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Stolen funeral busts from a tomb in Palmyra, one of Syria’s six UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

BELGIUM: TRIAL UNCOVERS EUROPE’S FORGOTTEN JIHADISTS

James Brandon

One of Europe’s largest ever Islamism-related anti-terrorism trials concluded on February 11 with the conviction of Fouad Belkacem, the leader of Sharia4Belgium, along with a number of the group’s followers (RTBF, February 12) .The court found that Belkacem and other members of the radical group had encouraged dozens of Belgian citizens to travel to Syria in order to join jihadist groups there and sentenced him to 12 years in prison and various others to lesser terms (*De Morgen*, February 11). “Belkacem prepared young men for an armed struggle, which has no place in a democratic system,” ruled the judge (*Elsevier* [Amsterdam], February 11). A total of 46 people were tried in the case, although not all were convicted, in part because only eight of the accused could be found to stand trial. The majority of the remainder are believed to be still in Syria or dead. The trial underlines that Belgium, whose problems with Islamist radicalization have long been overshadowed by more dramatic problems in the UK, France and the Netherlands, also faces significant challenges from Islamist militants. Indeed, according to one authoritative study in late 2013, the number of Belgian fighters in Syria was estimated to be between 76 and 296, giving it the highest rate per capita of any European country. [1]

A key finding of the trial was that Sharia4Belgium, a public and highly visible radical Salafist organization ostensibly dedicated to campaigning peacefully for Shari’a law in Belgium, had in fact covertly encouraged its followers to travel to Syria to join jihadist groups. For instance, in addition to producing YouTube videos praising jihadist martyrs, in 2012, several of the group’s leaders also travelled to Syria where they made contact with Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda’s official affiliate in the country, and also Majlis al-Shura al-Mujahideen, a smaller jihadist group largely active in eastern Syria. These leaders later encouraged their followers to use the same route. Sharia4Belgium was also shown to have organized physical training in Belgium for volunteers preparing to depart to

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Syria, notably in the Dambruggestraat neighborhood of Antwerp (*Brussels Times*, February 11). Although best known for holding pro-Shari'a demonstrations, the group had also previously taken part in acts of violence within Belgium, however. For instance, in 2012, members of the group—including Fouad Belkacem—clashed with police in the Molenbeek-Saint-Jean area of Brussels, after the police attempted to detain a woman for wearing the *niqab*, which is banned in Belgium (*La Libre*, June 1, 2012; *Le Vif*, June 2, 2012).

Aside from Fouad Belkacem, who is already serving a two-year sentence for inciting hatred against non-Muslims since 2012, which likely prevented him from traveling to Syria with the rest of his group, a key figure in the trial was Jejoen Bontinck, a 20-year-old convert to Islam of Brazilian heritage who had been raised as a Catholic (*De Volkskrant* [Amsterdam], February 10, 2012; *De Standaard* [Brussels], February 11). Bontinck, a former member of Sharia4Belgium, had travelled to Syria, allegedly with the intention of fighting against the Syrian government, before being convinced to return to Belgium by his father, who travelled to Syria in order to make contact with him. Bontinck had been involved with Jabhat al-Nusra, although he claimed not to have taken part in any fighting (*De Redactie*, January 5). Bontinck was found guilty by the court, but received a suspended sentence for assisting the prosecution. The trial also underscored the role the British pro-jihadist group, Islam4UK (formerly known as al-Muhajiroun), has played in stoking extremism on the continent. Sharia4Belgium was established with the guidance of Islam4UK's leader Anjem Choudary, who told CNN after Belkacem's conviction: "In 2010, he came to see me and he asked about how to set up a branch of our own body that we had in Britain. Sharia4Belgium was set under our own guidance" (CNN, February 11).

This trial comes shortly after Belgian counter-terrorism police on January 16 killed two Islamists in the town of Verviers, who were suspected of preparing an imminent attack in the country in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in France (*La Libre*, January 17). The previous year, on May 24, 2014, a lone Islamist gunman opened fire in Brussels' Jewish Museum, killing four people; the attack had few apparent links to Belgian radicals, however, and the prime suspect is a French citizen of Algerian origin who lived in Marseilles (*De Tijd* [Brussels], July 29, 2014). These developments indicate that Belgium is likely to see more extremist, and potentially terrorist, activity in the coming years, particularly as the large number of individuals active with jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria begin to return.

Note

1. "ICSR Insight: Up to 11,000 foreign fighters in Syria; steep rise among Western Europeans," International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, December 17, 2013, <http://icsr.info/2013/12/icsr-insight-11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans/>.

NIGER CONFRONTS BOKO HARAM

James Brandon

Niger's parliament on February 10 voted unanimously to send troops into northern Nigeria as part of a large regional military operation against Boko Haram, the Nigeria-based Islamist militant group (Agence de Press Africaine, February 10). Nigérien troops will join those from Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad and Benin in the planned offensive, which will involve 7,500 troops in total, making it the most significant multinational operation to date against Boko Haram (France24, February 4). The parliament's move underlines the country's growing concern with the group, which on February 4, carried out its first cross-border raid into Niger, conducting attacks in the country's Diffa region before being repelled by Nigérien and Chadian forces and then attacking a prison in the region on February 8 (Sahlien, February 9). This comes after the group recently seized key towns along Niger's border with Nigeria, as well as carried out operations in northern parts of Cameroon, which are also in close proximity to Niger.

