers, or include a second strike targeting responders all place burdens on ensuring the safety of communities and those attempting to secure them.

As we noted above, these Core Capabilities may not necessarily be the highest priority for jurisdictions given broader risk considerations, but they provide practitioners a means to consider how their proficiencies and resource allocations across capabilities meet the ISIL threat. We can, additionally, provide some context on proficiency and resourcing to aid in that self-reflection. Over the last six years, for example, none of the top three affected Core Capabilities listed above have been identified as national areas for improvement or at risk of declining in *National Preparedness Reports*. This suggests that capabilities nationally are (broadly speaking) likely sufficient to meet all-hazards. As of the 2016 *National Preparedness Report*, state and territory self-evaluation rankings provide a more nuanced outlook. For both Interdiction and Disruption and Physical Protective Measures, less than half of states rated themselves as proficient (a 4 or 5 on a 5 point scale) in these capabilities—42 percent and 35 percent, respectively.[51] For On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement,^c however, 60 percent rated themselves as proficient.[52]

The 2016 *National Preparedness Report* also provides a rough proxy measure of resource allocation through FEMA’s non-disaster preparedness grant spending (Figure 3). For states in 2014 (the latest data reflected in the report), Interdiction and Disruption was the eighth most funded of the 32 Core Capabilities (Figure 3).[53] For comparison, Interdiction and Disruption is fourteenth when capabilities are ranked by proficiency. Physical Protective Measures is among the top-five capabilities by funding[54] and falls in the bottom ten by proficiency. Meanwhile, On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement ranked ninth overall in FEMA grant funding and third overall by proficiency.[55]

^c In the 2016 NPR, the Core Capability is listed as On-scene Security and Protection. Some capabilities underwent renaming and slight adaptation during a 2015 revision of the National Preparedness Goal.



