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Ifthekar Jaman was a British man who joined the Islamic State in spring 2013 and helped create the current pipeline of Europeans going to Syria

ISLAMIC STATE IN YEMEN MAY HAVE REMOTE CONTROL EXPLOSIVE DEVICES

James Spencer

The December 6 assassination of the recently-appointed governor of Aden, Major General Jaafar Mohammed Saad, as he drove to his office, marks the first major success by Islamic State in Yemen against the newly-returned government of Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi (al-Jazeera, December 7). It also marks a worrying step change in Islamic State capability.

The spectrum of attacks which al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) could mount was comparatively limited, especially when compared with those of al-Qaeda in Iraq. For the most part, rank and file al-Qaeda attacks (often via their tribal affiliate Ansar al-Shari'a) were basic small-arms assaults on isolated locations or close quarter assassinations on security force personnel. After 2008, AQAP increasingly used suicide

improvised explosive devices (SIEDs) and suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs). The core cadre of AQAP also used some very sophisticated devices in Timer Power Units (TPUs) such as the "printer bombs", but also some VBIEDs; they also developed some very discrete SIED devices, either inside the underwear or in the body (*Daily Telegraph*, November 10, 2010; Reuters, January 7; ABC, December 28, 2008; CNN, September 2, 2009). These latter were command detonated by their bearers. There was one incident in which an under-vehicle improvised explosive device (UVIED) was used to murder a British shipping surveyor; however, this is assessed to have been criminal in nature, and probably involved a killer brought in from elsewhere, possibly from Lebanon or Syria (*Daily Mail*, June 29, 2012; BBC, June 28, 2012).

The Islamic State—which in Yemen was mostly formed by disaffected AQAP members—have similarly used small-arms fire attacks, as well as SIEDs, SVBIEDs and intimidation operations (Reuters, September 24; *Independent*, October 7; AP, October 25). Despite initial reports of the Islamic State attack on the Qasr hotel in al-Buraiqa and the UAE's military HQ in Shaykh Farid al-Awlaqi's palace being by rocket fire, the jihadist organization claimed it as four complex attacks, involving small-arms fire and SVBIEDs, which was soon confirmed by Yemeni sources (*Gulf News*, October 6; BBC, October 6).

What is significant about the December 6 attack is that it appears to mark a major technological—and indeed intelligence—shift. While the initial BBC report mentioned witnesses claiming to have seen an RPG, another report talks of an SVBIED: "[The Islamic State] says it detonated a car laden with explosives as [Saad] drove by" on his way to work (al-Quds al-Arabi, December 7; Reuters, December 6). Pictures of the burnt-out vehicle show that the roof above the front right (passenger) seat is more buckled than the opposite side, which would suggest that this was likely (Hadhrami Diaspora, December 6). The governor appears to have been riding in a B6 protected vehicle, and his protective security detail selected a route that had few parked cars along it, although it appears to have been a dual carriageway able to be traversed at speed. Nevertheless, and despite his new appointment, General Saad appears to have set a sufficient pattern that could be observed and exploited, possibly by a cell in Tawahi, which has become a terrorist sanctuary (Middle East Eye, December 7). It is likely that the Islamic State and AQAP have exploited the informal cooperation with the Saudi-led coalition to identify key personnel and reconnoiter locations (*Wall Street Journal*, July 16).

The area surrounding the site of the explosion appears to have been stone and concrete, with little scope to lay or dig in a command wire, nor have there been any such reports of a cable being found, suggesting that the means of initiation was remote control, most likely by mobile telephone (Haaretz, December 6). While there has been one report of an Explosively Formed Projectile being smuggled into Yemen (and intercepted), from the size of this explosion, it does not appear to have been a projectile, but merely explosive (*New York Times*, April 15, 2012). However, the Islamic State seem to have known that the governor's vehicle was not a soft-skinned vehicle and so used a sufficiently large quantity of explosives to achieve the necessary blast effect against a protected vehicle. The one possible scrap of comfort is that the location chosen for the attack appears not to be very populous, which suggests that the terrorists are trying not to kill many local civilians. The main question remaining is—if it was a remote-controlled improvised explosive device (RCIED)—where did the technology come from, and what else do they have? It may yet get bloody.

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Russian Intervention in Syria

Pavel Baev

Russia launched its intervention in Syria at the end of September 2015, immediately after President Vladimir Putin's grandiloquent but uninspired speech at the United Nations General Assembly. At first glance, Moscow's Syrian campaign appears hastily improvised, and it does not seem to reflect sound planning or careful risk assessment. Yet, this intervention was shaped by Russia's previous experiments in power projection and by Moscow's tradition of using military force as an instrument of politics. In a paradoxical way, it signifies both a continuation of Russian policy in the Middle East, centered on manipulating conflicts, and a departure from the pattern of cautious maneuvering aimed at exploiting opportunities created by confusion in US policy. Russian decision-making on this risky enterprise thus constitutes a peculiar mix of pragmatic calculations and emotional reactions—and appears to be informed by a blend of expert knowledge and arrogant ignorance.

The Road to Latakia

The first reference point for the analysis of current operations is the history of Soviet military involvement in Syria dating back to the coup of 1970, which brought to power Hafez al-Assad, who granted the USSR the right to establish a naval facility in Tartus in exchange for massive military aid. In the course of Syria's 1973 Yom Kippur War against Israel, the Soviet Union established a high-capacity air bridge to Syrian territory (3,750 tons of supplies delivered in two weeks), as well as a sea bridge (the transport ship *Ilya Mechnikov* was sunk by the Israeli Navy). [1] The USSR's military support to Hafez al-Assad's Syria was substantial in terms of weapons sales and the numbers of Soviet military advisors, but it ultimately proved to be no match for superior Western-sourced technology or operational planning like that wielded by regional rivals including Israel. One notable illustration of this was the air battle of June 9–10, 1982 (known also as *Operation Mole Cricket19*), in which the Syrian Air Force lost some 65 fighters (Mig-21 and Mig-23) and 19 surface-to-air missile batteries (SA-2, SA-3, and SA-6) in the Bekaa Valley without any losses registered by the Israeli Air Force. [2]

Seeking to turn a new page in relations with Syria, Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed in 2005 to write off 75% of Damascus's Soviet-era debt (amounting to $13 billion) and signed new commercial contracts on supplying arms. However, after taking into account Israeli objections, the Kremlin canceled Russian deliveries of tactical missiles and

S-300 surface-to-air missile batteries. Since the start of the Syrian civil war in autumn 2011, Russia has again expanded the supply of weapons to President Bashar al-Assad's regime and has been generous regarding Syria's payment schedules. [3]

Coming to the rescue of a friendly dictator-in-distress was a risky gamble back in 2012–2013, but Putin calculated correctly that tanks and artillery would empower the regime in Damascus to hold on against the rebels of various persuasions. [4] That calculation was underpinned by a strong ideological motivation to confront the chaos of revolutions. For the Kremlin, this was certainly self-serving because Putin's corrupt authoritarian regime is immanently threatened by domestic discontent. Putin's support for al-Assad was also motivated by imperious considerations, however, in that it granted the Russian leader a role of champion in the global struggle against revolution. The Russian president played up this role in his address before the UN on September 28. But just as crucially important is the fact that Putin evidently conceptualizes the Syrian intervention as a part of an eschatological struggle for the al-Assad regime's survival. [5] Targeting the Western-backed rebels that threaten to overthrow the "legitimate" Syrian government is no less, and perhaps more important than targeting the Islamic State. Therefore, when US President Barak Obama tried to impress upon Putin the need for Moscow to make a "strategic adjustment," the message just did not register. [6] Every rebel is a terrorist on Putin's Syria map, which makes the air campaign much easier—and entirely hopeless.

The Self-Propelling Enterprise

The exact decision-making process in Moscow regarding Russia's Syrian intervention cannot be reconstructed with any certainty (though it can be assumed that the deadlock in the Donbas war zone was certainly a major factor). But clearly the material preparations were done in a matter of a few weeks, so the start of the air campaign took most stakeholders in the Syrian war by surprise. Putin had good reason to see it as instant success because a relatively small force projection generated a colossal political resonance and propelled Russia into the position of an "indispensable" power for dealing with the conflict. That success, however, was short-lived and after the first—remarkably smooth—month of bombing, the Kremlin realized it would need to do more, at least in order to sustain the domestic enthusiasm.

The composition of the mixed air regiment at the newly set Hmeymim air base reflected the lack of clarity about the tasks of the intervention. The medium-range fighter-

bombers (six Su-34s and twelve Su-24s) attacked targets across the country (with the exception of Kurdish-controlled areas). Light fighter-bombers (twelve Su-25s) and attack helicopters (six Mi-24s) provided close air support to Syrian government troops, but the attempts at launching attacks were feeble, and the air dominance over the battlefield was ineffectual. Remarkably, from the very beginning of the operation, Russia sought to build an anti-access/air-denial (A2/AD) "bubble" over Latakia with SA-15 *Tor* and SA-22 *Pantsir* missile systems, as well as to demonstrate capacity for intercepting air targets (six Su-30), going even so far as violating Turkish air space. [7] But by attempting to take on several different tasks with limited means, Russia was unable to seriously impact the overall course of the war.

There was, however, another aim in the intervention, which had little to do with Syria but everything to do with demonstrating Russia's might: to test the Russian military's strategic combat capabilities. [8] The first of these experiments was the launch of 26 *Kalibr* long-range cruise missiles by four ships of the Caspian Flotilla on October 7, which was partly successful but upset Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The salvo was repeated on November 20 with 18 missiles, and there were reports about a launch of the same missiles from the *Rostov-on-Don* (*Kilo/Varshavyanka* class) submarine in the Mediterranean. On November 17, Russian strategic aviation had a busy day, with five Tu-160 and six Tu-95MS bombers launching new X-101 and old X-555 cruise missiles, while fourteen Tu-22M3s engaged in old-fashioned carpet bombing. In parallel with these strikes, other strategic weapons were tested: RS-24 *Yars* and SS-25 *Topol* intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) were launched (October 28 and November 17, respectively), and the new *Vladimir Monomakh* (*Borei*-class) submarine launched two *Bulava* missiles. [9] Impressive as they were, these demonstrations could not alter the fact that Russia's Syrian intervention had reached the peak of its impact and failed to deliver any useful victory for the Syrian government forces.

The First Disaster, and More in the Making

Moscow's intervention continued with no apparent losses for eight weeks until November 24, when a Russian Su-24, which had violated Turkey's air space, went down in flames after being hit by a missile fired by a Turkish F-16; subsequently, an Mi-8 helicopter was lost in the rescue operation. Putin was outraged at this "stab in the back" by Turkey, but Russia's military response to this incident considerably raises the probability of another disaster in the near future. In particular, Moscow has deployed an additional squadron of six Su-30s to Syria so that Russian bomber sorties will

always be accompanied by fighters. The most modern (and untested) S-400 *Triumph* surface-to-air missile battery was stationed at the Hmeymim base, making Russia's local air defense "bubble" much wider. This has effectively delegated the decision on engaging a "hostile" air target to the pilots and operators of the crudely inter-connected missile systems, making de-conflicting with the US-led coalition sorties prone to human error. Meanwhile, maintenance and logistics at the crowded and poorly-equipped base are stretched thin, while the 2015 track record of accidents and crashes in the Russian Air Force, caused primarily by technical failures, looks uniquely plentiful. [10]

Since the downing of the Su-24, Russia has deliberately increased its targeting of the Turkoman villages and the forces of the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army, while its attitude to "collateral damage" remains entirely indifferent. This inevitably results in accumulating grievances against Moscow; consequently, the possibility of a terrorist attack on the perimeter of the Russian base in Syria or on convoys going to and from the Tartus naval facility goes up accordingly. It is difficult to guess whether an accidental air fight, or a technical crash, or a terrorist attack will mark the next setback for the Russian intervention because all three are likely to occur. What is nearly certain, however, is that Moscow's response will most probably be misplaced, disproportional and push the boundaries of acceptable risk.

The prolongation of the al-Assad regime's existence does not necessarily translate into a useful definition of "victory". Thus, the lack of meaningful results prompts the Russian leadership to expand the scale of the intervention, even if Moscow remains highly reluctant to commit ground troops. At the same time, the paradoxical feature of this escalation trap is that the higher the intensity of the air campaign, the less sustainable it becomes. Unlike the Soviet Union of 1973, the Russia of 2015 is encountering large logistical problems in organizing an air and sea bridge to Syria—the Russian Navy has had to acquire eight cargo ships from Turkey in order to deliver the necessary volume of supplies. [11] Even bracketing out the possibility (anxiously discussed by Russian experts) of Ankara closing the Turkish Straits, it is clear that logistics presents the greatest vulnerability to this open-ended operation, which has neither a meaningful definition of victory nor a plan for wrapping up. [12]

Conclusion

Russia effectively defines each and every anti-Assad rebel groupings as an "enemy" subject to air strikes (while the Iranian-sponsored terrorist group Hezbollah is exempt from such treatment). Moscow's "principled" position on

not distinguishing between "bad terrorists" and "good terrorists" does not provide Putin any moral high ground. Rather, it makes French as well as US attempts to establish cooperation with Russia in the broadest possible anti–Islamic State coalition not only futile, but also counter-productive because this acceptance of Russia's force projection indirectly undermines the forces that could shape Syria's future. The Russian intervention adds considerably to the sum of bitter grievances in various Syrian communities and thus increases the recruitment pool for extremist and terrorist networks. It also generates incentives for joining the ranks of such networks inside Russia, first of all in the chronically unstable North Caucasus. The poorly-planned and doggedly expanded intervention is on course for serious trouble, butevery new setback in its execution is set to encourage Islamic radicals and to give a boost to the cause that spreads violent chaos across the Middle East.