Niger's concern over Boko Haram's recent spread to areas outside its heartlands of northern Nigeria, has been shared by the international community. On February 16, United Nations' Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel Robert Piper called on countries to donate \$2 billion to provide additional humanitarian support in the region in order to tackle issues, such as food insecurity, that can exacerbate insecurity in the region (Agence de Press Africaine, February 16). The requested amount included \$541 million in funding for Chad, \$375.7 million each for Mali and Niger and \$264 million for Cameroon (Reuters, February 16). In addition, France has stepped up its assistance to Niger, with its air force reportedly conducting reconnaissance flights along the Niger-Nigeria border in recent days (*Le Figaro*, February 4).

At the same time, however, fresh incidents underline that Niger faces not only an external threat from Boko Haram

fighters based in Nigeria, but must also deal with its own internal sympathizers with the movement. [1] For instance, on February 16, Boko Haram issued a statement in which it threatened to drag Niger into “a swamp of darkness,” and promised that “moving the war to the depth of your cities will be the first reaction toward any aggression” towards the group by Niger (*Vanguard* [Lagos], February 16). On the same day, the Nigérien authorities announced the arrest of more than 160 suspected Boko Haram supporters in the Diffa region. This followed the arrest of further suspects on February 15 at checkpoints on roads leading to Zinder, Niger’s second largest city (AFP, February 16).

At the same time, however, strong public backing for Niger’s tougher line against Boko Haram has also been visible, notably on February 17 when tens of thousands marched in the capital Niamey to demonstrate support of military action (France24, February 17). “Niger shall be the tomb of Boko Haram,” the Nigérien president, Mahamadou Issoufou, told the crowds (*Le Figaro*, February 17). At the same time, however, Niger’s response to Boko Haram’s attacks partly reflects the ethnic divisions in the country rather than any purely ideological opposition to the group. The Kanuri ethnic group, from which Boko Haram draws most of its support in the region, amounts to less than ten percent of Niger’s total population, but is concentrated in the southeast, in the vicinity of the group’s recent attacks and where the large number of arrests of Boko Haram suspects have occurred. Conversely, Issoufou is from the country’s majority Hausa ethnic group, which is likely to see Boko Haram as the threat to its influence. This underlines that Niger’s upcoming struggle against Boko Haram is likely to be shaped not only by ideological, religious and military issues, but also by ethnic and tribal factors.

Note

1. For background, see: “Boko Haram’s Growing Presence in Niger,” *Terrorism Monitor*, November 2, 2012, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40054&cHash=282b9e435194e7558a3f3bf4984757ef.

Islamic State Spurs Increased Jihadist Activity in Australia

Andrew Zammit

The ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq have had a dramatic effect on the level of jihadist activity in Australia, leading to a rapid increase in the operational tempo of Australia’s counter-terrorism agencies. Their work has been given added urgency in recent months by growing evidence that local networks supporting jihadist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State are no longer only sending funds and fighters overseas, but are also plotting attacks within Australia. This article describes the shift, showing how Australia has responded to this developing threat, thereby providing an example of how jihadist support networks in other countries may also evolve in coming years.

Background

From the late 1990s until the Syrian conflict internationalized in 2012, Australia had experienced a significant but generally low level of jihadist activity. For instance, unsuccessful terror plots occurred in 2000, 2003, 2005 and 2009, and some Australians (numbering in the low dozens) travelled to join jihadist groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, Somalia and Yemen. [1] However, from 2012, the Syrian conflict prompted the largest ever mobilization of aspiring jihadists. In early 2015, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) estimated that around 90 Australians were currently fighting for jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, up to 30 have returned and that over 20 have died in the conflict (ABC, January 25; Herald Sun, January 15; Sydney Morning Herald, December 11, 2014).

In response, the security agencies have been trying to disrupt the local support networks for Jabhat al-Nusra and Islamic State. The main focus of these has been Sydney, in the state of New South Wales (NSW), although raids against suspected networks have also occurred in Melbourne and Brisbane. Australian counter-terrorism policing work has been led by the Joint Counter Terrorism Team (JCTT), which in New South Wales comprises representatives from the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the NSW Police Force, the NSW Crime Commission and ASIO. A brief summary of JCTT’s recent operations in Sydney illustrates the key recent developments within Australian jihadism.