DISTRIBUTION OF FEMA PREPAREDNESS (NON-DISASTER) GRANTS BY CORE CAPABILITY, FISCAL YEAR 2014

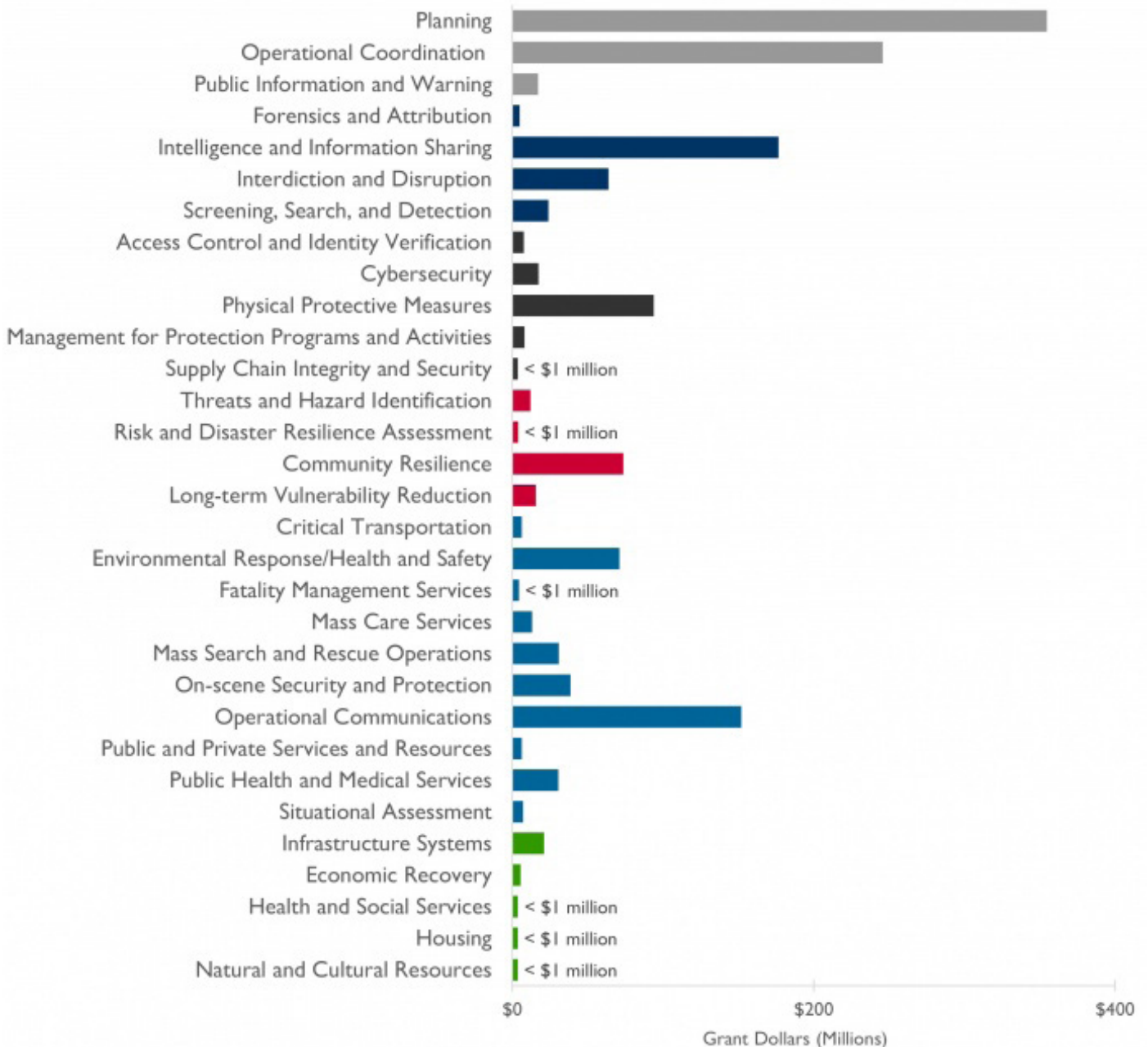


Figure 3 Note, 2014 data does not include the newly added Fire Management and Suppression capability. In order, funding above depicts the three common core capabilities, followed by Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery. Source, “2016 National Preparedness Report,” DHS, March 30, 2016, pg. 16.



Finally, while some Core Capabilities are affected by a wide variety of tactics, the inverse may also be useful knowledge for practitioners: some tactics touch on a wide variety of Core Capabilities. These tactics are particularly multidimensional, and their complex character could require specific consideration. Based on our mapping, the three tactics likely to affect the greatest number of Core Capabilities are the use of IEDs, the use of theatrical brutality, and the use of waterways (see Figure 4 below).