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Notes

1. For a useful examination, see William B. Quandt, "Soviet Policy in the October 1973 War", RAND Report R-1864-ISA, May 1976 (https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2006/R1864.pdf).#

2. See on that Matthew M. Hurley, "The Bekaa Valley Air Battle: Lessons Mislearned?", Airpower Journal, Winter 1989 (http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj89/win89/hurley.html).

3. One balanced analysis is Roy Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining alignment with a regime in crisis", International Affairs, vol. 89, no. 4, July 2013, pp. 795-823.

4. My check of those calculations is Pavel K. Baev, "Not everything is wrong with Russia's Syria strategy"; PONARS Eurasia Memo 248, April 2013 (http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/not-everything-wrong-russias-syria-strategy).

5. One sharp reading of that speech is Kathrin Hille, "What Putin told the UN: the US and allies are to blame in Mideast", Financial times, 28 September 2015 (http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/0adcfd46-660f-11e5-a57f-21b88f7d973f.html#axzz3snIRPFBh).

6.. See Michelle Kosinski, "Inside the Obama-Putin power huddle", CNN Politics, 16 November 2015 (http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/15/politics/obama-putin-g20-meeting/).

7. See Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Top NATO general: Russians starting to build air bubble over Syria", Washington Post, 29 September 2015 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/09/29/top-nato-general-russians-starting-to-build-air-defense-bubble-over-syria/).

8. See Maxim Solopov, "The Syrian test site", RBC.ru, (in Russian) 19 November 2015 (http://www.rbc.ru/politics/19/11/2015/564dde149a7947255482bfd8).

9. One Bulava missed its target in Kamchatka; see "The Bulava salvo from Vladimir Monomakh was partly unsuccessful", Lenta.ru, (in Russian) 19 November 2015 (http://lenta.ru/news/2015/11/19/missiles/).

10. See on that Pavel K. Baev, "Russian air power is too brittle for brinksmanship", PONARS Eurasia Memo 398, November 2015 (http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/russian-air-power-too-brittle-brinksmanship).

11. See Ivan Safronov and Sergei Goryashko, "Russia in Syria: The view from above", Kommersant-Vlast (in Russian), 26 October 2015 (http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2836487).

12. The Montreux Convention (1936) leaves for Turkey a possibility to restrict the naval traffic through the Bosporus and the Dardanelles not only in wartime but also in the situation of high military threat; see Georgy Makarenko and Anatoly Temkin, "Sea scare: Could Turkey close the Bosporus for Russia?", RBC.ru, 25 November 2015 (http://www.rbc.ru/politics/25/11/2015/56558fed9a79477724f27822).

Rebel Reaction to Russian Intervention

Nicholas A. Heras

On September 30, Russia's military intervention in Syria officially began with airstrikes against Syrian armed opposition forces in western Syria. Since the start of Russia's military intervention, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and its auxiliary forces—such as the National Defense Force (NDF) local militia network, and allies including Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-mobilized paramilitary forces, including Iraqi and Afghani organizations—have engaged in multiple ground offensives throughout western Syrian in Latakia, Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs and Damascus governorates (see MLM Briefs, October 31). Although these offensives have not been uniformly successful—in some battle spaces, such as in northern Hama and southern Idlib, SAA forces have faced significant difficulties—Russia's military intervention in Syria, has fundamentally impacted the geopolitical context within which the Syrian armed opposition operates.

The immediate impact of the Russian military intervention is that the Syrian armed opposition in northwestern Syria has lost the initiative in its campaign to apply pressure upon the Alawite community in Latakia Governorate that provides significant demographic support for the al-Assad government. This pressure, particularly that applied by the Islamist Jaysh al-Fateh (Conquering Army) coalition, which includes several constituent militant Salafist organizations, was intended to threaten the stability of the al-Assad government by seeking to amplify internal dissent against it by loyalist communities through the prospect of impending military defeat (See Terrorism Monitor, June 12; MLM Briefs, April 29). While Jaysh al-Fateh was successful in seizing the majority of the northwestern governorate of Idlib, and also ceding practical control over a significant portion of the governorate to the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, its continued advances beyond Idlib in Hama, Latakia and Aleppo governorates, were actively contested by the SAA and its adjutant paramilitary forces.

For the foreseeable future, the Russian military intervention in Syria has secured the continuation of an al-Assad government-led statelet in western Syria, with the SAA's ongoing presence in highly contested battle spaces in southern Syria in Dara'a Governorate, in northwestern Syria in Aleppo Governorate and in the eastern governorates of al-Hasakah and Deir al-Zor. The indefinite survival of the al-Assad government, even if its authority over Syria's territory is significantly weakened, presents a significant dilemma for opposition-supporting international actors. This dilemma is that since the initiation of Russia's military intervention in Syria and the solidification of the al-Assad government's statelet, the armed opposition is in a worse position to force a decisive military conclusion to the conflict, while retaining its significant disunity in leadership and ideological goals for the end state of Syria after the conflict.

Conversely, the al-Assad government and its allies are in their best position since the beginning of the civil war to dictate the terms of a humanitarian ceasefire and an eventual political process in such a manner as to preserve the rule of Bashar al-Assad or his regime's handpicked successors. While loyalist forces are unlikely to restore Bashar al-Assad's rule throughout all of Syria in the foreseeable future, a general ceasefire between loyalist forces and some elements of the armed opposition, if achievable, also provides the al-Assad government with the opportunity to reallocate military resources as needed from less to more important battle spaces.

The October 30 Vienna communique, released under the auspices of the United Nations, calls for a transition from the al-Assad government to a secular, inclusive and democratic Syria post-conflict (United Nations, October 30). However, this communique does not address the Syrian armed opposition's demands for the immediate removal of the al-Assad government, and all of the structures of the military, security, intelligence and administrative functions of the Assad regime as well as the withdrawal of Russian and IRGC forces and their proxies from Syria (Elaph, November 22; Aksalser, October 2). The demand of the withdrawal of Russian, IRGC and Hezbollah forces from Syria is highly unlikely to be met until late in a political transition period after the end of conflict, especially in the context of Hezbollah's deployment in Syrian-Lebanese border regions and the IRGC-mobilized paramilitary network's deployment in the vicinity of the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, in a strategic area of Damascus' southern suburbs. Another demand of the broader armed opposition is the dismantlement of the NDF militia network, which incorporates fighters from local loyalist communities, including sectarian minority communities; the armed opposition accuses the NDF of being a sectarian weapon of the Assad regime and its IRGC patrons (Elaph, November 22; Aksalser, October 2).

The NDF, which was established by the SAA and Syrian security and intelligence services in cooperation with advice and direction of the IRGC, is an effective, if limited, paramilitary organization that allows members of loyalist communities to be armed, salaried and sponsored by the

al-Assad government in exchange for an agreement to stand their ground against the armed opposition in contested areas throughout the country. It is in the context of the NDF, and the Ministry of National Reconciliation and its adjutant "Reconciliation Committees," that the al-Assad government seeks to reincorporate armed opposition fighters under its authority. In some battle spaces (particularly in Damascus and Homs, and to a lesser extent in Aleppo and Deir al-Zor), the option for besieged armed opposition groups, and the local communities that support them, to surrender and return back to the fold of the al-Assad government in the context of the NDF, is a core component of al-Assad government's counter-insurgency strategy (see Terrorism Monitor, August 21). This is likely a fundamental part of the al-Assad government's strategy throughout the Vienna process, and in any potential political transition period.

Further, according to a prominent and well-connected Syrian opposition figure, the greatest impact of the Russian intervention in Syria has come less in the context of backing the SAA's ground offensives throughout northwest Syria and in the Damascus battle space, but has instead come in the context of the destructive power of Russian air and artillery assets. [1] These are degrading the armed opposition by killing civilians and destroying the communities from which the armed opposition draws support. In particular, the psychological impact of the escalation of Russian and IRGC involvement that does not appear set to end in the near term, and which has firmly taken the initiative away from the armed opposition, is driving Syrian armed opposition calculations in the context of the Vienna process. [2]

One of the most direct impacts of the Russian intervention on the broader Syrian armed opposition movement has been a revival of the process to achieve a wide-ranging framework for the unification of the leadership of the broader Syrian armed opposition throughout the country, and across the ideological spectrum, from militant Salafist organizations to secular nationalists (Ammon News [Amman], November 22; Elaph, November 22; Elaph, November 14). Meetings scheduled for the week of December 7-11 in Saudi Arabia seek to establish both a unified list of Syrian armed opposition groups that can be a party to the Vienna process and the baseline political vision for a post-conflict Syria that is secular, inclusive and democratic as outlined by the October 30 communique (Reuters, December 6; Ammon News [Amman], November 22; Elaph, November 14; United Nations, October 30).

As a model, opposition-supporting states are seeking to revive the Majlis Qiyadaat al-Thawri Sooria (Syrian Revolutionary Command Council—SRCC), which was an effort announced

in August 2014, and which has since fallen into inactivity. The Syrian Revolutionary Command Council, included a wide range of armed opposition groups, including militant Salafist organizations Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya (Islamic Movement of the Free Ones of the Levant) and Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam), and organizations including Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki (Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement), Jaysh al-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Army), Suqur al-Ghab (Falcons of al-Ghab), Liwa Fursan al-Haqq (Knights of the Truth Brigade) and Faraqa 13 (13th Brigade) that have received TOW missiles from Saudi Arabia and Turkey with the approval of the United States (YouTube, November 30, 2014; al-Jazeera [Doha], August 3, 2014). However, prominent Syrian opposition figures, and opposition-supporting states, look to the Revolutionary Command Council as a potential blueprint for how to achieve the wide-ranging armed opposition unity sought in the Vienna process. [3]

The TOW-supplied Syrian armed opposition organizations have sought to capitalize on the military effect—and propaganda utility—of their TOWs, and the reported difficulties that TOWs present to the Russia and IRGC-backed SAA offensives in northern Hama and southern Idlib, in order to increase their prominence in the broader Syrian armed opposition movement (Twitter, December 1; Reuters, November 25; Reuters, October 30; Reuters, October 19). Some of these externally supported organizations, which are considered to constitute the most effective elements of the Syrian moderate armed opposition, are actively utilizing the propaganda points earned by their successful deployment of TOW missiles to attempt to position themselves as the centers of gravity for the broader armed opposition movement in northwestern Syria (*al-Nahar* [Beirut], December 2; Twitter, December 1; SMO [Hama], December 1; YouTube, November 26).

In spite of these ongoing efforts toward the unity of the armed opposition, there remains no clearly empowered leader or leadership body that has authority over the broader Syrian armed opposition movement. Media sources close to Hezbollah and supportive of the al-Assad government's war effort, indicate that the Syrian government and its allies are fully aware of the challenges of unification facing the armed opposition and have incorporated this reality into their political and military calculations (al-Manar [Beirut], November 17). These divisions among the rebels occur throughout Syria, including in southern Syria, where the relative strength of the generally moderate armed opposition coalition the Southern Front (SF) is receding to militant Salafist armed opposition groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra (Victory Front), Harakat Muthanna al-Islamiya (Islamic Movement of Muthanna), Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-

Islamiya and the former SF constituent faction and current Islamic State affiliate Liwa Shuda al-Yarmouk (Yarmouk Martyrs' Battalion). [4]

However, it is in northwestern Syria where rebel disunity could have the most destructive, and trans-national, impact as the conflict continues. This region of the country is where the majority of the Russian and IRGC-backed SAA operations have occurred, and where the highest concentration of Salafist-Jihadist, militant Salafist and militant Islamist organizations, some with a similar ideology to the Muslim Brotherhood, have the strongest presence. The largest concentration of Salafist-Jihadist fighters from the Caucasus, outside of Islamic State-controlled areas of eastern and northern Syria, are also present in northwestern Syria, and resolving the threat of Caucasus-origin foreign fighters based in this region presents a counter-terrorism priority for the Russian forces (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], November 30; AFP, October 7; Terrorism Monitor, April 2). This region of Syria also borders Turkey, the most significant site of strategic depth for the armed opposition, and it is from Turkey that the armed opposition has the ability to achieve the strongest lines of supply and reinforcement to apply indefinite military pressure on the al-Assad statelet.

The Syrian government's current list, the October 30 Vienna outline and the recent statements by the United Arab Emirates' State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, that the UAE would not be unhappy with Russian airstrikes against the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, further highlights the dilemma of the broader Syrian armed opposition movement in northwestern Syria (AFP, November 30; Mehr News [Tehran], November 28). The October 30 communique indicates that there is broad public agreement by international actors supporting the designation of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in Syria, which is generally but not exclusively referred to in the context of Jabhat al-Nusra, as terrorist organizations to be marginalized and defeated (United Nations, October 30). In spite of this agreement, prominent armed opposition organizations throughout northwest Syria, including TOW-supplied organizations in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo, still militarily cooperate with Jabhat al-Nusra and are ambivalent in regard to their future relationship with it (ARA News [Hama], November 26; All4Syria [Hama], November 23).

Jabhat al-Nusra's continuing influence on the Syrian armed opposition is pragmatically recognized by the predominately exile-led opposition movement that frequently interacts with pro-opposition states, such as the Syrian National Coalition. Khaled Khoja, the current president of the Syrian National Coalition, has made several public statements, including a statement after the conclusion of the latest round of the

Vienna process on November 23, asking Jabhat al-Nusra members to renounce their allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri in return for full acceptance in the mainstream armed opposition (AFP, November 23).

This stance is highly problematic as it indicates that there is still deep reservation within the Syrian opposition movement, and opposition-supporting regional actors, to completely marginalize, confront and defeat non-Islamic State, militant Salafist actors in Syria, which are embedded in the broader armed opposition's military campaigns against the al-Assad government and its allies. Throughout Syria in areas that have fallen into rebel rule, these organizations include Jabhat al-Nusra, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya, Jabhat Ansar al-Din (Partisans of Religion Front), Jund al-Aqsa (Soldiers of Aqsa Mosque), Jaysh al-Islam in the eastern Ghouta region of the Damascus suburbs and Harakat al-Muthanna al-Islamiya in Dara'a, and others, including militant Islamist organizations that are part of the Jaysh al-Fateh coalition. The ongoing dispute among international actors over the status of Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya is indicative of the assumptions, and the challenges, that are inherent in creating an "approved" list of Syrian armed opposition actors.

Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya is an ideologically militant Salafist umbrella organization of local constituent militias, which at its leadership level has close and well-recorded ties to al-Qaeda's leadership and its senior international commanders; at its local constituent militia level, the organization regularly and enthusiastically coordinates and conducts operations with Jabhat al-Nusra and other Salafist-Jihadist organizations throughout the country (ARA News [Aleppo], November 30; All4Syria [Aleppo], November 27; al-Akhbar [Beirut], November 17; Enab Baladi [Hama], November 15; Free Syrian Army [Damascus], October 21; al-Bawaba [Idlib], October 15; Enab Baladi [Latakia], August 16; al-Safir [Beirut], July 24). Further, although certain factions within Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya publicly state that they seek a more conciliatory and gradualist approach to revolution in Syria, the constituent militias within Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya have aided and abetted the development of Jabhat al-Nusra's growing administration in Idlib (al-Mujhir [Idlib], November 11; *al-Quds al-Arabi*, November 7; al-Araby al-Jadeed, November 1; al-Qabas [Kuwait City], October 24; YouTube, September 26; al-Araby al-Jadeed, July 16; *al-Araby al-Jadeed*, June 11).

The al-Assad government, and likely its Russian and Iranian allies, want to marginalize Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya and Jaysh al-Islam in the course of the Vienna process (France 24, November 29; Mehr News [Tehran], November 28; al-

Alam [Tehran], November 18). A majority of the joint operations rooms that are conducted throughout northern Syria incorporate either Jabhat al-Nusra or Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya, or both, and to a lesser extent Jaysh al-Islam, while in the Damascus area, the operations rooms heavily incorporate Jaysh al-Islam (al-Nahar [Beirut], November 21; Enab Baladi [Hama], November 15; Enab Baladi [Latakia], August 16). The Syrian government, by demanding that these operations rooms, which include more ideologically moderate armed opposition actors, disavow Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya, is seeking to create rifts within the broader armed opposition movement.

In particular, several of the most active and most celebrated TOW-supplied armed opposition groups actively cooperate with Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiya constituent militias (al-Jazirah Online [Aleppo], November 29; All4Syria [Hama], November 23; Enab Baladi [Hama], November 15; Enab Baladi [Latakia], August 16). These rifts, should they develop, have the potential to lead to open warfare among Syria's rebel organizations throughout the north—and across the ideological spectrum—which would threaten not only a humanitarian ceasefire, but also the project of building Syrian armed opposition unity. At the center of these rifts remains Jabhat al-Nusra, which has increased its influence and leverage throughout northwestern Syria.

The ceasefire plan and the Vienna political process is likely dependent on Jabhat al-Nusra, and other militant Salafist armed groups, not preventing its implementation. In the event that a ceasefire is achieved and a political process begun out of the Vienna process, there will remain significant challenges from within the Syrian armed opposition. This scenario will be most challenged, from within the armed opposition, via a "war after the war," whereby more ideologically extremist Sunni armed opposition groups led by Jabhat al-Nusra demand that the war against the al-Assad government and its allies continues until all of the security and intelligence structures of the regime are removed and a Shari'a governance structure is imposed over all of Syria. In the event of these developments, the pro-opposition states' support for TOW-supplied groups in northwestern Syria could serve the purpose of challenging Jabhat al-Nusra's building governance structure's expansion, if in fact the TOW-supplied armed opposition organizations in northwestern Syria are not in a subordinate position to Jabhat al-Nusra and its ideological allies.

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1. Interview with a Syrian defector from the al-Assad government who worked several years in Damascus with close ties to prominent Syrian opposition, including the armed opposition, leaders involved in the Vienna process. Interview conducted by Viber on November 30.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. Interviews with two Syrian activists with close ties to the Southern Front. Interviews conducted via Skype on October 28, November 14, and December 2.

Turkey's Reaction to the War in Syria

Nihat Ali Ozcan

Just as in other parts of the world, the Syrian civil war has been discussed deeply in Turkey. Turkish public opinion has different views on the Turkish government's policies on Syria. For example, in the last election, although Erdogan's party received 50 percent of the votes, the majority of the voters do not support the Turkish government's policies toward Syria. [1] Every single phase of the Syrian civil war has created complex and different problems for Turkey in the areas of security, economy, foreign policy and domestic politics. In order to understand the process and its outcomes we can touch on four different topics.

Turkey-Syria Relations Before the Civil War

The AKP (Justice and Development Party) came into power in 2002, after an economic crisis. Turkish society had a skeptical approach towards the party's members due to their Islamist ideologies. Erdogan and his colleagues had serious legitimacy issues both in the domestic politics and in the international arena. Initially, the AKP pursued a coherent policy towards the West in order to avoid further pressure and resolve its legitimacy problem. During this period they used the EU membership process and negotiations as a strategic tool. On the other hand, the government pursued a "zero problem with neighbors" policy in order to reduce the role of the military in politics, overcome the economic crisis and find new markets. In this context, besides all other neighbors the government developed good relations with the Assad regime in Syria. An increase in trade had been observed. Citizens benefited from visa exemptions. In addition to these, Erdogan developed personal relations with Assad.

The Road to Civil War

In 2011, as the Arab Spring occurred, Erdogan's party won another general election. Economic success helped the party to gain support from the public and to overcome the issue of legitimacy both inside and the international arena. After this point, Erdogan thought that he did not need the European Union anymore due to the weakening of the military and the opposition parties. Additionally, a peace process started with the PKK, a 30-year-long and troublesome problem for Turkey's government and society.

At this very moment the Arab Spring arose. Erdogan and his team reutilized their Islamist ideologies and motivations, which they had been sidelining for some time. They realized that the Arab Spring could provide the opportunity for their Islamist ideologies to spread in a vast geography. Under these circumstances, a potential Muslim Brotherhood rule in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt seemed only a matter of time.

According to Erdogan and his friends, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria had an extremely high potential to become the ruling party in a post-al-Assad Syria. The Sunnis, who constitute the majority in the country, had been distant from being the ruling power for years, which has instead largely been in the hands of the minority Alawite sect. In case of an election, it seemed that the Sunnis would automatically take power due to their majority. Thus, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the time, Ahmet Davutoglu, visited Bashar al-Assad and advised him to quit his position and called for free and fair elections during this meeting. But al-Assad ignored his advice. According to Davutoglu, the regime was weak and it would collapse if a widespread scale social movement appeared on the streets, just as happened in Tunisia and Libya. So, speeding up the process was essential. Together with its allies, Erdogan gave support to the insurgents in Syria. As time progressed the insurgents failed to defeat al-Assad and eventually their character changed. Radical and jihadist groups became dominant on the field and with the Islamic State coming into the picture, the jihad that started in Syria became a global threat.

The Changing Character of the Syrian Civil War

It is now a fact that Turkey's Syria policy has failed. There are many reasons for this. Apparently, Erdogan analyzed the political system in Syria, its institutions, social structure and geopolitical position wrongly. Erdogan's lack of knowledge on the topics of the insurgency and the Syrian civil war is obvious. The main reason for the wrong analysis was his prejudiced "Islamist ideology." On the other hand, Erdogan ignored the advice of several institutions and simply bypassed the advice coming from military generals and diplomats during important decision-making periods in the Syrian civil war.

Another reason is that he promoted the armed militants rather than the political actors during the initial insurgency period. Erdogan also made the mistake of "interfering in the internal affairs of his neighbors." Soon after that, the interference with covert operations and proxy wars got out of control and eventually started to affect Turkey's own national security.

The lack of capacity and inexperience of government institutions in the means of "covert operations" and "proxy wars" started to become a problem inside Syria. Control over the "friendly insurgents" was lost. The allies' priorities on Syria policies were misunderstood and besides that, the intentions and approach of pro-al-Assad countries were not analyzed correctly. Sectarian perspectives and anti-Western prejudices played an important role in these failures. Al-Assad's resistance and his success in avoiding "regime change" became a personal problem for Erdogan and Davutoglu, which eventually caused them to make irrational decisions.

On the other hand, "speeding up the process for al-Assad's fall" and the open door policy for encouraging the Sunni Muslims to rise up had unforeseen outcomes. More than two million refugees entered Turkey and the Turkish government's spending on those who crossed the border to Turkey is presently around $7 billion, and it is likely that the numbers will increase in the future as the number of refugees continues to grow. Turkey's "open door policy" also however made it easier for the foreign terrorist fighters to also cross the border from Turkey to Syria, and vice versa, spreading some elements of the civil war to Turkey proper.

Syria also became the center for attraction for Turkish citizens with different motivations. Citizens of Turkey joined different militia groups. As the insurgency became prolonged, the radical groups committing unlimited violence gained power. As the Islamic State became the preeminent radical group, Turkey's relationship with radicals damaged its relationship with its allies. On the matter of backing insurgents, Turkey did not share the same views with its allies.

During the first stage of the insurgency, Turkey cooperated with Barzani in order to control the Syrian Kurds. However, the PKK overshadowed Barzani and Turkey with its experience, aggressive stance and clever strategy, underlining Erdogan's weak analysis and wrong strategic decisions.

The attacks on Kobane, Erbil and Mosul by Islamic State undermined Turkey's role and political claims in Syria. As a result, Turkey had to remain silent against the rise of PYD in Syria on one hand, and on the other hand had to open the İncirlik Air Base to the United States. Another development that has limited Turkey's actions in Syria is the Russian military intervention in the region. Following Turkey's shooting down of a Russian military aircraft on November 24, 2015, relations with Russia grew tenser, and Turkey's role in Syria started to diminish.

Turkey and the United States have different approaches regarding the area covering the distance of 98 kilometers, which is controlled by the Islamic State, along the Turkish border in between the two Kurdish enclaves. According to the Turkish side, this area will be ideal for a buffer zone, which President Erdogan still imagines can be achieved. However, there are no strong enough "moderate" opposition groups on the battlefield to push Islamic State back and clean up the area. On the issue of "moderate" opposition and the status of the PYD, Turks and the United States have not been able to reach a consensus. According to the Turkish side, the PYD is a part of the PKK. Turkey still feels threatened by the establishment of geographically and politically integrated Kurdish enclaves in northern Syria, keeping in mind that the adjacent territory is governed by the Iraqi Kurds.

Turkey declared Islamic State a terrorist organization in October 2013. Since last year, Turkey has deployed 25 percent of its land forces to the Syria-Turkey border to enhance physical control there to prevent illegal trade and human trafficking. Turkey also strengthened security checks in its airports for foreign terrorist fighters arriving from other parts of the world. Immediately after the deployment, the flow of illegal human trafficking, as well as oil and other smuggling declined sharply. According to data compiled by the Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet*, the amount of fuel seized on the border decreased while the amount of drugs seized increased, a clear sign that the Islamic State likely switched shifted its strategy from oil smuggling to that of the narcotics trade, after Turkey began to crack down on the oil trade. Ironically, this fact seldom receives attention in the West. Compared to 2014, there has been a serious decrease in the amount of smuggled fuel that was seized while crossing the Turkish border. In 2014, the seized fuel amount of fuel totaled 3,201,000 liters. For the first six months of 2015, however, this number dropped to a mere 27,000 liters (*Hurriyet*, July 25).

Meanwhile, there has been a serious increase in the amount of drugs seized along the Syrian border. The numbers amounted to a total of 6,566 kg for 2014. For the first six months of 2015, this number increased to 1,495,000. In addition, the total amount of cigarettes that were seized also experienced a major increase, rising from 454.999 in 2014 to 620,000 for the first 6 months of 2015. Interestingly enough, there was a major increase in cross-border cattle-smuggling. For example, the total amount of cattle that were seized in 2014 totaled 5,723, while the number has been around 4,500 cattle for the first six months of 2015. Despite all the evidence of Turkey's efforts to crackdown on the Islamic State, Ankara still has trouble convincing its allies and other countries about the scale and success of its effort to crackdown on Islamic State and block its cross-border smuggling (*Hurriyet*, July 23).

Costs of the Syrian Civil War for Turkey

The Syrian Civil War continues to affect Turkey's domestic and foreign policies. Even though Erdogan clearly states that al-Assad's regime is the primary issue, this claim has no basis. All of Turkey's Western allies view the situation in Syria and Iraq through the prism of Islamic State and consider it to be a global threat except for Erdogan. Expecting a regime change in Syria turned into a new wave of global terrorism, and this contains risks for Turkey and relationships with its allies. Besides the allies, relations with Russia and Iran are extremely tense. It is dramatic that Turkey's closest allies are the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Syrian civil war has unsettled the social, political and ideological fault lines of Turkey, and it is producing more problems for the economy, society and national security.

The PKK has made the best use of the Syrian civil war. It gained legitimacy, geographical depth, new members, arms and experience. There are no doubts that it will become one of the most important actors in Syria in the future. This situation may also bring the Kurdish issue in Turkey to an unforeseen point. Throughout the Syrian civil war, the Islamic State strengthened its global network, with the help of local cadres stationed in Turkey. After the fall of Kobane, the Islamic State had the opportunity and space to carry out its ideological war with the PKK within the borders of Turkey.

Conclusion

It will take many long years to establish a steady security environment in Syria. Therefore, we cannot expect anything to be the same compared to the prewar period in Turkey-Syria relations. Additionally, the Syrian central government will be weaker in the future, causing a decentralized political structure. In this process, the sectarian, ethnic and religious disunity and tension will reflect on the political system. It would only be a surprise to expect that these reflections will only affect Syria. Developments will trigger the ethnic and religious fault lines of Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. In this respect, induced Kurdish political aspirations will become a predominant foreign policy issue in the Middle East region. The Kurds will play an important role in regional tensions between the various powers, conflicts and problems and finding solutions to these disputes. In fact, Iraq and Syria will likely witness an intensification of ethnic conflicts between the Arabs and Kurds. The PKK will likely consolidate its power and position while becoming more active in the region. On the one Turkey and the costs for thatyrian civil war

lobal threat.