Operation Rathlin

In 2013, the JCTT launched Operation Rathlin, leading to the arrests of two men in December 2013. [2] These were Hamdi al-Qudsi, a 39-year-old man who had participated in protests against the film “The Innocence of Muslims” in 2012, and Amin Iman Mohamed, a 23-year-old New Zealand citizen born in Somalia, who are soon to stand trial. The prosecution alleges that al-Qudsi had recruited at least six fighters and facilitated their travel to Syria and that Mohamed had been recruited by al-Qudsi and was himself preparing to join the war (The Australian, December 4, 2014). The men’s network extended to the Middle East, with al-Qudsi allegedly conspiring with former Sydney man Muhammad Ali Baryalei, who assisted the aspiring fighters once they arrived in Turkey.

Muhammad Ali Baryalei, who is of Afghan heritage and who arrived in Australia as a child, is believed to have been the most senior Australian member of the Islamic State (ABC, September 9, 2014). The authorities believe Baryalei recruited approximately 30 Australians, first for Jabhat al-Nusra and then for the Islamic State, before his death in Syria in October 2014 (Sydney Morning Herald, October 29, 2014). Baryalei had previously been a security guard for a Sydney nightclub before embracing a strict interpretation of Islam (ABC, September 9, 2014). In April 2013, Baryalei left for Syria, joined Jabhat al-Nusra and facilitated the arrival of several Australian recruits, often former friends from his time in a preaching movement called Street Dawah (The Australian, September 6, 2014).

However, around June 2013, he shifted his allegiance, abandoning Jabhat al-Nusra and joining the Islamic State (ABC, September 25, 2014). This occurred at a time of intense jihadist infighting, which other Australians also became involved in; during the violence, Islamic State members killed one of Baryalei’s Jabhat al-Nusra Australian recruits, a convert called Tyler Casey who had been heavily influenced by the teachings of U.S.-born radical preacher Anwar al-Awlaki. Casey, along with his Australian Muslim-born wife, was killed as part of the group’s power struggle against al-Nusra in Aleppo in Syria in January 2014 (ABC, September 9, 2014).

Operation Appleby

Al-Qudsi’s arrest in December 2013 did not end Islamic State recruitment from Sydney, however. A small group of people in contact with al-Qudsi continued to coordinate with Baryalei to recruit fighters and send money to the Islamic State. The suspected network involved roughly 17

people and had a loose hierarchical structure, with four men in leadership positions. Security agencies monitored the network and confiscated the passports of suspected recruits. In May 2014, the Joint Counter Terrorism team launched a large-scale investigation into the group, termed Operation Appleby (The Australian, September 19, 2014).

In early September 2014, however, the threat posed by this legacy network changed. The authorities believe Baryalei had now asked the network to prepare for an attack in Australia, leading them to discuss vague but ambitious plans such as a car bombing. However, in mid-September, Baryalei allegedly ordered the men to carry out a much simpler attack, as quickly as they could. The plan was to kidnap and murder a randomly chosen non-Muslim member of the public, film their killing and place the video on social media (The Australian, September 19, 2014).

The JCTT, judging that they needed to act fast, launched the largest series of counter-terrorism raids in Australia’s history. On September 18, more than 800 federal and state police officers raided houses across Brisbane and Sydney, arresting 16 people (The Australian, September 19, 2014). Following the raids, 22-year-old Omarjan Azari was charged with conspiring “with Muhammad Baryalei and others to do acts in preparation for, or planning, a terrorist act” (The Australian, September 19, 2014). He is currently facing trial.

The police faced media criticism that the extensive raids had resulted in only one person being charged with a terrorism offence. The Australian Federal Police stated that the raids were:

A disruption [operation] primarily based on public safety issues. We will be alleging that we received credible information that a terrorist attack was imminent and... made a decision that we had to intervene with that particular activity – at the cost of evidence collection. [3]

In other words, the police assessed that the threat was so acute that it should be disrupted by the massive raids, even if they did not have the evidence to prosecute most of the suspects.

Ongoing Disruption of Plots

Operation Appleby has continued since then, with the JCTT launching further raids against suspected members of the network, and laying charges where possible, in order to disrupt and deter a potential attack. On October 17, 2014, a Brisbane man of Albanian origin named Agim Kruezi, who was already being charged with intending to travel to fight

in Syria under a separate terrorism investigation (Operation Bolton, which involved planting an undercover officer inside a Brisbane-based network), was charged with a new offence thanks to evidence gained in the Appleby raids (*Brisbane Times*, January 23). Police allege that Kruezi was linked to the Sydney network and had transported a firearm and acquired equipment for a terrorist plot (ABC, October 17, 2014). On December 15, 2014, 24-year-old Ali al-Talebi was arrested and accused of sending \$11,000 (\$15,000 AUD) to the Islamic State (*The Australian*, December 18, 2014). [4] On December 23, 2014, Sulayman Khalid, a 20-year-old who was born in Sydney, was arrested and charged with “possessing documents designed to clearly facilitate an attack” (Sydney Morning Herald, December 26, 2014).