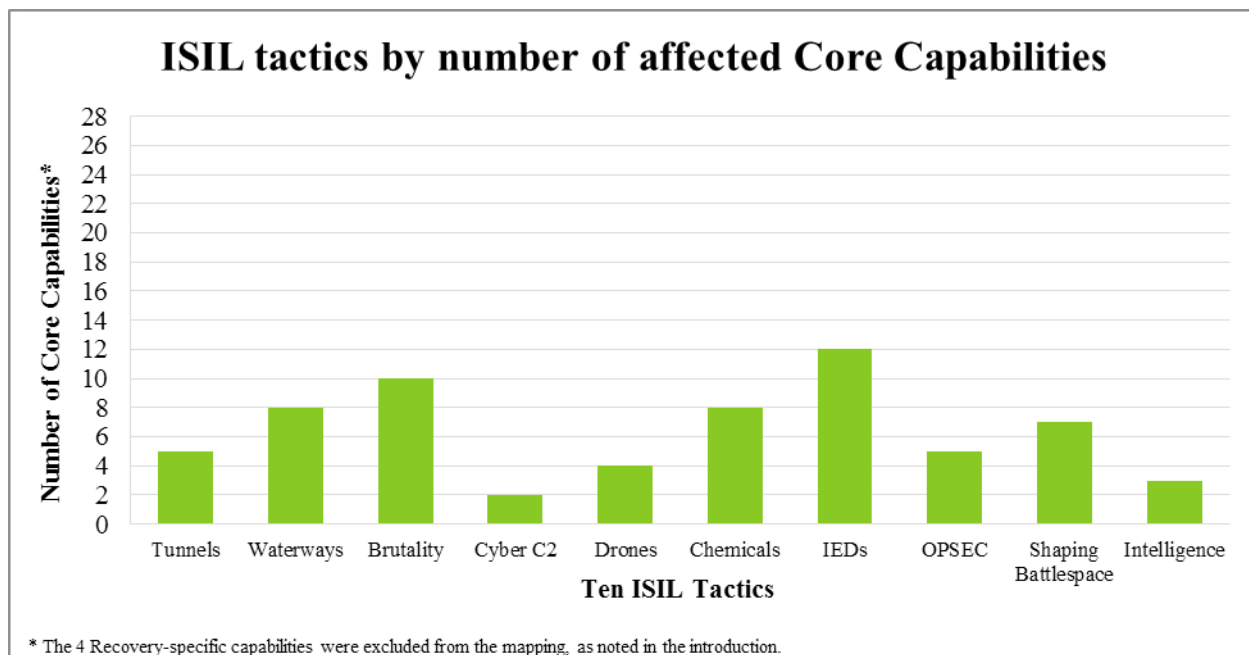


Figure 4: Of the ten ISIL tactics identified in this paper, IEDs maps to the widest number of Core Capabilities, followed by the innovative use of theatrical brutality and waterways.

For those tactics that are particularly complex, countering specific tactics could prove effective at thwarting a known adversary. Understanding specific threats is also important for ensuring that programmatic decisions taking place underneath the broader heading of Core Capabilities are informed by evolving threats and hazards. This could be particularly useful in dealing with a tactic like theatrical brutality, which presents an amorphous challenge that may not fall discretely into existing programs. Using tactics as the sole basis for decision-making is not, however, ultimately a substitute for Core Capabilities. Preparing for individual tactics alone results in less transferable skills for first responders. While the tactics identified may be specific to ISIL, the National Preparedness Goal and the system that supports it is designed to improve the capacity of first responders and emergency managers to staff, train, and equip for all contingencies.

Recommendations

For those jurisdictions that regard an ISIL-directed attack as an issue of high priority, our mapping suggests a two-fold response. First, jurisdictions should assess their level of proficiency and resourcing (which may not just be funding, but also equipment and personnel) across the Core Capabilities that were identified as affected by ISIL's tactics. To prioritize decision-making, our ranking suggests that jurisdictions pay close attention to Interdiction and Disruption; Physical Protective Measures; and On-scene Security, Protection, and Law Enforcement, which are affected by the greatest variety of threats. Given the state and territory proficiency data noted above, jurisdictions should pay particular attention to their level of proficiency for



Interdiction and Disruption and Physical Protective Measures.

Providing funding recommendations is more complicated, since all three of these capabilities are in the top half of grant funding allocated by FEMA. However, it is possible that additional resourcing (along with training and exercises) could bolster proficiency among states and territories in the capabilities of Interdiction and Disruption and Physical Protective Measures. For all three of the top Core Capabilities discussed above, a majority of states and territories regard improving proficiency in these capabilities as entirely or mostly a state responsibility, suggesting that non-federal jurisdictions have an important role to play in augmenting these capabilities.[56]

Second, our mapping suggests that practitioners also assess how their existing programs and activities across all relevant Core Capabilities meet the unique dimensions of the ten ISIL threats discussed above. In particular, we recommend that jurisdictions consider how existing plans, programs, training, and exercises wrestle with waterborne threats, the creative application of improvised explosives, and the psychological component of brutally constructed attacks. These threats are complex and multidimensional, mapping to a wide variety of capabilities across Mission Areas. Without considering specific tactics, practitioners run the risk of misaligning programs and hazards, even if the broader Core Capabilities exhibit suitable proficiency. With an organization as adaptive and tactically adept as ISIL, emergency managers and homeland security professionals must continuously strive to connect emerging threats to the framework in place to combat them.