. Radical and jihadist groups became dominant ion the field key' hand, the strengthening role of the PKK in Syria will intensify Kurdish demands in Turkey, and on the other hand, it will be the determinant actor among the overall Kurdish groups. These developments will eventually put the strengthened PKK to a position and at the same time will trigger adversaries among the Kurds of the region.

Russia's military existence in Syria might become supplemental for its policies around the Black Sea region. Within this period Russia will revitalize its historical relationships with the PKK by the extension of the Kurds. Russia can use the PKK against Turkey as a tool to undermine Turkish interests in the region. It is possible to say that the luckiest actor in the region will be Iran. Iran will strengthen its military and political position in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. This will of course pose grave risks for Turkey.

In the near future, the Islamic State organization will become a threat not only to the rest of the world but also to Turkey. It will take time to overthrow the Islamic State. Pressure on the group will eventually push the terrorist organization to look for new ways and practices to survive. Some of the radical foreign fighters who fought in Syria will go back to their countries following the same route, which they came through. By using their local cadres, these radicalized terrorists will pose a threat to Turkish national security.

The Syrian issue continues to damage Turkey's relationship with its allies and neighbors. The crisis is highly unlikely to end in the near future and unfortunately there is no quick easy solution to resolving the Syria crisis. It will take years for Syria to regain its uniformity, and this will mean increasing threats and loss of money and energy for Turkey.

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Note

1. See, http://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/TP%20 Key%20Findings%20Report%20Turkce%20Final1.pdf Syria and ISIS: parted Stances on Intervention. Approximately 57 percent of the Turkish public who answered the questions are against a military intervention against the Assad's regime in Syria. Only 29 percent of the people support the idea. When asked what they would think if such an intervention came into reality, 37 percent stated that Turkey should completely stay out of this

conflict, and another 30 percent said that Turkey should support a military intervention with non-military channels. Seventeen percent of the people stated that Turkey should join the military coalition. However, such an idea does not find support basis among the Turkish public when this intervention does not have the character to create a buffer zone in order to protect local civilians against the Islamic State. Generally asked, only 29 percent of the participants support the idea of a buffer zone. When the questions are elaborated, 35 percent of the participants support the idea of creating a military buffer zone to protect the Syrian opposition against Assad's regime. Thirty-seven percent of the participants stated that a military buffer zone must be forged against the PYD, thus preventing the formation of a Kurdish populated area. No matter which scenario is put into practice, the majority of the Turkish public is against a military intervention. However, 47 percent of the Turkish participants do support the idea of sending troops to the buffer zone to protect the local civilians against attacks by Islamic State.

The Kurdish Periphery

Wladimir van Wilgenburg

The Kurds play a key role in the war against the Islamic State as they are located on the periphery of the jihadist organization's two de-facto capitals, Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. As a result, both Western states and Russia are courting the Kurds since they do not want to put boots on the ground. However, Turkey has opposed both possible Russian and Western support for the People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel—YPG), a Syrian Kurdish defense force. Turkey also fundamentally opposes the creation of a Kurdish statelet along its Syrian border. Despite this, the mutual interest of the Kurds and the West to contain the Islamic State has brought them closer together.

YPG and Peshmerga Forces

The main Kurdish militias are the Peshmerga forces led by Kurdistan Regional Government president Masoud Barzani in Iraq and the YPG militia in Syria, which is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê—PKK) terrorist group. There are over 160,000 Peshmerga forces patrolling a border of 1,600 kilometers with the Islamic state (Rudaw, September 11; Rudaw, November 25, 2014). The Peshmerga forces already control over 95 percent of the territory that they say they want to hold after capturing the city Sinjar on November 12 (KRG cabinet, April 6). The YPG, on the other hand, constitutes a fighting force of approximately 50,000 fighters that controls most of the Syrian-Turkish border apart from a 90-kilometer line between Azaz and Jarabulus and territories in Idlib and Latakia Governorates (al-Jazeera, June 28).

The Islamic State sees both the YPG and Peshmerga as its most important adversaries on the ground. Its English magazine Dabiq also mentions that the PKK, which it refers to as the same organization as the YPG, and the Peshmerga are the biggest allies of the United States on the ground in Iraq and Syria. [1] The enmity of the Islamic State toward Kurdish militia groups is related to the fact that the Kurds are the biggest recipients of U.S.-led coalition support in both Iraq and Syria.

The Islamic State launched its biggest attack on Iraqi Kurds in August 2014, while its main attack on the YPG was on the Syrian city of Kobane in September 2014 (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 6, 2014; Rudaw, November 23). Both battles led the U.S.-led coalition to give Kurdish forces air cover to contain the Islamic State, enabling them both to inflict

huge casualties on the jihadist organization in Syria and Iraq. In Kobane alone, the Islamic State reportedly lost at least 5,000 fighters (Daily Beast, November 18). Moreover, the Peshmerga recently cut IS supply lines between Mosul and Raqqa by capturing Highway 47 and the city of Sinjar on November 12 in just two days (Rudaw, November 12). The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces have also shown an interest in assisting future Iraqi Army operations in Mosul; however, they do not want to occupy the city because they fear an Arab backlash (Basnews, November 30).

Furthermore, the Kurdish-inflicted losses on the Islamic State could push the organization to shift its focus from the "near enemy" to the "far enemy" by attacking Western countries in the "heart of crusader" territory. [2] An example is the November 13 Paris attack that overshadowed the Islamic State's loss of Sinjar the previous day. The weakening of the Islamic State's narrative of *baqiya wa tatamaddad* (remaining and expanding) prompts them to expand in new territories in North Africa and Asia, and carry out attacks against the "far enemy."

The YPG, Turkey and Future Operations

Although the Iraqi Kurds have secured most of their goals, the Syrian Kurds have not, as they cannot connect the territories of Kobane and Efrin due to Turkish opposition. Any attempt by the YPG to take the city of Jarabulus and link these two regions would invite cross-border fire from Turkey (Now Lebanon, October 26). For Turkey, it is more important to prevent the Kurds from capturing the Syrian territory stretching from Azaz in the west to Jarabulus in the east. Turkey fears a viable united Kurdish statelet along its border, which could be used by the PKK in the future for recruits (Terrorism Monitor, September 17). This fear is heightened after clashes restarted between the PKK and the Turkish state in July 2015, ending the peace process. Therefore, Turkey has proposed a safe zone in this border area in order to prevent YPG advances (Yeni Safak, September 2).

However, the Russian-backed Bashar al-Assad regime has advanced in Aleppo, and IS has threatened to capture Azaz, which could leave the YPG as the only viable alternative to IS along the Syrian-Turkish border (Now, December 2). If IS does capture Azaz, Turkey's plan for a "safe zone" would be finished. This might prompt Turkey to provide more support to rebels along its border or carry out more attacks on Islamic State positions near the border

Russia, Turkey and the Kurds

The intervention of Russia on the behalf of the al-Assad regime in late September and Turkey downing a Russian jet on November 24 has complicated the situation (*Daily Sabah*, Nov 24). Clashes have occurred between Turkish-backed rebels and YPG-allied FSA-rebels in northern Aleppo. The FSA and Islamist rebels accuse the YPG and its allies of receiving Russian air support, while the YPG accuses them of working with Turkey to orchestrate attacks on Kurds (Now, December 2; Hawar News, December 1). This has led to worsened relations between Syrian opposition groups and the Kurds in Aleppo.

The tensions between Russia and Turkey could lead Russia to back the Syrian Kurds in their attempt to take the border strip of Jarabulus to Azaz in order to take revenge on Turkey (*Pravda*, December 2). However, the YPG and Russia differ over their approach to Bashar al-Assad. The YPG is neutral toward al-Assad, but refuses to back his indefinite stay in power, suggesting that al-Assad has to go in the long term in order for the YPG to work with Russa (Sputniknews, November 30; Al-Monitor, October 1). Russians still prefer for al-Assad to stay.

The YPG most likely wants to maintain its neutrality towards both al-Assad and the opposition because it fears that it could lose its support from the U.S.-led coalition. However, the YPG would prefer for both Russia and the United States to work together against the Islamic State. The Kurdish militia could be tempted to use Russia's air cover against FSA rebels and the Islamic State in order to connect its territories if the Kurdish enclave of Efrin in Aleppo faces more danger from Turkish-backed rebel groups.

Raqqa and Hasakah

Currently, the YPG is focusing on Raqqa and Hasakah in order to attain more Western support and to work with Arab and Christian groups so as to control ethnically diverse Arab-Kurdish areas. For this purpose, they formed a joint FSA-YPG operations room in September 2014 that attained coalition support following the IS attack on Kobane. After liberating the city from the Islamic State in January, the YPG managed to capture the Arab majority town of Tal Abyad in June (YPG Rojava, June 16).

Currently, the FSA militias in the joint operations room has several checkpoints 50 kilometers from Raqqa. They are part of a newly formed Syrian Arab coalition allied to the YPG that has received ammunition from the United State to fight against the Islamic State in Raqqa (*Hurriyet*, November 11).

This coalition consists of members of the Shammar tribe in al-Hasakah Governorate and smaller FSA groups and tribes from Raqqa and Deir al-Zor governorates near Raqqa and Kobane. To support this alliance, the United States has deployed 50 special forces soldiers to Kobane to train the Arab and Kurdish forces who are intended to attack Raqqa (AFP, November 27).

To take it a step further, the YPG and its allies set up the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a newly created alliance to receive more support from the West, on October 15 with a smaller Arab and Christian groups that already has made several advances (YPGRojava, October 16). This is in anticipation of further peace talks for a Syrian transition between major stakeholders. The SDF says that it is both an alternative to the Syrian regime and jihadist groups, and that is can provide a template for a federal democratic Syria (Hawar News, November 30). In its first operation, launched on October 31, the SDF managed to advance more than 900 square kilometers, capturing al-Hawl and marching on toward al-Shadadi (Twitter, December 2; Qasioun, November 15).

The goal of the YPG is to secure its territory in al-Hasakah Governorate from future Islamic State attacks by securing the Syrian-Iraqi border near Sinjar, Iraq to the Jabal Abdal Aziz Mountains in southwestern portion of the Syrian governorate. However, tensions with Turkish-backed Syrian rebel groups in northern Aleppo could damage relations between Arab rebel groups and the YPG in the future.

Conclusion

The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces have so far secured over 95 percent of the territory that they wanted to capture in Iraq, and will assist Iraqi forces when they capture Mosul. In Syria, Turkey opposes any further advances from the YPG along the Jarabulus-Azaz border strip. As a result, the YPG has focused its operations more on Raqqa and al-Hasakah to the south so as to receive more Western support. The Russian operations in Aleppo in support of Bashar al-Assad, and the refusal of Turkey to prevent Kurdish forces from advancing across the Syrian border, could push the YPG to pick a side. The different goals of the different actors could further complicate the policies of the U.S. administration, but this also depends on developments on the ground.

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Notes

1. "Just Terror," Dabiq, Issue 12, November 18, 2015, https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/the-islamic-state-e2809cdc481biq-magazine-12e280b3.pdf.
2. *Ibid.*

Caliphate at War: Islamic State Ideology, War Fighting and State Formation

Ahmed S. Hashim

A series of books that I remember from my teenage days when I was in school in France sought to provide a succinct explanation for a variety of phenomena. The series title was *De Quoi S'Agit-Il?* This roughly translates as "what does it mean or what is it all about?" in the deeper sense of explanation rather than mere description. Almost no day goes by without mention of Islamic State and dismay over its repertoire of actions on the ground in either Syria or Iraq ranging from military operations to something incontrovertibly barbaric as mass slaughter or nihilistic erasure of the historical past or mass terrorism as the Sinai, Beirut and Paris. This paper is a summary of my forthcoming book on Islamic State: its historical origins, its ideology and goals, its organization from early times to the present, its war-fighting styles and its war-formation and nation-building enterprise in Syria and Iraq. [1]

History Matters

A century and half ago, a brilliant thinker wrote some of the most profound words in political philosophy:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.

The man was Karl Marx in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. Mercifully, the political and socioeconomic system that was his legacy has been consigned to the "dustbin" of history, but this does not detract from his incisiveness and, in my view, the accuracy of his much of his observations.

History is very important. My historical approach towards what is going on in Iraq is one that lies firmly within the French historical school of *la longue duree,* which favors the study of long-term structural factors over "mere" events to understand what is happening. I am not denying the importance of personalities here in history in general or in Iraq specifically. It suffices to say that in order to understand modern and contemporary Iraq, "long-range" history is crucial. What we think is insignificant or of merely historical record is not in the region where, dare I sound "Orientalist," memories are long and perceived historical injustices are never forgotten. However, while Iraq may be a vast and infinitely rich historical canvas, I want to make only two points here that should constitute food for thought as we address this seemingly peculiar apparition known as the Islamic State.

Two Historical Points to Ponder

First, the Sunni slander of Shi'as is not modern. I am not saying that sectarianism is ingrained or biological, rather it is constructed, but it certainly has a long pedigree. What struck me in the course of the research for my book was that Islamic State's ideology—not really al-Qaeda since the leadership of that organization tried to tone down the Islamic State's rhetoric and viciousness against Shi'as—drew on some interesting anti-Shi'a rhetoric going back centuries to Ibn Asakir al-Dimashqi and Ibn Taymiyyah. Al-Dimashqi lived a hundred years before Ibn Taymiyyah, also in the Fertile Crescent. His was also a time of turmoil, with the Crusader kingdoms seemingly ensconced in the region and myriad heterodox groups challenging mainstream Islam. Al-Dimashqi did what many people do when they are looking for scapegoats: he blamed the Shi'a.