Several other suspected members of the network have also been charged in recent months, mainly with weapons and drug offences. An Islamic State member from Melbourne is believed to have taken Baryalei’s place in the movement, and to have communicated to his followers in Australia to continue trying to attack local targets (The Australian, February 7). To date, over ten people have been charged as a result of Operation Appleby, which is still ongoing. [5]

Conclusion

Since 2012, Australian security agencies have been tackling local networks providing support for Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State’s operations abroad. Today, however, their attention is focused on preventing potential terrorist plots arising from members of these networks. The bulk of this activity has occurred in Sydney, though much about these events is unclear, as many of the trials have not yet taken place and Operation Appleby continues, with fresh arrests occurring regularly. These developments, however, show that local support networks for groups like the Islamic State can rapidly evolve to pose a direct threat at home.

Indeed, the events share similarities with past jihadist activity in Australia, which often saw domestic terrorist plots arise from networks that had initially developed to support armed movements overseas. For instance, a plot in 2000 to attack the Israeli Embassy developed out of southeast Asian group Jemaah Islamiyah’s Australian-based support network after it was coopted by al-Qaeda. [6] Similarly, a 2009 plot to attack an army base emerged from a Melbourne-based support network for the Somali jihadist movement al-Shabaab. [7] However, the broad appeal of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq means authorities have a greater range of local support activity, and potential plots, to monitor. At the same time, these events indicate that well-developed police understanding of support networks can make such plots

easier to thwart.

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Notes

1. Andrew Zammit, “Explaining a turning point in Australian jihadism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 36, Issue 9, 2013, pp. 739-755.
2. Australian Federal Police, “Joint agency operation charges two men with foreign incursion offences,” December 3, 2013, <http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2013/december/media-release-joint-agency-operation-charges-two-men-with-foreign-incursion-offences>.
3. “Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security - Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment Bill (No.1) 2014”, (Thursday, 13 November 2014) http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commjnt/10464a9d-926f-4033-8541-bb84f7502961/toc_pdf/Parliamentary%20Joint%20Committee%20on%20Intelligence%20and%20Security_2014_11_13_3067_Official.pdf%3bfileType=application/pdf#search=%22committees/commjnt/10464a9d-926f-4033-8541-bb84f7502961/0000%22.
4. Australian Federal Police, “Further charges in joint counter terrorism operation,” December 18, 2014, <http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2014/december/media-release-further-charges-in-joint-counter-terrorism-operation>.
5. Australian Federal Police, “Two men charged in ongoing joint counter terrorism operation,” December 24, 2014, <http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2014/december/media-release-two-men-charged-in-ongoing-joint-counter-terrorism-operation>.
6. See: Supreme Court of Western Australia - Court of Appeal, “R v Roche” (2005), <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/cases/wa/WASCA/2005/4.html>.
7. See: Supreme Court of Western Australia - Court of Appeal, “R v Fattal & Ors” (December 16, 2011), <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/cases/vic/VSC/2011/681.html>.

‘Fight Them Until There Is No Fitnah’: The Islamic State’s War With al-Qaeda

Wladimir van Wilgenburg

Recent events have raised fresh questions over the relationship between the Islamic State militant group and al-Qaeda. For instance, militants from the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the group’s Yemen-based franchise, are reported to have coordinated the multiple jihadist attacks in Paris in early January 2015. Moreover, recent U.S. airstrikes in Syria have targeted both Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda’s official local franchise, which could potentially push the two groups to unite against the Western threat. Western media reports have also suggested that there have been meetings between Islamic State and al-Qaeda leaders during the past year, aimed at solving the groups’ differences in order to better fight the West (Daily Beast, November 11, 2014; *Guardian*, September 28, 2014). At the same time, however, the Islamic State’s official online magazine *Dabiq* shows that many important ongoing differences remain between the *manhaj* (methodology) of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The aim of this article is to explore the interplay between the two groups and to show how this relationship may evolve in the coming months.

The Battle Over Takfir

The split within the Islamic State and al-Qaeda dates back to historical differences between Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (killed in 2006), Ayman al-Zawahiri of al-Qaeda and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (a.k.a. Asim Tahir al-Barqawi), a prominent Salafi-Jihadist Jordanian ideologue who had been Zarqawi’s original mentor, over how to deal with the issues of Shi’a Muslims and when to pronounce *takfir* (excommunication) against Muslims in general. [1] This dispute, which combined both strategy and ideology, was triggered by al-Zarqawi’s indiscriminate attacks on Iraqi Shi’a civilians in the 2003-2006 period, which prompted Zawahiri to write him a letter in July 2005, asking: “And can the mujahideen kill all of the Shi’a in Iraq? Has any Islamic state in history ever tried that? And why kill ordinary Shi’a considering that they are forgiven because of their ignorance?” This letter further suggested Iran and al-Qaeda should not fight each other since their joint enemy is the West. [2] An important outcome of this dispute is that al-Qaeda remains generally much more reluctant to declare *takfir* against fellow Muslims *en masse* than the Islamic State, which is quicker to regard all Muslims who have not pledged loyalty to the group as apostates. These differences

were underlined in April 2014, when the Islamic State’s spokesperson Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani issued an audio message called “This was never our manhaj and will never be,” an extensive criticism of al-Qaeda’s marginally less hardline doctrines. [3]