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Book Reviews

Michele R. McPhee, *Maximum Harm: The Tsarnaev Brothers, The FBI, and the Road to the Marathon Bombing* (ForeEdge, 2017)

reviewed by Tim Wilson



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At 2.49 p.m. on April 15 2013 two home-made bombs wreaked carnage at the annual Boston Marathon. As a symbolic target of jihadist terror, the marathon's finishing line area was particularly well chosen: a crowd celebrating individual runners' achievements under an array of international flags symbolised an entire Western-led global order. Three died in these explosions; hundreds more were injured (of whom no less than 17 lost limbs). Two more policemen were to die in the four-day manhunt that followed before the bombers, Chechen-American brothers, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, were finally stopped. General rejoicing greeted the news that Tamerlan had been killed, and Dzhokhar arrested. As Michele McPhee comments simply: 'I know a lot of police officers who didn't have to pay for a round of beers that night' (p. viii).

Ultimately, though, McPhee's account of the Boston atrocity leaves the reader with notably little sense of reassurance. First, she is a blunt writer who is not afraid to tell it like it was. Her account of the injuries caused by the bombings which drove red-hot shrapnel through the bodies of spectators and runners makes for genuinely uncomfortable reading. All too often, mere death tolls dominate assessments of terrorist attacks; by contrast, this graphic account points all too starkly at the importance of the wider penumbra of injury – the multiple lives that will continue, but which have been changed for ever in an instant.

Second, she is a diligent and tenacious researcher. Her findings on the Tsarnaev family, granted political asylum in the USA in 2002, are here rather startling. The key figure here quickly emerges as the elder brother, Tamerlan. His terrorist career, as so often with so-called 'homegrown' jihadists, turns out to have been an unedifying one. Aged 26 at his death, he had never held a proper job; yet he drove a Mercedes and had embarked on starting a family. Despite apparent implication in a grisly drugs-related triple homicide back in 2011, he had escaped investigation. Despite not holding a valid US passport and having his name on two terror watch lists, he was allowed to travel to Russia for six months in 2012; and, even more pertinently, to return without hitch to the USA. McPhee suggests, in short, that 'Tamerlan got away with so much villainy that only a hands-off policy formulated at the local level by one or more agencies responsible for national intelligence could have engineered it' (p. x). Thus, McPhee makes an argument for viewing Tamerlan as (most likely) a disappointed FBI informant on jihadism who had turned against his handlers when he had failed to achieve American citizenship. This is a forcefully made case: though ultimately, of course, one that must unavoidably rest upon circumstantial evidence.

Stylistically, this is a dense book in places: and occasionally, its 'thick description' risks becoming positively viscous. But it does succeed in demonstrating what well-informed, locally-grounded, diligent journalism has to offer the academic study of both terrorism and counter-terrorism; and, most importantly of all, what it can potentially illuminate about their tangled inter-relationship. McPhee thus deserves our gratitude: her



book will surely become the standard 'go to' study both of the Boston atrocity of 2013, and of its very murky genesis.

About the reviewer: Dr Tim Wilson is the Director for the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence and a Senior Lecturer in the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews



Michael Griffin. *Islamic State: Rewriting History*. London: Pluto Press, 2016. 176 pages. \$20.00 Paperback

reviewed by Richard C. Dietrich



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Abstract

This is a review of the book Islamic State: Rewriting History by Michael Griffin. It provides a chronological account of the organization's emergence and the role that external global actors had on its development. In addition it examines ISIS' use of media and the possible effects of its expansion on regional relations.