A hundred years later, the much better known Ibn Taymiyyah was confronted with the existence of Crusaders and Mongols despoiling the *umma*, or land of Islam. Of course, these "infidels" bore much responsibility for the problems confronting Islam. However, the "internal enemy," bore as much culpability in his eyes. He began his vituperative assault against what were in his time, the weakest and most despised heretical sects living within the *umma* and whose status as part of the faith was somewhat ambiguous, the Nusayris (today's Alawites) and the Druzes: [they] "are not Muslims [*kharijin an shiat al-Islam*, they have come out of the party of Islam]…Fighting them is therefore lawful [*qitaluhum kana ja'izan*] … and others like them—who live in Muslim lands have aided the Mongols in their war against the Muslims." Much of his ire—presumably because they were a greater danger—was reserved for the mainstream Shi'as whom he referred to as the *rafidis*, or rejectionists because of their refusal to accept the legitimacy of the first three caliphs or successors to Muhammad:

The Rafidis [*al-Rafida*] come next, for they ally themselves with whoever fights the Sunnis. They allied with the Mongols and with the Christians. Indeed, there was in the coastal areas [of the Fertile Crescent] a truce between the Rafidis and the Franks. The Rafidis would ship to Cyprus [Crusader bastion during the Crusades] Muslim horses [!] and armor, as well as captive soldiers of the sultan and other fighters and young warriors. When the Muslims defeat the Mongols, they mourn and are saddened, but when the Mongols defeat the Muslims, they celebrate and rejoice. They are the ones who advised the Mongols to kill the [last Abbasid] caliph and massacre the people of Baghdad. Indeed, it was the Rafidi vizier of Baghdad Ibn al-Alqami who, through deception and trickery, conspired against the Muslims and corresponded with the Mongols to incite them to conquer Iraq and instructed people not to fight them.

Now, I don't know what a "Muslim horse" is. What I do know is that this sectarianism became part and parcel of the Ottoman struggle with the Iranians after the latter were forcibly converted to the Shi'a faith. Saddam Hussein could not use it during the first two decades of his rule over Iraq: he was secular, his country was 60 percent Shi'a and lastly he needed the support of the Iraqi Shi'a against Iran. After the 1991 rebellion in the south and the onset of the so-called "Return to Faith" Campaign, the Shi'a were viewed with suspicion as a "tabour khamis" for Iran. The Salafist-Jihadists, to whom Islamic State and its predecessors firmly belong, have firmly imbibed the hatred of the Shi'a that was in full display when a Saudi Wahhabi army invaded southern Iraq and slaughtered the inhabitants of the holy cities of the Shi'a faith.

Second, the other "long-range" historical factor that is critical to my story is this: modern state-formation and nation building efforts of both foreigners in Iraq and of Iraqis themselves to date have failed dismally. Neither the Ottomans nor the British succeeded for many reasons that we cannot explore here in any detail, tempting as that may be. It suffices to say that the *raison d'etre* of empires has never been to create states or nations out of peripheral areas of which they are in control. It simply defies imperial logic. The Iraqis themselves have made a mess of it, to be sure. They are not the only people who have made a mess of their state-formation and nation building enterprises, but Iraq (and Syria) right now is the country that the world is worried about because this twin failure—of state-formation and nation building—allows Islamic State to proffer its own alternative.

The American state building enterprise of 2003-2011 in Iraq was declared by its originators to have nothing to do with "empire" but everything to do with bringing "freedom" and democracy to a state and a people that had never known it before and simply did not have the wherewithal for it cognitively, materially or institutionally after having been crushed by three decades of brutal government and 12 years of unremitting sanctions imposed by the international community.

Following the departure of the Americans, the Iraqis once again snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory under the aegis of the underwhelming prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki. Al-Maliki fancied himself a revolutionary because he had spent much of his life as part of a conspiratorial and outlawed party, the Da'wa Party, running and hiding from the merciless Baathist regime. But this revolutionary was no Lenin; indeed, he was a mediocre revolutionary at best. Maybe he could have transformed himself into a statesman, one of historical import, after all many revolutionaries have done that. Al-Maliki did not transform into a statesman. He did not think in grand historical terms in the sense of leaving his mark on Iraq as its savior and the man who brought it out of its dark times. To paraphrase, the famous Senator Lloyd Bentsen, al-Maliki was no Bismarck and no Ataturk.

To be sure, the Americans left a fragile and unstable country in 2011. How fragile and unstable was reflected in the fact that contrary to popular perceptions, the extremist predecessor of the Islamic State, namely the Islamic State of Iraq, had not been convincingly defeated, either by the "Sahwa" (or Awakening) or by the "surge" of U.S. troops. Nor had the central government in Baghdad settled the matter of the integration of the Sunni community into the body politic. It was also reflected in the calamitous failure of the Iraqi military and security forces in the wake of Islamic State advances in 2014; this was not a mere "event," it was yet another example of a structural failure of Iraqi state-making. While I have previously stated that history and structure are important, people are not mere prisoners of history, nor are they so constrained by structure that they cannot proceed to make their own history. Iraqis of all stripes bear much of the blame for what transpired between 2011 and the present.

There currently exists a cacophony of voices, views and ideas about the trajectory of the inexorably weakening Iraqi state. At one level is the Iraqi state, which is dominated now by the Shi'a. This state has little power to establish ideological hegemony over the rest of the other communities. It has little power of domination and coercion; look at what happened to its hapless security forces. Indeed, what can this state offer the Sunnis and Kurds as things stand now? Both Sunni Arabs

and Sunni Kurds did hope that things would get better. They did not; things got worse.

At a second level, there are the Kurds. The Kurds have been seriously thinking about going their own way. While there are still some structural constraints in the way of the Kurds' stealthy path towards independence, it has been clear for a while that the sentiment has steadily grown, and particularly more so since the events of 2014.

At the third level, are the Sunni Arabs, really the focus of all the attention given the Islamic State's control over large swathes of Sunni territory. There is an interesting paradox here, which I am exploring in my forthcoming book *The Caliphate At War*. Until 2003, they were at the center of power, or elements of them. Precisely because of that, Saddam kept a close watch on them: Sunnis watched other Sunnis in a Byzantine web of competing security and intelligence services. His particular worry was that disgruntled Sunnis would use the military to shoot their way into power. He made sure that this would never happen, and successfully; after all, he was not overthrown by the Sunni-dominated army. The Sunnis had no alternative power centers; the Sunni Islamic parties had been weakened. The tribes had been strengthened at the local provincial level, but were not national players. The Shi'as and Kurds had alternatives: their alienation from power and exile for many of them allowed them to develop into parties; the Kurds in particular had their sanctuary, which gave them the opportunity to build political machinery. The Sunnis had the insurgency, which was frankly a dismal affair between 2003 and 2007 when many of the groups absconded and joined the Sahwa. The insurgent groups were fractious, did not have clearly defined political and military wings, were wedded to their "restorationist" agenda and were invariably defined by the barbaric AQI of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his successors. The situation did not improve for them after the temporary defeat of ISI in 2009, a defeat that has been overrated as the organization came back again and took advantage of the Sunni community's weaknesses.

Exit, Voice and Loyalty Be Damned: The Theo-Totalitarian Alternative of Islamic State

Fifty years ago, the American economist, Albert Hirschman, wrote a book that has become a minor classic. The book was called *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. The basic premise is that members of an organization, business or state have two possible responses when they perceive that the entity to which they belong is performing below par: they can *exit* (withdraw from the relationship), or they can *voice* (attempt to repair or improve the relationship through communication of the complaint, grievance and calls for

change. If things get better, they would then demonstrate their loyalty anew. Iraq as a state is performing below par, and Islamic State has taken advantage of this with respect to the Sunni community. However, Islamic State does not want to exit from Iraq or Syria; it wants to seize both of them and beyond. Why and how are important issues to address briefly here by looking at its ideology, goals, organization, war fighting and governance or state-formation.

Goals

The goals of the Islamic State have been remarkably consistent since al-Zarqawi's days. Almost ten years ago, al-Zarqawi stated that the political platform of his organization was clarified by the saying of the Prophet: "I was sent to the world with a sword in my hand until all worship would be devoted to Allah alone." This principle, he tells the interviewer "determines our political program." What is that political program? On numerous occasions from 2003 till his death in 2006, Zarqawi defined the group's political program and provided justifications for its way of doing things. For example, he posted an extended statement in the organization's first issue of the online magazine *Dhurwat al-Sanam* in the jihadist *al-Ikhlas* forum. The statement begins by asking and answering the question: what is the "Al-Qaeda of Jihad organization in the Land of the Two Rivers?" It is a group of Muslims "who seek God's gratification by implementing God's absolute authority for themselves and others in harmony with the principle that says: Nothing is dearer to me than man's adherence to my commandments." The group focuses on major, interrelated and thorough objectives as follows:

- Renewal of pure *tawhid*. Propagation of "there is no god but God alone" in countries where Islam did not reach.
- Jihad in the cause of God to exalt God's word, liberate the entire Muslim territories from infidels, establish God's Shari'a in these territories.
- Support for Muslims everywhere, reinstatement of their dignity, which the invaders and traitors have desecrated, reestablishment of the Muslims' usurped rights and exertion of the efforts to improve the situation of Muslims.
- Reestablishment of a wise caliphate similar to the theocracy established by the Prophet. A person will die a pre-Islamic death if he does not have allegiance to a caliph.

The statement poses the question: Why do we carry out operations against the Americans and their agents, including the army and the police? The answers:

- To gratify God, save Muslims, their honor and property from assailants and expel the aggressor from the Land of

the Two Rivers.

- To salvage the honor of our fraternal brothers, the chastity of our sisters and the innocence of the Muslim children who are killed by the Americans and their agents.
- To reestablish an Islamic caliphate in Baghdad that shines with the brightness of justice and prosperity reminiscent of the days of caliph Harun al-Rashid.
- To kill everyone whose soul is debased and who assists infidels in their war against Muslims in the territory of Iraq. Those include army personnel, policemen, agents and spies who help the Americans to commit crimes.

True, many things have changed since his death in 2006, but the Islamic State still clings to al-Zarqawi's ideological legacy and his goals.

Organization

Organizationally, Islamic State is vastly more developed than its predecessors, though paradoxically this makes it more susceptible to destruction. In 2003, al-Zarqawi started with an organizational structure that is not based on a rational system of management and functional specialization. Rather it was based more on a circle of kin, family and friends, particularly of those who came from the Fertile Crescent— Jordanians, Lebanese (very few), Syrians and Palestinians. Some of them had been with him in Afghanistan in their own camp in Herat in Afghanistan and later followed him into Iraq.

The exigencies of war in Iraq against a wide-ranging group of enemies forced al-Zarqawi to develop a more formal structure. The group around al-Zarqawi, which was not really much of an organization to date but rather a group of like-minded individuals had to *organize to organize*, that is, they had to turn themselves into an organization with specific tasks and missions. It had to then establish a system of management, that is, a leadership that managed the organization as it set about its deadly business of bringing mayhem to Iraq. The organization's tasks were numerous. First, such an organization needed to manage relations with the local population, the Iraqis and particularly the myriad of local insurgent groups. Relations with the Iraqis were not always smooth. Al-Zarqawi was suspicious of the Sunni Arabs, seeing them as one of the following: apathetic and indifferent, closet Baathists or worse, collaborators with the enemy. Nonetheless, since he was in their country, he began cooperating with insurgent groups like the group of Iraqi Islamist fighters in Fallujah led by Omar Hadid. Second, his organization recognized the value of recruiting the many Arab volunteers in Iraq who had been caught flat-footed by the downfall of the regime. Some chose to return

home; others joined al-Zarqawi because the Iraqis did not want them. Third, the organization was going to be involved in fighting for the first time in a serious way. It needed to become functionally specialized with distinct expertise and skill levels. Al-Zarqawi's successors sought to further build up the organization and were deluded into thinking that the time was ripe for an Islamic state under Abu Umar al-Baghdadi at the very time when the organization was being hollowed out by relentless U.S. operations and by the major assault on the jihadists by the thoroughly disgruntled Sunni insurgents.

War Fighting

The Islamic State and its predecessors had to set up a force structure or army that must be configured in such a way that it would not succumb easily to the more powerful forces of their state opponents. Islamic State as it currently stands is a terrorist outfit, a guerrilla organization and a quasi-conventional force. It has come a long way since al-Zarqawi's day. His chief weapon was the suicide bombing campaign. Insight into the networks is difficult to gain, but they do have an infrastructure. The suicide bomber cannot do this alone: (a) there is a safe house; (b) the bomb-maker; (c) the spiritual handler and (d) the security and reconnaissance teams. Contrary to popular perceptions, a slight majority of the targets in Iraq between 2003 and 2009 were against government, police and military, that is the infrastructure of the state, not commercial and civilian targets. However, many of the killed were obviously Shi'a. The ratio changed after the campaigns of 2012 to the present. Many civilian areas were targeted, markets in particular.

It then progressed to a situation where the Islamic State has developed into something akin to a hybrid structure to borrow a term popularized by Frank Hoffmann. I use the term in two ways: (a) Islamic State has a range of capabilities spanning the fighting spectrum from terrorism to guerrilla war to semi-conventional war and (b) it can go back and forth along this spectrum depending on circumstances, environment and the nature and characteristics of the enemy it faces. When under immense pressure, it reverts back to its specialty: the suicide bombing campaign using either the solo suicide bomber or the more effective VBIED.

Islamic State "strategists" used to complain that Iraq was not suitable for classic guerrilla warfare in the rural areas because of the lack of sanctuaries, the absence of truly inhospitable terrain such as in Afghanistan or Yemen and because of the ability of U.S. forces to move rapidly anywhere and anytime in Iraq. The situation for the extremists was remedied to some extent by their determination to establish a sanctuary

in Diyala province to the northeast of Baghdad. The terrain there enabled them to establish some training grounds to set up quite well-trained and disciplined small units that actually stood and fought U.S. combat forces in a significant battle in Diyala.