Since then, the Islamic State has continued to seek to discredit al-Qaeda leaders as well as scholars with whom they have allegedly cooperated, such as AQAP member Shaykh Harith al-Nadhari, who was killed in an American drone strike in February and who had been a vocal critic of the Islamic State (BBC, February 5). For instance, he is pictured in the sixth issue of *Dabiq*, together with other AQAP leaders, and is described as “void of wisdom.” [4]

Paris Attacks

Initially, when the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine and Jewish targets in Paris were carried out on January 7-9, both supporters of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State celebrated these as revenge for perceived attacks on the honor of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad. However, the latest evidence suggests that the attacks were made possible by personal connections between the two sets of attackers, Islamic State-inspired Amedy Coulibaly and al-Qaeda-linked Chérif and Said Kouachi, who were both influenced by the France-based al-Qaeda recruiter Djamel Beghal (*Wall Street Journal*, January 13). Further muddying the waters, Islamic State-supporter Amedy Coulibaly said in a video before the attacks that he had coordinated the Paris operations with the Kouachi brothers and AQAP militants (Daily Beast, January 11). However, senior AQAP official Nasser bin Ali al-Ansi, who claimed responsibility for the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, said it was a mere coincidence that the operations of the Kouachi brothers had coincided with the attack by Ahmed Coulibaly (*Telegraph*, January 14). It was therefore no surprise that al-Ansi was criticized in the seventh edition of the Islamic State’s *Dabiq* magazine as being *hizbiyyin* (partisan) in favor of al-Qaeda. [5] *Dabiq*’s sixth issue also said that although Coulibaly, who attacked the Parisian Jewish targets, helped to finance the brothers, their operations were different. These different views may reflect that among would-be militants in France, the differences between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are seen as less important than to those in the Middle East.

On the Frontlines in Syria

Meanwhile, on the frontlines in Syria, relations between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda also do not seem to be improving. In early January 2014, the first major clashes erupted between the Islamic State and other rebel fractions, including al-

Nusra (*Daily Star* [Beirut], February 24). This led to the killing of Abu Khaled al-Suri, the co-founder of the Ahrar al-Sham Islamist group who had long-standing ties to al-Qaeda, in late February. Following his death, al-Nusra issued a call to the Islamic State to stop the infighting (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], February 26). Despite this, fighting continued on several fronts, especially in the provinces of Aleppo and Deir al-Zor. The only area where both groups were present without conflict was the strategic Lebanese border region of Qalamoun, where there was reportedly cooperation between a small number of Islamic State fighters and al-Nusra against Hezbollah and the Syrian government in early 2014 (McClatchy, April 3, 2014). Although this demonstrates the theoretical ability for these groups to cooperate against hated enemies such as Hezbollah, even this limited cooperation apparently takes place reluctantly and only under pressure (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], December 26, 2014). On the other hand, even when al-Nusra moved against Western-backed rebels in the Syrian province of Idlib in October 2014, it apparently did not cooperate with the Islamic State (*Washington Post*, November 2, 2014). [5]

Likewise, after the United States launched airstrikes against the jihadist groups in Syria in September, there were attempts by various jihadist factions to bridge their differences (Middle East Eye, November 14). This was made easier by the fact that the zones of control of the different jihadist factions were more clearly divided after months of infighting. Despite this, a ceasefire offer by the leader of Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar to end the bloodshed between the jihadist factions in the face of Western airstrikes was reportedly rejected by the Islamic State leadership in Raqqa in November. The Islamic State further widened rifts by suggesting that jihadist groups fighting against the Islamic State were *murtadeen* (apostates), just as it has already described other jihadist factions in Syria as apostates. [6]

Similarly, tensions between the rival groups have continued in Syria's Aleppo province, where the Syrian government has been trying to encircle the city. For instance, in December 2014, al-Nusra supporters claimed that the Islamic State launched multiple attacks against it in northern Aleppo. This offensive predictably disrupted al-Nusra's ongoing assault on the government controlled Shi'ite villages of Nubul and Zahra. [7] "All this infighting isn't getting us further in our battle against the Nusayriya [Syrian government] and Rawafid [Shi'a]," wrote Dutch al-Nusra-fighter Abu Muhammad on Twitter in response. [8] There were also suspicions among al-Nusra supporters that the Islamic State was behind suicide attacks carried out against al-Nusra-held checkpoints in Aleppo in January (Aranews, January 11). Despite this enduring rivalry, however, some Islamist

militants apparently hope for an end to the strife between the groups, especially after the United States formed a coalition to fight jihadist movements in both Iraq and Syria. For instance, one al-Nusra fighter has told the media: "If all the powers of mujahideen worldwide would be united, this would have significant benefits for the jihad" (Middle East Eye, November 14, 2014).