Keywords: ISIS; Caliphate; Jihad; Syria; Iraq; terror; Turkey

Despite continuing, serious setbacks on battlefields in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State (IS) remains a force to be reckoned with not only in the regions bordering these two countries, but also further afield, in Africa, Europe and the United States. Among the numerous works that deal with IS is Michael Griffin's recent book *Islamic State: Rewriting History*. In the preface to his book Griffin describes it as "a chronological approach to IS in the Middle East, and not its subsequent expansion from Afghanistan to Nigeria" (p. xxi). Within these parameters Griffin delivers a concise, readable account of the rise and development of the IS from its origins in Iraq after the US invasion in 2003 up to late 2014.

The "Preface" provides a fine introduction to the scope (mentioned above), and the two main claims of the book, first, that the rise and development of IS is "... a phenomenon that obeys none of the narrative rules previously encountered" (p. xxii), and that very little about the organization can be known or confirmed from outside sources. Second, Griffin asserts that the "...history of the rise of IS, perforce, constitutes an account of the many US failures to develop a consistent policy focus in the Middle East after the withdrawal of forces from Iraq at the end of 2011..." (p. xxii). While development of the first claim constitutes the majority of the book, the second claim is the main subject of chapter 11.

The first four chapters give a condensed account of events and developments in Iraq between 2003 and 2008. The first chapter begins by discussing the role that Camp Bucca, an American detention facility near Umm Qasr, Iraq in use from 2003-2009, played as a training ground for extremists. This section is brief, but sufficient to give readers an idea of the somewhat ironic role the camp played in preparing numerous detainees for carrying out terrorist acts, often against the Americans, after their release. The remainder of chapter is a bare bones biography of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

In the second chapter Griffin documents the emergence and rise of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to a position of leadership among the insurgent groups in Iraq. In contrast to the scant information provided about al-Baghdadi in the first chapter, here Zarqawi's background, how he went about implementing his strategy of creating a Sunni-Shi'i sectarian war, his difficult relationship with al-Qaeda, and his media strategy to publicize his activities are all given much fuller treatment.

The brief third chapter covers the continuing tensions between Zarqawi and al-Qaeda, the fortunes and transformations of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) after Zarqawi's death in 2006, and the emergence of Abu Bakr al-



Baghdadi at the head of the Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'a (consistently written as Jaysh Ahl al-*Sinnah* wa'l-Jama'a). In addition, the factors that led to the beginning of the Anbar Awakening, or *Sahwa*, are discussed.

Chapter Four describes the impact of the US surge in Iraq on AQI, now known as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), during 2007-2008. Externally, ISI not only faced larger and more aggressive US operations against its organization, but it also faced continuing opposition from Sunni tribes that were part of the *Sahwa*, violent disputes with other rebel groups, as well as Kurdish *peshmerga* forces in the north around Mosul. Internally, al-Qaeda's leadership was becoming increasingly critical of how ISI was being led. Griffin does a commendable job of concisely describing all the factors that contributed to the near elimination of ISI in this period.

In Chapter Five the regrouping and re-emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq in the period just prior to and immediately after the American withdrawal from Iraq at the end of 2011 is concisely and clearly related. Although short (six pages), in this section Griffin skilfully navigates through the complexities of Iraq in this period, tracing how al-Baghdadi was able to use events and Baathist disaffection to his advantage, and even begin to establish a presence in Syria.

In light of current events, the following chapter, Chapter Six, which provides a clear account of Qatari activities in the Arab world in the wake of the Arab Spring, is particularly timely. While this chapter does not discuss relations between Qatar and IS, it does describe Qatar's links to the Muslim Brotherhood, and, more specifically, Qatar's support for Islamist parties or groups in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. This chapter not only provides excellent background for understanding Qatar's later moves in Syria, it also provides insight into the roots of the current conflict between Qatar and its Arab neighbours.