State-Formation and Nation Building

Since the Islamic State was also in the process of state-formation and nation building, they sought to develop governance and control structures that are more transparent than the leadership and bureaucratic structure at the first level (the level that "governs the organization," as it were). This state infrastructure had to be developed and defended against both internal enemies and against the state or foreign forces with which the movement is in conflict. In short, a violent armed non-state actor is often engaged in both an *orgy of destruction* aimed at the state structure and administrative apparatus of its enemy (and often only secondly at its military forces), and an *orgy of construction* as it seeks to build its own counter-state.

The Future of Islamic State

Despite the Islamic State's efforts to portray an image of success in its state-formation process, the consensus of opinion is that they are not doing a very good job. The effort is suffering from immense corruption, lack of bureaucratic and administrative capacity and it is reportedly facing dwindling support. State-formation requires financial resources, but it is still not clear whether finances are dwindling and how far. However, in my estimation the biggest problem that the Islamic State faces is a structural one that it will be incapable of resolving because of the logic of its ideology and the number of enemies it has created. To be more specific: the Islamic State spends considerably more time exerting domination within its restive domains and fighting its enemies—both constitute war-making—and is not able to spend enough time in state-formation and consolidation. Within its domains, such as they are, the Islamic State has not been able to move from the dynamic of domination—meaning always relying on the threat or use of coercion—to that of hegemony or establishment of legitimacy. What it has going for it so far is that the resistance to it within its domains is not solid, despite the existence of anti-Islamic State insurgents, because the captive populations have not been given hope or support from the outside. Many Sunnis are caught between Scylla—the Islamic State—and Charybdis—the Shi'a-dominated government in Baghdad and its vengeful militias. This provides the Islamic State with the legitimacy of the worst alternative.

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Note

1. Ahmed S. Hashim, *The Caliphate at War: Ideological, Organizational, and Military Innovations of Islamic State*, London: Hurst and Company, (May 2016). The paper is also based on my many observations and notes in a collection of diaries I maintained while on deployment with U.S. forces in Iraq between 2003-2004; 2005-2006 and in 2007.

ISIS and al-Qaeda: Tactical Twins, Strategic Enemies

Michael W.S. Ryan

How can "Daesh" and al-Qaeda be both tactical twins and strategic enemies? [1] Their tactics are very similar. Even their strategies have the same roots in classical guerrilla doctrine. In a short article, one cannot review all the points of convergence and difference between the two organizations. However, one can begin to define how their respective strategies diverge and why the two are now mortal enemies. Without clarity on these points, no effective counter-strategy can be devised against either.

A good approach to these questions begins with a description of the overarching political military context for Salafist-Jihadist groups, what I would like to refer to as the "*strategic wrapper*" into which their tactics fit. What I am calling a strategic wrapper is, in broad strokes, the model by which the success of their guerrilla and terrorist tactics may be judged. Without this strategic orientation, we are doomed to interpret temporary tactical adjustments as changes in strategic direction. Or, we might conflate legal and social doctrines with military doctrine and the desire for power of individuals at the center of these organizations. This is a difficult task unless we find the key to interpret al-Qaeda and Daesh thinking about war and politics.

Determining the strategic wrapper of Daesh or al-Qaeda cannot be solely an academic question, if we hope to defeat them. Fortunately, we do not need to guess at the strategic wrapper for either organization, but let us first be clear about what it is not. It is not an apocalyptic vision of end times, as some have suggested recently. The apocalyptic vision is used as a powerful mobilization narrative, but it does not influence military strategy, let alone tactics, for either organization.

By using it as a teaching tool, both organizations have endorsed *The Administration of Strategy* by Abu Bakr Naji, which states clearly that the path to establishing an Islamic state is exactly the same as the path to establishing any other state. [2] Another major influence on both organizations, Abu Musab al-Suri, did collect over 100 pages of *ahadith* (the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) about jihad. Many of these were apocalyptic, which were meant as assurance that jihadists would win in the end no matter how long it might take or how powerful their enemies might seem. To amplify this point, al-Suri also quoted a number of European thinkers on the decadence of the West. In his days of darkest but defiant despair, al-Suri placed these 100

pages as an appendix to over 1500 pages about how to defeat jihadist enemies, especially the United States. [3] In all of those pages, the military strategy was rational and modern, based on an adaptation of historic guerrilla warfare to the context of jihadist warfare.

Although Daesh and al-Qaeda are both Salafist Muslim organizations, Islam is not their strategic wrapper. They both consider themselves to be Salafist-Jihadists, which establishes their claim to be within the Muslim community, and their Salafism is intended as a basis of the law within the territories they govern and the state they hope to establish. In the words of Abu Bakr Naji, Salafism-Jihadism is a mixture of divine and universal laws. Divine laws are revealed, and universal laws are subject to observation and reason. As a recent Daesh security manual emphasized, Allah created causality for human reason to interpret. [4] Prime examples of universal laws for Salafist-Jihadists are the laws of politics and war, which are subject to political military reasoning from empirical evidence. Naji cautions that these universal laws grind down all who ignore them. According to training materials from both organizations, Salafist-Jihadists do not use Islam to determine military strategy. They appear to bend Islam to meet the needs of their political military strategy, although Daesh is only too happy to debate such an assertion.

Daesh and al-Qaeda are fraternal, not identical, twins; their common characteristics are more salient than their differences. Continuing with the metaphor, one could say that they share the same political-military DNA. Although they would disagree, much of the Daesh group's worldview can be traced to the writings and teachings of Ayman al-Zawahiri, which are elaborated in the works of Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji among others. Like Maoist revolutionaries, these strategists argue that only field commanders can devise the strategic plan for a particular theater of operations. *Der Spiegel* discovered one such plan in Syria whose author clearly used the knowledge and experience of an officer from the fallen secular security state of Saddam Hussein (*Der Spiegel*, April 18).

Daesh and al-Qaeda are enemies because of the famous dispute over who was to be in charge of operations in Iraq and Syria. At the root of that disagreement was a rejection of al-Zawahiri's regional strategy, not as a whole, but for the current period of what both sides see as the "long war."

Tactical Twins: The Strategic Wrapper

The desktop computer that Ayman al-Zawahiri used in his office in Kabul before the US and Northern Alliance

destroyed the Taliban government contained working papers, drafts of his writings, letters, business forms and checklists for interrogations. One of the working papers in a folder marked *amn* (security) contained an untitled white paper about guerrilla warfare. [5] Almost certainly written by Abu Musab al-Suri, the paper describes how to wage guerrilla warfare within an Islamic context. Many of the examples are taken verbatim from the Arabic translation of Robert Taber's 1965 book *War of the Flea,* which examines why insurgencies (mostly socialist revolutions of the 20th century) succeeded or failed. The white paper includes a description of the three-stage Maoist revolution. The first stage is called "attrition," the second "equilibrium," and the third "decision." Numerous Salafist-Jihadist writers and leaders who wrote about jihad have alluded to this Maoist three-stage process, including Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Musab al-Suri, who have influenced the Daesh organization's military thinking.

The first stage is a stage of preparation, mobilization and training. It is marked by guerrilla warfare with light weapons and terrorism. The document in al-Zawahiri's computer refers to Mao's metaphor of the war of the flea, in which the weak flea's relentless bites sicken and kill the apparently more powerful dog. Jihadists in this stage use terrorism in populated areas and guerrilla tactics to damage and exhaust the enemy, forcing its better equipped armies and security forces to withdraw to fortified areas and leaving pockets of territory (provinces, cities or parts of either) to the guerrillas. Lacking airpower, jihadists use the suicide bomber as their version of shock and awe done on the cheap, in combination with small unit tactics.

In the second stage, according to Naji's explanation, the jihadists govern with what he calls the administration of savagery, which is a primitive proto-state that is set up as government forces withdraw. This "administration" governs what Naji defines as savage chaos, the equivalent of Hobbes's state of nature in which people will accept any governance that provides security and rudimentary services such as food and shelter. This stage is sometimes called strategic equilibrium or stalemate. In this stage, for example, neither Daesh nor Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, can overthrow the central government, nor can the central governments of Syria or Iraq destroy the jihadists' ability to hold territory. As this stage progresses, the guerrillas achieve the ability to wage semi-conventional warfare, using captured weapons if they are not supplied by some external power. For the most part, al-Qaeda is stuck in stage one and Daesh has achieved stalemate in stage two for most of the territory it controls in Syria and Iraq. However, these stages are not stable or absolute. Daesh gained territory quickly, but has lost control of some areas; in others, it has driven out

all opposing forces, but the central governments are by no means defeated. Generally, both al-Qaeda and Daesh move back and forth between stages one and two, depending on local circumstances.

Stage three represents true victory for the insurgents, with a final series of decisive battles or with the collapse of an exhausted central government. The jihadist forces are now mostly a conventional army, and its mujahideen guerrillas become an adjunct. It is conceivable that stage three could be achieved in Syria, but not soon, not as long as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad maintains significant external support and the opposition groups remain divided. Achieving this military decision in Iraq seems highly unlikely because taking Baghdad and the traditional Shi'a south appears almost impossible. Castro in Cuba, the North Vietnamese with their Viet Cong vanguard and Mao's Communist Party in China are solid examples of achieving stage three. The Daesh organization is far from that condition, and al-Qaeda and its jihadist allies are undecided as to the wisdom of creating an Islamic emirate at this stage. Unless the international community agrees on a way to topple Daesh, the organization will continue to occupy the peripheries of both countries and will continue to call its minimal and brutal government a state. However, Daesh can still judge itself to be winning even though it has not achieved Mao's third stage. For the guerrilla, survival is a kind of victory, and holding and expanding territory represents movement towards final decision. At this stage, it is accurate to say that the jihadist movement, especially Daesh, in the Levant and Mesopotamia is winning.

Strategic Enemies

Since the end of World War I, all jihadist groups in Muslim-majority countries have shared, at a minimum, the goals of establishing some version of Shari'a as the only law of the state in which they operate, and eventually restoring the caliphate. Al-Qaeda and its heirs have also had the goal of creating Islamic emirates or states within Muslim areas to overthrow the Westphalian system in former colonies, in preparation for establishing a caliphate someday. Al-Qaeda hoped to achieve that goal after a long war to establish a new Islamic state in traditionally Muslim lands using what they referred to as the "prophetic method," by which they meant along the lines of their understanding of the original Muslim state in Medina. The prophetic method is also claimed by Daesh.

When Daesh leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi rejected al-Zawahiri's decision that his organization should remain the Islamic State in Iraq and that Jabhat al-Nusra should

fight in only in Syria, the Iraqi leader did not reject only al-Zawahiri's decision; he rejected the strategy jointly fashioned by Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri from the beginning. Al-Qaeda claimed to be the fighting vanguard for the jihadist movement. Al-Qaeda's leaders' strategy involved a network of local jihadist groups rising up together to overwhelm the world order at some distant future date after the United States would be forced to withdraw from the greater Middle East.

Al-Baghdadi's vision is based on a clear and quite different plan. He envisioned victory through sectarian polarization, terror, ideological cleansing and the apocalyptic vision of a modern caliphate fighting on the brink of the end times. If the vision of the caliphate was ancient in Daesh's description, the road to establishing it is very modern.

Modern insurgent groups traditionally use terrorism to manipulate the populations on which they rely for victory. Insurgents' reliance, however, is never based on trust. Insurgents must first polarize societies and draw some factions to them while demonizing others. For al-Baghdadi and his predecessors, sectarianism became the stuff of polarization, while terror was the tool that shaped, enhanced and maintained it. Terror for Daesh is what the "propaganda of the deed" was for 19th century anarchists—a way to draw recruits by weakening enemies.

Al-Baghdadi and his lieutenants chose a strategy that required a totalitarian, ideologically pure end-state. They also needed to establish territory they ruled and held against all enemies as the jihadist ideology required—but they needed to do it as quickly as they could while chaos reigned in the Levant and Mesopotamia. They prepared their strategy for this course in late 2009 and early 2010, in anticipation of the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in 2011. The principles of their strategy included: forced unification of ideological factions, the creation of a jihadist awakening movement among the tribes, military and political planning to deal with changing circumstances, emphasizing a jihadist icon for the coming period around which Muslims could rally and working with other groups to achieve goals. [6]

The Daesh leadership's focus on creating a jihadist icon required it to declare a caliphate as soon as circumstances warranted, which came with the destruction of the border between Syria and Iraq and the taking of Mosul on June 14, 2014.

Now claiming to be the leader of all Muslims, al-Baghdadi also claimed leadership of the jihadist movement. Al-Zawahiri disavowed Daesh, and the jihadist shadow civil war began in earnest in Syria. At this point, the better-funded

Daesh, with its superior propaganda, offers advantages to jihadist groups outside of Syria and Iraq that the current al-Qaeda has difficulty matching. In fact, Daesh's ability to raise money and wage a quality information war is so much greater than al-Qaeda's, it might seem to employ different tactics. In reality, the tactics are equivalent, but Daesh's execution is so much more brutally effective that it looks new. Also, its political strategy of declaring the caliphate, with all of its downsides, still gives Daesh a propaganda advantage in recruiting foreign fighters.

If these two major jihadist factions could unite, the resulting organization would theoretically be much more powerful. However, one of them must first change its political strategy, which would likely require a leadership change. With economies built on criminal networks and extortion of local populations, neither faction appears to be on a firm foundation despite Daesh's current success.