Burning of Jordanian Pilot

Given that U.S. and coalition airstrikes have targeted both al-Nusra and the Islamic State, one might expect al-Qaeda members to not condemn the burning of Jordanian Air Force pilot Muadh al-Kasasbeh in Syria by the Islamic State. On the contrary, however, Salafi-Jihadist ideologues and allies of al-Qaeda-linked groups in Syria, such as Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Muhaysini and al-Maqdisi, criticized the Islamic State for the action on Jordanian television (al-Ru'ya, February 6). Indeed, such actions exacerbate the fault line between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda; namely, al-Qaeda fears that excessive violence will alienate ordinary Muslims from jihadist groups. In addition, al-Maqdisi had been secretly involved in negotiations to exchange the Jordanian pilot for prisoner Sajida al-Rishawi, who was convicted of involvement in the 2005 Amman bombings. In an interview after the pilot's death, al-Maqdisi accused the Islamic State of not being serious in its negotiations to free al-Rishawi, leading to her death, as well as strongly criticizing the way in which the pilot was killed: "Then after that I am being surprised with the burning of the pilot... burning? In which sunnah is this? The Prophet forbade this. And you give the precedence to the speech of Shaykh ul-Islam [Ibn Taymiyyah] over him?" [9] Al-Maqdisi further accused the Islamic State of dividing Muslims: "You are splitting the rows of the Muslims and distorting the *deen* [Islamic religion] by these positions and this slaughtering and this burning."

In response, the Islamic State argued that the Jordanian government had complicated the negotiations to free the Japanese prisoner Haruna Yukawa by including al-Kasasbeh in the talks, leading to the failure of the negotiations. [10] The Islamic State additionally launched a personal attack on al-Maqdisi, calling him a representative of the Jordanian *taghut* (tyrant) regime, and describing the Jordanian pilot as an apostate client of al-Maqdisi's. "Perhaps Allah will facilitate a detailed exposure of how al-Barqawi [al-Maqdisi] (whose campaign of lies carries on) represented the Jordanian *taghut* in these negotiations," it added in *Dabiq* magazine. [11] In response, online supporters of al-Nusra responded by creating a hashtag on Twitter to defend al-Maqdisi. "Every *muwahid* [ontheist] & *mujahid* [Jihadist fighter] who stands for the truth; It's time to stand up & defend Shaykh Abu

Muhammad al-Maqqisi,” wrote a Dutch al-Nusra fighter on his Twitter-account @Abamuhammed07, underlining that at least some al-Nusra fighters continue to look up to al-Maqqisi. [12]

No Grey Zones

Even before the Paris attacks in January, the December 2014 issue of *Dabiq* had heavily criticized al-Qaeda, particularly arguing that al-Qaeda (and the Taliban) were too lenient on the *Rawafid* (Shi’a Muslims and Iran). [13] This issue, therefore, contained two important articles that attack al-Qaeda. “Al-Qa’idah of Waziristan – a testimony from within” by Abu Jarir al-Shamali, a former member of Zarqawi’s Jama’at at-Tawhid wal-Jihad group (that pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2004 and then to the Islamic State in June 2014), criticizes Zawahiri, al-Qaeda’s activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Taliban. In particular, al-Shamali, previously imprisoned for eight years in Iran, blames Zawahiri for not making *takfir* on Iran, for praising the Arab Spring, for not making *takfir* on Muslim Brotherhood leaders and for promoting demonstrations instead of armed jihad. “The strangest matter was the hesitance in making *takfir* of the *rafidah* [Shi’a] of the era whose evil is not hidden from anyone whether distant or far,” al-Shamali wrote. A separate article in *Dabiq* by Abu Maysarah al-Shami, meanwhile, attacks the AQAP leadership and blames them for allowing the Shi’a Houthis for taking over Yemen. [14] The author also points out the contradiction between the Taliban’s Afghanistan “emirate” calling for good relations with Iran, while senior AQAP member al-Nadhari calls for “killing the *rafidah*.” Both articles also criticize al-Qaeda for renewing its allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Omar in July 2014, with particular complaints being that the Taliban respects international conventions and borders, implements tribal law and is (theoretically) opposed to militant operations outside Afghanistan. The Islamic State’s commitment to these beliefs is not just rhetorical, however; it has consistently sought to put its ideology into practice during the last year, for instance, massacring hundreds of Shi’a soldiers in Tikrit when it started to take control of most of the Sunni areas of Iraq in mid to late 2014 (al-Alam, September 1, 2014).

Conclusion

In the February 2015 issue of *Dabiq* (titled, “From Hypocrisy to Apostasy – The Extinction of the Grayzone”), the position of the Islamic State toward other jihadist factions is made even clearer. [15] In it, the Islamic State quotes Osama bin Laden referring to former U.S. President George W. Bush’s “with us or against us” speech in order to make its position toward other jihadist factions clear: the group’s intention is to clarify

that these groups will have to join its self-declared Islamic caliphate or else the Islamic State will fight against them, too. This position underlines that for the Islamic State, al-Qaeda is not Islamic enough, since the group does not consider all Shi’a Muslims to be apostates and thus automatically worthy of death. In this ideological environment, fueled by personal insults against al-Maqqisi and AQAP leaders, any substantial cooperation between the Islamic State and other jihadist factions seems unlikely at present, unless they pledge allegiance to the Islamic State’s caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, or if both sides are so weakened by their rivals on the battlefield that they are forced into a pragmatic compromise. Even in this case, however, such cooperation is unlikely to be enduring.