Chapters Seven through Ten discuss the international, regional, and military context in which IS arose. Chapters Seven and Eight describe the events leading to, and the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, and the responses of the US, Qatar and Saudi Arabia to it. Chapter Nine shifts to Iraq in the period from mid-2011 to the end of 2013. It covers both the events in the country during this time, as well as ISI's early operations and territorial conquests in the Sunni regions. In Chapter Ten the focus is once again on Syria. Here the development, actions and rivalries of various opposition and Islamist groups (other than ISI) are recounted.

Griffin presents his main arguments for the link between indecisive US policy in Iraq and Syria and the growth of ISI in Chapter Eleven. In particular, he cites the US' failure to attack the Syrian regime after it launched several chemical attacks in the summer of 2013, a previously declared US "red line", and the US' later acceptance of a Russian proposal to put Syria's chemical weapons under international control as a major turning point in the conflict since it clearly demonstrated US reluctance to get directly involved. Griffin sees this as giving the regime and opposition groups a free hand to conduct operations without fear of US intervention.

The next three chapters continue to document the transformation of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria and the shifting fortunes of the various Islamist groups there in relation to the growing power of ISI. Chapter Twelve looks at the conflicts between Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN) on one side and ISI and AQI on the other in 2013, and notes that ISI changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in this period. In Chapter Thirteen the full imposition of ISIS' brand of Islamic rule on the town of Raqqa is recounted, while Chapter Fourteen describes the disputes between JaN and Ahrar al-Sham, and the expansion of ISIS' control in Iraq which culminated in its capture of Mosul in June 2014.

Chapter Fifteen shifts the focus to the evolution of IS' use of print, electronic and social media and the role



it has played in spreading its message and attracting members. This chapter not only traces the development and increasing sophistication of IS' media use, it particularly focuses on the organization's use of Twitter to reach a wider audience.

In Chapter Sixteen ISIS' decision to change its name to the Islamic State (IS), and the possible reasons for Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's declaration of the caliphate in late June 2014 in Mosul are discussed. In addition, the role and number of foreign fighters in IS, particularly after the declaration of the caliphate, are investigated.

The following chapter, Chapter Eighteen, is devoted to a critique of US responses (or lack of them) to IS as its control over territory in Syria and Iraq continued to spread through the second half of 2014. In this context Griffin discusses the events related to rescuing the thousands of Yezidis who had fled from IS and taken refuge on Mt. Sinjar in northern Iraq, and how they led to greater US action against IS later in the year.

Finally, Chapter Eighteen concerning Turkey's activities in Syria through late 2014 provides an important background to Turkey's current efforts to influence events in Syria and Iraq in its favour. It traces the somewhat indecisive approach the Turkish government took in its approach to IS, particularly in light of its ambivalent attitude towards the Kurds in both northern Syria and Iraq. In particular, Griffin points out the complex relations Turkey has with both regions and the Turkish government's clear reluctance to become deeply involved militarily in these areas.

While *Islamic State: Rewriting History* is overall a well-written and informative work the book does have some weak points. These tend to fall into one of two categories. The first is a failure to provide fuller information on subjects that, even in a book intended as a concise introduction to IS, require it. The second is raising intriguing issues, hint that there is more to them than meets the eye, and then drop them without further comment.

As examples of the first category, in the passage in the first chapter (p. 3) describing how the *emirs* ran their section of Camp Bucca Griffin states that the emirs' orders were issued in accordance with "an extreme version of Sharia law, known as *takfiri*." Since this book is clearly intended for a non-specialist audience, and considering the centrality of the concept of *takfir* to extremist groups like IS, even a brief explanation of what *takfir* is and its significance would have been helpful.

Likewise, the information in the first three chapters related to the backgrounds of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi are extremely concise, lacking the deeper analysis and detail that this topic deserves considering their roles in the emergence and rise of IS. More information regarding what initially turned al-Zarqawi and al-Baghdadi onto the path of extremism, and what motivated them to create their respective organizations would have been welcome.