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Notes

1. Daesh is the abbreviation of al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wal-Sham, the Arabic name for the group referred to as the Islamic State, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham. Daesh is the Arabic acronym equivalent of ISIS in English.
2. Abu Bakr Naji, *Idarah al-Tawahhush: Akhtar Marhalah Satamurru biha al-Ummah* (The administration of savagery: the most dangerous phase through which the ummah will pass), N.p. [presumably Peshawar]: Markaz al-Dirasat wa al-Buhuth al-Islamiyyah, 2004) formerly accessed at http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=chr3ofzr; for an explanation of Naji's theory, see Michael W. S. Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy: The Deep Battle Against America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) pp. 147-192.
3. For references and an analysis of al-Suri's use of apocalyptic *ahadith*, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, *The Apocalypse in Islam*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011) pp. 186-193.
4. Michael W. S. Ryan, Hot Issue: "How DAESH's Lone Wolf Guidance Increases the Group's Threat to the United States," The Jamestown Foundation, November 24, 2015, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44834&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=2642d32f425637412758b56c42509267#.VltyrYQrw6.
5. The *Wall Street Journal* reporter Alan Cullison shared files from al-Zawahiri's desktop with the author. Cullison purchased the computer from a thief in Kabul after al-

Qaeda had fled the city pursuant to the fall of the Taliban government. For the story, see Alan Cullison, "Inside Al-Qaeda's Hard Drive," *The Atlantic*, September 1, 2004, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/09/inside-al-qaeda-s-hard-drive/303428/.

6. *Khuttah Istratijiyyah li Ta'ziz al-Mawqif al-Siyasy li Dawlah al-Iraq al-Islamiyyah* (A Strategic Plan to Improve the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq), 2009/2010. Formerly available at http://www.hanein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=158433. See also, Murad Batal al-Shishani, "The Islamic State's Strategic and Tactical Plan for Iraq," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor,* August 8, 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42728&cHash=25347708f9f9a0fc36db1096e5a68e13.

Europe's Jihadist Pipeline to Syria

James Brandon

As previous papers have outlined, the Islamic State poses a range of different threats to different people. One is a more or less conventional threat to the state structure in the Middle East. The other is an unconventional threat to countries further afield, including in the West, and particularly to their civilian populations.

This presentation is going to focus on the issue of the Islamic State's foreign fighter manpower, which enables it to both challenge states in the Middle East and to threaten countries outside the region, particularly focusing on foreign volunteers from Europe.

To do this, I will look at (a) the number of people going to fight in Syria, and where they come from; (b) how the process of Western volunteers going to the Islamic State has evolved over time and (c) how the Islamic State has sought to guide their arrival in the region—and what long-term implications this will have.

Numbers of Foreign Fighters From Europe

As other presenters have indicated, the total number of foreign fighters who have joined jihadist groups in Syria, principally the Islamic State, including those who have died or returned, is somewhere around 20,000. The total number from Europe is more than 4,000. This is twice the number in December 2013, two years ago.

According to figures from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) in London and the Soufan Group, the largest number of fighters per capita in absolute terms is around 700 from France, followed by a few hundred from the UK and Germany (*The Economist*, August 30, 2014). In relative terms, the highest number is from Belgium. These high absolute and relative numbers from France and Belgium are worth bearing in mind given recent attacks in France—and the fact that these appeared to have been directed from Belgium.

After Belgium, it is also worth noting that Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands have high number of jihadists per capita. The number of foreign fighters from Denmark is particularly significant as the country obviously remains a high-priority target for jihadists due to the Muhammad cartoon controversy. Given the France and Belgium precedent, it is possible this high relative and absolute number of Danish

foreign fighters will correlate into attacks there at some point.

Islamic State's Shrinking Gateway

In terms of actually getting to the Islamic State, volunteers face a range of challenges, including leaving their home countries, transiting through Turkey and crossing into Syria. At present, the Islamic State is largely surrounded by hostile powers—the Kurds, the Iraq government, Bashar al-Assad's forces—and also inhospitable desert areas. One result of the recent advances against the Islamic State, particularly by the Kurds, is that the area connecting the Islamic State to Turkey—its main access point to the outside world—has been really squeezed. At present, the connecting frontier between the Islamic State and Turkey is about 60 miles long. By comparison, the whole border with Syria and Turkey is around 550 miles long.

This means that these large numbers of jihadists are having to transit an increasingly narrow stretch of frontier, which has only two official crossing points. This is a challenge for the Islamic State as it is much tougher for them to get recruits in now. But, as has been emphasized in previous talks, the Islamic State is a learning organization, and they are adapting to this challenge.

To show how the environment for Islamic State recruits has changed, I am going to look at one of the most prominent British jihadists—Iftekar Jaman, the leader of the so-called Portsmouth Cluster of jihadists. Jaman travelled to join the Islamic State in March 2013, and his journey to Syria shows how difficult, ad hoc and dangerous the process was in early 2013—and how he himself made a big contribution to making the journey easier (*New Statesman*, November 6, 2014).

To give some background, Jaman was superficially well-integrated. His parents were first generation migrants from Bangladesh, and owned a successful restaurant. He worked in a number of jobs in retail and call-centers and got on well with colleagues. Unlike many other jihadists, he had no issues with criminality or drug use. But at the same time, he also became involved in Salafist preaching networks in Portsmouth in his teenage years.

In March 2013, when he was 23, he decided to join the jihad in Syria. His motivations are unclear. Publicly, he said he wanted to fight against the "oppression" of the al-Assad regime. However, he specifically wanted to join Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's official affiliate. He also adopted a sectarian view of the conflict, with Shi'as oppressing Sunnis, and saw the West as just standing by. At a personal level, he also saw

this decision as empowering; he produced pictures showing how he wanted to see himself in Syria, and the contrast with the slightly nerdy individual he was in previous pictures taken in the UK is clear to see.

After making this decision, Jaman flew to Turkey in May 2013, and took a bus to Reyhanli on the border. He did not, however, have any contacts or a clear plan. On the bus towards this border town, he approached the only bearded person on the bus and spoke to him. This man turned out to be a Sunni Arab from Aleppo in Syria. Jaman took a big risk and told him that he wanted to travel to Syria for jihad. The man was sympathetic; he took Jaman to the border and helped him cross. Then on the other side, he drove him to Aleppo and directly to Jabhat al-Nusra's recruitment center.

However, because Jaman had traveled without any prior contacts, he was rejected by Jabhat al-Nusra as he had no one to vouch for him. They actually accused him of being a British spy and—to get rid of him—referred him to one of the less religious rebel groups nearby. He left the recruitment center very downhearted, actually crying. However, he then had another stroke of luck when he met an Algerian jihadist in a nearby coffee shop.

The Algerian tells him about another group called the Islamic State, then the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and that they are the real deal—and takes Jaman to see them. The Islamic State vetted him for a fortnight, and then accepted him. This account shows very clearly that in the early days of the Islamic State (in 2013), the journey was extremely risky. There was no channel or process for foreign fighters coming in, and the Islamic State did not prioritize getting European foreign fighters into its territory.

Social Media Outreach

However, a result of Jaman's arrival, the Islamic State's lack of outreach began to change in mid-2013. As soon as Jaman arrived, the Islamic State assessed his skills. They decided he was not much use on the battlefield, so they gave him a role in trying to reach out to other English-language speakers through the internet and encourage them to come to Syria. Over the next six months, he became one of the Islamic State's social media stars. He did this through posting pictures of daily life in the caliphate. Some showed him posing with guns while others showed landscapes or even just cats. He also took part in online question and answer sessions with potential volunteers on open forums, reassuring them about not speaking Arabic among other concerns. Once he had established a connection with would-be recruits, he then engaged them in one-on-one private messaging

conversations with them—providing both ideological radicalization, addressing their concerns and advising on the practical logistics on travel to Syria.

One of Jaman's main achievements during this time was to encourage an entire network/friendship of five others from his hometown of Portsmouth to join him in Syria. The group included friends (and one of his cousins) and were mostly in their early 20s. They seem to have been attracted by the sense of adventure, comradeship and purpose that Jaman's social media output had promised them.

Following advice from Jaman, they booked a package holiday at a resort in Antalya in Turkey and traveled as ordinary holiday makers to avoid attracting attention. A picture taken of them in October 2013 in Gatwick airport en route to Turkey shows them without beards and wearing casual clothes—nothing that would arouse suspicion.

After reaching Turkey, Jaman connected them with an Islamic State supporter in Turkey, who was able to help them over the border into Syria, where an Islamic State contact immediately met them and transported them to safety—probably to near Raqqa. As this demonstrates, Jaman had very quickly learned from his own difficult journey to Syria and was able to set up a network that would safely and effectively channel European volunteers into Syria.

The postscript to this is that Jaman was killed in December 2013—only six months after arriving in Syria—in a battle near Deir al-Zor. In addition, within a year, four of the five Portsmouth volunteers that Jaman brought over were also killed. The fifth returned home early and was convicted in the UK.

Abu Rumaysah

The second example is more recent. "Abu Rumaysah," real name Siddhartha Dhar, was one of the leading followers of Anjem Choudary and was active in al-Muhajiroun. A Hindu who converted to Islam, he was born in India, but brought up in the UK. He traveled to Syria in November 2014. His story shows that by this point, travel to Syria had become much easier for someone with the right knowledge and connections.

He was detained by UK police on November 10, 2014, on suspicion of encouraging terrorism. He was released on bail and ordered to hand in his passport. Instead, two days later, he took a coach to Paris. He then, apparently, caught a flight to Turkey. Once in Turkey, he crossed the border, evidently without any difficulties. Once in the Islamic State, he was

rapidly vetted by the jihadist organization and allowed to get onto social media on November 26. He immediately became active on Twitter, changing his photo to the Islamic State logo and taunting the British authorities on how easily he had traveled to Syria (*Independent*, November 26, 2014).

The remarkable thing about this story is that even with his heightened profile—and while being on the run—Abu Rumaysah was able to complete this journey to Syria, from London to Raqqa in two weeks. This shows how effective the Islamic State's pipeline from Europe to Syria had become by mid-2014. It also shows that even after the death of Jaman, the system that he had helped to establish was able to continue functioning. Another interesting thing that Abu Rumaysah's tweets show is that reaching the Islamic State is in itself perceived as a victory. And they are right; it is.

***Hijra* to the Islamic State**

Travel to the Islamic State has become more complex again. Turkey has been actively tackling the foreign fighter situation since late 2014. For instance, the Turkish prime minister's office has said that in 2014, Turkey had prevented 520 suspected militants from entering Syria. The Islamic State's border with Turkey has also shrunk considerably. However, the Islamic State knows the flow of foreign recruits is vital to its operations. For instance, foreign fighters play a disproportionate role as suicide bombers. The flow of recruits is also vital to its self-image. One of its key messages is that the caliphate is drawing in true Muslims from across the world. If it stops attracting Muslims, then by its own measure, it is failing.

To manage help these people traveling to the caliphate, and to ensure as many people reach it as possible, the Islamic State has produced a guide "Hijrah to the Islamic State" (*Guardian*, February 25). This is a 50-page e-book in English that was published in February 2015, and it is the most comprehensive guide on how to enter Syria. The guide also provides pre-travel advice, such as listing items to pack. However, it also gives extensive advice on how recruits can prepare in order to avoid attracting the attention of the Turkish security forces. For instance, it advises buying a return ticket—as opposed to a one-way ticket to Turkey—so as not to attract attention. Another tip is for recruits to buy a tourist guidebook for Turkey: "Make sure you have a good knowledge of the tourist attractions in Turkey... This is important since if they question you, you can just brandish this in front of their noses and show them how serious of a tourist you are."

The document also illuminates the Islamic State network in Turkey. For example, once in Turkey, the guide advises that recruits should buy a local Turkish sim card, call their IS contact and arrange a meeting place. Depending on their contact, they may meet the volunteer at an airport, even in Istanbul. Or, they may need to get a bus to southeastern Turkey, nearer to Syria, to meet their contact there. The guide also warns recruits that the contact may be clean-shaven or smoking. He will then take the volunteer to a safe-house near the Syrian border. The border crossing is then arranged by the contact—and this is usually done at dawn or at night—and there will be other jihadist contacts waiting on the Syrian side of the border. This is usually done an unofficial crossing point.

One surprising aspect of this document is that it seeks to play down the risks. For example, it says the "worst that can happen" if the Turkish police detain the volunteer, "All they can do is stop you, request you to produce identification (your passport, most probably), ask you a few questions, probably take you to a police station and ask you some more questions."

This also is a common motif of Islamic State messaging. Its message is not that becoming a jihadist is dangerous or exciting—or all the things we associate with recruitment. Instead their message is that it is *easy*. The Islamic State's message is that jihad is in reach of ordinary Muslims: one does not have to be a superhero to be a jihadist. And that is reflected in this document.

To conclude with a recent example, on November 18 of this year, two of the best known British al-Muhajiiroun members—Simon Keeler and Abu Izzadeen—were arrested in Hungary (*Daily Mail*, November 19). Both had been jailed previously, in 2008, for inciting terrorism abroad and terrorist fund-raising. They were also among the most prominent radicals in the UK, with multiple TV interviews and have given sermons. Also, they are both extremely committed to the core jihadist ideology (i.e., their belief in applying Shari'a law, on the supposed religious obligation to recreate the caliphate, etc.). Keeler and Izzadeen were apprehended while on a train to Romania, apparently heading to Turkey and then to the Islamic State. Both were under travel bans, meaning they could not leave the UK without permission. It is not clear how they got to Hungary.

There are a few points arising from this latest story: (a) Their arrests on a train in Hungary show that would-be jihadists are developing new routes—in this case, apparently travelling solely by land, and also taking an indirect route; (b) it also shows that if individuals believe that they have a religious duty to join the Islamic State, they are going to keep trying—even if they have been stopped before and know that they are recognizable figures. and (c) the other, more positive, message is that even if these individuals left the UK undetected—which is a problem—the European authorities are now communicating more effectively on these issues.

Conclusion

The good news is that Turkey is actively preventing foreign fighters entering from Syria—and this evident from the precautions that the Islamic State advises people to take. In addition, the remaining Islamic State-controlled border open between Syria and Turkey is just 60 miles long compared to an overall 550 miles. This is going to make a difference; resources can be focused on this smaller area, and that common border may shrink further in the next year or so.