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Notes

- 1 See: Zawahiri’s letter to Zarqawi, July 9, 2005, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>.
- 2 *Ibid*.
3. Pieter van Ostaeyen, “Message by ISIS Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami,” April 18, 2014, <https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2014/04/18/message-by-isis-shaykh-abu-muhammad-al-adnani-as-shami/>.
4. *Dabiq* (Sixth edition), December 2014. Available at: <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-issue-6-al-qaeda-of-waziristan.pdf>.
5. *Dabiq* (Seventh edition), February 2015. Available at: <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/islamic-state/islamic-state-dabiq-magazine-issue-7-from-hypocrisy-to-apostasy.pdf>.
6. Joanna Paraszczuk, “Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar Emir Visited IS In Raqqa To Ask For Truce,” From Chechnya to Syria, November 13, 2014, <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=22885>.
7. See the tweet of Nusra supporter @liwaa38, December 11, 2014, <https://twitter.com/liwaa38/status/543017939059101696>.
8. See the tweet of Dutch Nusra fighter Abu Muhammad (@Abamuhammed07), February 6, 2014, <https://twitter.com/Abamuhammed07/status/563784069365112834>.
9. Pieter van Ostaeyen, “Interview and Translation: Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Maqqisi,” February 6, 2015, <https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2015/02/09/interview-and-translation-shaykh-abu-muhammad-al-maqqisi-dd-february-6-2015/>.
10. *Dabiq*, February 2015, *Op. cit*.

11. *Ibid.*
12. See the tweet of Dutch al-Nusra fighter Abu Muhammad, February 14, 2015, <https://twitter.com/Abamuhammed07/status/566743465975767040>.
13. *Dabiq*, December 2014, *Op cit.*
14. *Dabiq*, February 2015, *Op cit.*

Islamic State Loots Archaeological Sites for Cash

John C.K. Daly

By late 2013, more than 90 percent of Syria's cultural sites lay in regions affected by fighting and civil unrest, leaving them open to plunder. In addition, regions of Iraq now under the control of the Islamic State militant group and its allies include roughly 4,500 of Iraq's 12,000 known archaeological sites. [1] UNESCO recently reported that the "armed extremists in Iraq" are targeting "cultural heritage, cultural and religious minorities, as well as the documents and written evidence of one of the oldest civilizations in human history" (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], February 4). In addition to destroying the cultural heritage of Iraq and Syria, there is also evidence that such activities are providing an important revenue stream for the Islamic State. U.S. officials have estimated that up to \$100 million worth of antiquities from Syria and Iraq are being sold off each year, a significant portion of which is likely to pass through the hands of the Islamic State (*Wall Street Journal*, February 10). Similarly, on February 13, a UK Conservative member of parliament, Tim Loughton, told the House of Commons that antique buyers in the West could be unwittingly "feeding insurgencies," citing Iraqi intelligence claims that the Islamic State "had collected as much as \$36 million from the sale of artifacts" (*Daily Telegraph*, February 13).

Syria

In late 2012, the Islamic State dramatically increased its financial income when it secured Syria's eastern oilfields. However, due to the fall in oil prices and U.S.-led airstrikes on oil facilities in its territories, the antiquities trade has become an increasingly important source of Islamic State funds. In one recent media report, an Iraqi intelligence official was quoted as saying: "They [the Islamic State] had taken \$36 million from al-Nabuk alone (an area in the Qalamoun Mountains west of Damascus). The antiquities there are up to 8,000 years old" (*Guardian*, June 15, 2014). However, some such figures may be too high as they are based on Western auction house prices rather than initial Islamic State deals with smugglers. Despite this, while the Islamic State continues to rely on black market oil sales, earning an estimated \$850,000-1.65 million per day, the antiques trade is an important additional income source, helping it to become financially self-sustaining and less reliant on wealthy Gulf state donors (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], February 12).

In terms of Syria specifically, an estimated one third of Syria's

museums and 16 major archaeological sites are believed to have been pillaged, fuelling an illicit trade in stolen Syrian artifacts estimated by one expert to be worth more than \$1.89 billion (*Sunday Times*, May 5, 2013). The Islamic State typically profits from this trade by providing authorization to local inhabitants to loot archaeological sites under its control in exchange for a percentage of the monetary value of the excavated objects. The Islamic State's share is based on the Islamic *khums* tax system, which specifies that Muslims must pay to the government a predetermined percentage of the value of the retrieved items. This rate, however, reportedly varies from as high as 50 percent in the Raqqa region down to 20 percent in Islamic State-held areas of Aleppo province. [2] One smuggler told the media that bigger traders with better connections "sold pieces worth \$500,000, some for \$1 million" (BBC, February 16).