Examples of the second category can be found beginning with the "Preface" where Griffin writes (p. xxi), "...IS has never seriously menaced Israel...indicating a tacit understanding between the Islamic state and the Zionist state not to meddle in one another's affairs." If this is so, it is significant, but nothing follows this statement leaving the reader to speculate on where this information came from, why such a tacit agreement would be made and how it would specifically benefit IS and Israel.

Two paragraphs later the author speculates that after the American withdrawal in 2011 the rise of IS' forerunner in Iraq was linked to a large influx of money. He then lists several possible financial sources for the organization, but does not believe that any of them would be sufficient to cover IS' expenses. Griffin concludes that "...no convincing, open-source material is available to explain how IS operates financially day to day, and there is remarkably little interest in securing more precise data on the question." This point



is raised again at the end of Chapter Sixteen (p. 114), but in both cases the reader is left to speculate on IS' finances without even a hint from the author on what these sources of revenue might be.

Similarly, in the second chapter (p. 10) the author makes the observation that it does not seem credible that Zarqawi was able to create a complex insurgent organization in Iraq using "...nothing more advanced than a mobile phone, a contacts book and word of mouth..." The clear implication is that there was more behind the creation of Zarqawi's organization than this, but there is no further discussion of, or even speculation on this point.

Chapter Fifteen, "Twitter Caliphate", vividly describes IS' effective use of various media, and stresses the importance of IS' media savvy. In particular, Griffin points out the dramatic change in IS' use of media in 2014 (p. 101), stating that "...it unveiled, seemingly out of mid-air, a structured campaign of psychological operations in print, video and social media..." Further down the page he notes a "compelling sense of a new intelligence behind ISIS' psychological operations". On the following page (p. 102) the author speculates that this new media sophistication suggests "...the involvement of convert consultants from the Indian subcontinent or perhaps one of the more Twitter-literate Gulf sheikhdoms." Both are intriguing suggestions, and in light of how important IS' media operations are to the organization, knowing who is behind them could be significant. However, the point is dropped without even a note to point the reader where to begin further investigation.

Finally, in the postscript, Griffin proposes that an American-Iranian agreement would be the strongest counter to IS' threat to the security of the region, but does not suggest how such an agreement could be made between the two parties, or how neighbouring countries could be convinced to support such an agreement if it were reached. While his arguments may still be valid, current conditions would seem to make such a rapprochement between the US and Iran even less likely.

One final critique of this work is that while the writer has consulted a very large number of sources in writing this book, they are almost entirely English language sources, with only a very small number of translated Arabic sources. He has presented a number of viewpoints on all the issues that are raised, but the vast majority of these views are Western views.

Despite these criticisms, the positive qualities of Griffin's work outweigh the weak points. First, he has taken IS' very tangled history with its numerous actors, and presented it in a very comprehensible fashion—at the end of each chapter the reader is left with the sense of having successfully navigated through difficult terrain. Not only does Griffin provide a clear understanding of IS' rise in within the political and strategic contexts of both the Middle East and beyond, he does so in a very enjoyable style that keeps the reader's attention. For the points that are developed in the text, the endnotes provide a wide variety of sources with differing perspectives from English language media.

Griffin has shown in his book is that IS has been a tenacious, adaptable organization throughout the course of its history, making it unlikely that IS' current defeats in both Syria and Iraq will result in its immediate demise. As a result, there will remain a need for works that document its development and expansion. *Islamic State: Rewriting History* is an excellent starting point for the reader seeking a concise history of IS in order to better understand the background of the current state of affairs of IS in Syria and Iraq, or the reader who requires a more general background of IS before delving into more specialized research.

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About JTR

In 2010 the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence launched the online Journal of Terrorism Research. The aim of this Journal is to provide a space for academics and counter-terrorism professionals to publish work focused on the study of terrorism. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the study of terrorism, high-quality submissions from all academic and professional backgrounds are encouraged. Students are also warmly encouraged to submit work for publication.

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