Besides looting, Islamic State militants in Syria have also engaged in acts of ideologically-driven vandalism. In May 2014, for example, the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology (APSA) obtained photographs of Islamic State militants smashing Assyrian statues and artifacts, believed to be 3,000 years old that had been illegally excavated from Tell Ajaja (Assyrian International News Agency, May 17, 2014). A further UN report from December 2014 based on satellite evidence, which focused on 18 areas, of which six are UNESCO-listed, noted that nearly 300 cultural heritage sites have been destroyed, damaged and looted in Syria since 2011 (AFP, February 4). The six UNESCO World Heritage Sites listed as affected include the Old City of Aleppo, Bosra, Damascus, the Dead Cities of northern Syria, Krak des Chevaliers and Palmyra. Imagery of 290 locations at these sites showed 24 of them had been destroyed, 104 severely damaged, 85 moderately damaged and 77 possibly damaged (UNESCO, February 2015). [3]

Iraq

The situation is arguably even worse in Iraq, which has been wracked by strife since before 2003. In March 2003, the former head of Iraq's Department of Antiquities, Jaber Khalil Ibrahim, said that archaeologists believed that 500,000 archaeological sites in Iraq that remain undiscovered and unstudied, along with 10,000 registered and discovered sites, including at least 25,000 highly important ones (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], February 3). Many of these sites have subsequently been looted, including by extremist groups. For instance, within weeks of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Assyrian artifacts are reported to have been looted by al-Qaeda, which then reportedly sold them to finance its operations (Assyrian International News Agency, April 1, 2003). When the Islamic State captured the northern Iraqi city of Mosul and

the Nineweh province in June 2014, they gained access to almost 2,000 of Iraq's 12,000 registered archaeological sites, at least some of which are likely to have since been looted under their watch.

The extent to which the Islamic State has gained financially from such activities is currently unclear, but this may change as since June 2014, Iraqi intelligence officers have been analyzing more than 160 flash drives captured near Mosul from dead Islamic State military council head Abdulrahman al-Bilawi to determine the exact role that the group has played in Syria's illicit antiquities trade. [4] In addition to providing funds for the Islamic State, looting also provides employment in areas controlled by the Islamic State. Sadly, the problem of archeological smuggling is not limited to Syria and Iraq in the Middle East; since 2011, \$3-6 billion worth of antiquities have reportedly vanished from Egypt, although a far smaller proportion of these are likely to have passed through the hands of militant groups (Al-Monitor, February 5, 2014.)

International Response

While the Islamic State's degradation of the region's cultural and historic sites is unlikely to end anytime soon, the international community is taking belated steps to limit its effects. Local and international organizations like The Syrian Campaign are pushing for the UN Security Council to ban the trade of undocumented Syrian and Iraqi artifacts. [5] In early December, UNESCO Chief Irina Bokova called for the creation of "protected cultural zones" to save heritage sites in conflict-torn Iraq and Syria that were at risk of "cultural cleansing" via "stronger engagement with local actors" (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], December 4, 2014). The problem is broader than just the Islamic State, however, as groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army have also admitted to looting sites to raise money for weapons. There are also international efforts to disrupt the trade at "end use" countries such as Germany, which has become the "el Dorado of the illegal cultural artifacts trade," with Munich serving as Europe's transit hub (Deutsche Welle, October 24, 2014). U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has also weighed in on the Islamic State's looting, telling an audience in New York in September 2014:

Ancient treasures in Iraq and in Syria have now become the casualties of continuing warfare and looting. And no one group has done more to put our shared cultural heritage in the gun sights than [the Islamic State]... These acts of vandalism are a tragedy for all civilized people, and the civilized world must take a stand. [6]

In a further—and more concrete—step, on February 12, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2199 banning all trade in antiquities from Syria, among other measures aimed at reducing the group's income from oil and kidnapping (*al-Shorfa*, February 17). However, while this is an important step, such efforts will take time to bear fruit. Meanwhile, more archaeological sites in Syria and Iraq will come to resemble the moon's cratered surface as Islamic State looters feed the artistic addictions of wealthy Western collectors while at the same time generating further income for the Islamic State's military operations.

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Notes

1. Hosham Dawod, "Patrimoine irakien en danger," L'Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes, June 25, 2014, http://www.ifea-istanbul.net/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=3576%3Apatrimoine-irakien-en-danger&Itemid=450&lang=fr.
2. Justine Drennan, "Report: The Black-Market Battleground," *Foreign Policy*, October 17, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/17/the-black-market-battleground/>.
3. "UNESCO Director-General welcomes UN Security Council Resolution to step up protection of cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq," UNESCO, February 12, 2015, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1236/>.
4. Heather Pringle, "ISIS Cashing in on Looted Antiquities to Fuel Iraq Insurgency," *National Geographic*, June 26, 2014, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/06/140626-isis-insurgents-syria-iraq-looting-antiquities-archaeology/>.
5. See: <http://thesyriacampaign.org/en/actions/save-history>.
6. "Remarks at Threats to Cultural Heritage in Iraq and Syria Event," U.S. State Department, September 22, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/09/231992.htm>.