The bad news is the Islamic State has responded previously to challenges to its "rat-run" into Syria and it will continue to find inventive solutions. In addition, what is clear is that the Islamic State has developed a complex physical network within Turkey and virtual communications channels from Syria into Europe. At present, this network is focused on sending recruits into Syria. However, once this network is in place, it will be very easy for the Islamic State to reverse the flow and send money, arms and recruits back into Europe. Indeed, the Paris attack suggests this has already started to happen.

The final point is that this flow of European recruits into Syria is a symptom of a problem and not a root cause. These jihadists are being made in the West. They are not being radicalized in Syria; they are seeing and reading about the Islamic State's actions at home and deciding that this is something they want to be part of. They are radicals before they even set off to Syria. Ultimately, if we want to stop individuals travelling to Syria for jihad, we are going to have to look closer to home.

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Islamic State and West Africa

Jacob Zenn

2015 marked the year when "Boko Haram" evolved from an ostensibly domestic-rooted and globally unaffiliated militant group into a "Province" in the Islamic State's global structure. This transition was formalized on March 7, 2015, when "Boko Haram" leader Abubakr Shekau pledged *baya'a*, or allegiance, to the Islamic State caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (*Vanguard*, March 7). In the ensuing weeks, al-Baghdadi's spokesman accepted Shekau's pledge, the Islamic State publicized Shekau's pledge in its official magazine *Dabiq* and other Islamic State "Provinces" in Algeria, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Iraq issued ten videos of congratulations for Shekau's pledge (Nigeria News, March 12).

The ten videos of congratulations are the highest number of videos that the Islamic State has released on any theme or issue since al-Baghdadi's declaration of the caliphate in May 2014. This was a testament to the significance to the Islamic State of "Boko Haram," which was renamed the "Islamic State in West Africa Province," or ISWAP. ISWAP became the Islamic State's largest acquisition outside of the Middle East and furthered the narrative that the Islamic State was remaining (*baqiya*, in Arabic) in Syria and Iraq and expanding (*tatamadad*, in Arabic) globally, especially in Africa.

Why and How Shekau Made the Pledge

The most likely explanation for Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi is that Shekau has long yearned for an "Islamic State" to replace the federal, secular, democratic, Anglophone and constitutionally established state of Nigeria. Shekau was willing to declare himself "subservient" to al-Baghdadi and even respect an al-Baghdadi-appointed amir for "West Africa Province," who is reportedly an Arab based in Libya, in order to receive legitimacy for his "Province" in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region (Fulan's SITREP, September 17). Shekau also likely benefitted from reconciliation with former "al-Qaeda in Nigeria" militants, who publicly referred to themselves as "Ansaru" after Ansaru announced its formation in 2012 and, at that time, expressed its opposition to Shekau's *takfiri* ideology.

After Ansaru's disintegration in 2013, U.S.-designated terrorist Khalid al-Barnawi's forces began to operate alongside Shekau's forces, mostly in northern Cameroon. There, al-Barnawi's militants have controlled key logistical and smuggling routes, masterminded the kidnapping-for-

ransom of 22 foreigners and caused significant casualties to Cameroon's Rapid Intervention Brigades (BIR) and Chadian forces (and arguably hastened their departure from Cameroon in November 2015) as well as the civilian population (Terrorism Monitor, February 6). It was these former Ansaru militants under al-Barnawi who likely:

- Reconnected with their former North African al-Qaeda comrades who had defected from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to the Islamic State; and
- Through these North Africans, opened up the line of communication between Shekau and Libya- and Tunisia-based Islamic State militants who report, and in some cases travel, to Raqqa, Syria.

The relationship between Shekau and North African AQIM defectors to the Islamic State paved the way for Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi and for al-Baghdadi's forces in Raqqa in Syria to recognize the pledge.

Islamic State Influence on ISWAP

In the year leading up to Shekau's pledge on March 7, 2015—and in the nine months after the pledge—the most visible area of Islamic State influence on ISWAP has been in ISWAP's strategic communication, which is fully integrated into the production and dissemination style on social media of all Islamic State Provinces. ISWAP's media wing is accordingly called "West Africa Province Media Foundation."

Yet, there are three other strategic areas where Islamic State influence on ISWAP may also be seen. These three areas are:

- ISWAP's decision, for the first time, to hold territory in northeastern Nigeria, starting in mid-2014 when Shekau was first beginning to signal his impending allegiance to al-Baghdadi. [1]
- ISWAP's expansion, activation of cells and escalation of attacks in Nigeria's neighboring West African countries of Niger, Cameroon and Chad after the start of regional military intervention in northeastern Nigeria in February 2015, including a trademark tactic of deploying teenage girls in suicide attacks in those countries. [2]
- ISWAP's target selection within Nigeria, including a claimed suicide attack on a Shi'a procession in Kano in November 2015, three claimed suicide attacks in Abuja in October 2015 and four claimed suicide attacks in N'djamena, Chad in June 2015 (Terrorism Monitor, February 6). [3]

There is debate in the analytical community about the extent to which the Islamic State influenced the above three strategic

areas. Before Shekau's pledge, one of the most credible and closely connected Nigerian journalists to ISWAP, the exiled Ahmed Salkida, suggested that the Islamic State was offering funds to "Boko Haram" to make the pledge like the Islamic State did to other militant groups, which makes it possible that some Islamic State funds—in addition to ransom money that al-Barnawi's forces receiving for their kidnappings in Cameroon—contributed to some of these above-mentioned ISWAP operations in 2014 and 2015 (Storify.com, November 1, 2014). Nonetheless, it is beyond reasonable doubt that the Islamic State contributed directly to ISWAP's strategic communication to "market" those operations, especially to the Islamic State's online English, Arabic and French-speaking followers (but not necessarily Hausa-speaking Nigerians).

For example:

- When ISWAP began to occupy territories in northeastern Nigeria in mid-2014, Shekau declared that the region was part of an "Islamic State (*dawla Islamiya* or *dawlat al-Islam*)" several times in videos, which carried the "signatures" of Islamic State choreography, special effects, music, clothing, symbols (such as flags), terminology and rhetoric from Islamic State's own videos from Syria and Iraq, and Libya (YouTube, August 24, 2014; YouTube, October 5, 2014; YouTube, November 1, 2014; YouTube, November 10, 2014). [4]
- ISWAP began to operate its own official twitter account called *al-Urhwa al-Wutqha* with the pro-Islamic State, Algeria- and Tunisia-based, and Islamic State-endorsed Africa Media organization in early 2015, and released "letters" to Africa Media on developments in northeastern Nigeria, including one about the prospective pledge, while Africa Media encouraged the use of French language on *al-Urhwa al-Wutqha* and even appeared to have co-written a threat to neighboring West Africa countries on ISWAP's behalf that was posted on *al-Urhwa al-Wutqha*.
- ISWAP has only claimed three sets of attacks since Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi—the attacks on the Shi'a procession in Kano, military and police facilities in N'djamena and markets in Abuja—which suggests that the Islamic State, which disseminated the claims on ISWAP's behalf, was likely specifically informed of and interested in claiming those attacks because they are the types of targets in city capitals or against enemies, such as Shi'a, that the Islamic State would want ISWAP to publicize as part of the organization's branding of ISWAP's militancy.

While the Islamic State has long approved of Shekau's style of *takfiri* violence and has defended, in particular, the kidnappings in Chibok of more than 200 mostly Christian schoolgirls in April 2014, the Islamic State is now "re-packaging" ISWAP to serve and fit the template that the Islamic State "core" in Syria and Iraq envisions for all Provinces (*Dabiq4*, October 2014). This does not necessarily require the Islamic State to radically change how ISWAP operates; "Boko Haram" was successful on its own—with some AQIM operational, financial and media support—well before Shekau's pledge. However, the Islamic State wants to improve the name-recognition of and confidence in ISWAP among the Islamic State's global followership by:

- Contributing to ISWAP's strategic communication and social media "upgrade."
- Tempering Shekau's previously erratic—albeit carefully orchestrated—"righteous tormentor" persona (Journal for Deradicalization, November 2015).
- "Reducing" Shekau to the role of a provincial *wali*, or governor, instead of an overbearing and dominant leader.

In this way, Shekau is no longer the focus of ISWAP's international image. He will neither distract from the Islamic State's broader messaging priorities related to controlling and expanding territory and attacking Shi'a, the West and Christians, nor will he pose a threat to other Islamic State leaders through the possibility of upstaging them with his characteristically bombastic videos.

Future Trajectory of ISWAP

The Islamic State's engagement with ISWAP on branding may be only the starting point for a more advanced relationship in the future. Moving forward, the Islamic State could encourage more ISWAP attacks that garner international attention. This would further justify the Islamic State's decision to acquire ISWAP in the eyes of other Islamic State followers around the world as well as potential "Pprovince candidates," such as al-Shabaab members who are considering joining the Islamic State. For the Islamic State to increase ISWAP's prominence, ISWAP's attacks in 2015 on the Shi'a procession in Kano and in Abuja or N'djamena, however, do not suffice.

Rather, what ISWAP needs to do for Islamic State is to raise its stature internationally with an attack, or attacks, that are equivalent to "Boko Haram's" first internationally significant suicide attack at the UN Headquarters in August 2011, which the mastermind, Mamman Nur, carried out with support of AQIM and al-Shabaab (*Vanguard*, December 7, 2011). The type of operation that ISWAP may seek to carry out in the

near-term future may therefore include:

- A major attack at an oil installation or café, hotel or other public place in Nigeria's southern economic hub of Lagos, where former militants in Ansaru had planted cells; [6]
- A major attack *outside* the Lake Chad region, such as in Mali, which could show that ISWAP is a bona fide "West African" Province and that could benefit the support of former MUJWA militants who have pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi and are now under Shekau in the ISWAP hierarchy; or
- A major attack in a city like Abuja or Kaduna that is the equivalent of the joint Belmokhtar-AQIM Sahara Branch (with local-level support from Macina Liberation Front, or FLM) attack at the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali in November 2015, and that would receive international attention for the killing many foreigners, or any "spectacular" killing of foreigners in a way that could be publicized internationally due to the shocking level of brutality.

It is in this regard that the relationship of ISWAP to Libya-based Islamic State militants may soon transcend the media sphere and leadership hierarchy (with Shekau reporting to an amir in Libya) to also involve training of ISWAP militants in Libya. It took only one year after the Islamic State's Sinai Province (formerly Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis) pledged allegiance to the Islamic State that the Sinai Province was capable of "impressing" the Islamic State "core" in Syria and Iraq—and around the world—by taking down a Russian airplane in Sinai and only one-and-a-half years for the Islamic State to be able to mastermind an attack in Paris from its bases in Raqqa, Syria (al-Arabiya, November 4, 2014). If Libya becomes a hub to sub-Saharan Africa as Raqqa is to other parts of the world (such as Paris and Sinai), then in 2016 or 2017, ISWAP could also carry out a new type of attack in Nigeria or West Africa under the training and coordination of the Islamic State in Libya. Moreover, if the border between Turkey and Syria closes or the Islamic State is driven out of Raqqa and Mosul, Iraq and key leaders relocate to Libya, then the Islamic State would likely further encourage militants to "migrate" or support ISWAP and the ties between the Islamic State's "core" and ISWAP would deepen.

In Spite of the Islamic State, al-Qaeda Can Find a Third Way in Africa

Shekau's pledge to al-Baghdadi and Islamic State's subsequent series of video appeals, including one from ISWAP, to al-Shabaab militants to also make the pledge succeeded in drawing some factions and militants in al-Shabaab to Islamic

State, especially fighters that lived abroad, younger fighters and fighters from the Swahili Coast in Kenya and Tanzania. In addition, since 2014, not only has AQIM lost its sub-Saharan progeny of MUJWA and Ansaru to the Islamic State, but also five, albeit relatively small, factions within Algeria have defected to the Islamic State:

- Al-Ansar Brigade in Centre Region in September 2015;
- Al-Ghuraba Brigade in Constantine in July 2015;
- Humat al-Da'wah al-Salafiyah in Tlemcen in May 2015;
- Skikda Brigade in northeastern Algeria in May 2015; and
- Jund Al-Khilafa in the mountains outside of Algiers in November 2014.

Defectors to the Islamic State from AQIM's orbit also extend to large numbers of foot soldiers of the former AQIM Southern Command, who established Katibat Uqba Ibn Nafi (KUIN) in Libya and Tunisia after AQIM southern commander Abu Zeid was killed by French-supported Chadian forces in northern Mali in 2013. Many foot soldiers in Ansar al-Shari'a Tunisia (AST), such as the attacker at Bardo Museum in Tunis in March 2015, also appeared loyal to the Islamic State, despite the leadership of AST, like KUIN's leadership, still being officially pro-AQIM.

AQIM's Saharan branch as well as AQIM "front groups" that it coordinates within Mali, such as Ansar Dine and the FLM, appeared to have been gravitating away from AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel and towards the independent but al-Qaeda-loyal Mokhtar Belmokhtar (as evidenced by the above-mentioned attack at the Radisson Blu in Bamako, Mali on November 2015) (Terrorism Monitor, November 13). However, the joint statements of Belmokhtar and Droukdel on December 4, 2015, saying that Belmokhtar was rejoining AQIM likely reinvigorated AQIM's standing in Africa (RFI, December 4). Moreover, although AQIM's Saharan Branch has "upgraded" its strategic communication to resemble more closely—but not necessarily support—the Islamic State, recent Saharan Branch videos still maintain distinct characteristics of longtime AQIM videos dating back to the time of the AQIM's predecessor—the GSPC—by showing, for example, the ethno-linguistic diversity in its ranks that had spawned both MUJWA and Ansaru in 2011 (Leak Source, June 23; Long War Journal, September 3). This does not mean AQIM will "lose" its Saharan Branch, but does suggest that the Saharan Branch is re-evaluating its *modus operandi*, particularly related to recruitment and strategic communication, as a response to Islamic State competition in the region.

Thus, al-Qaeda's African stalwarts of al-Shabaab and AQIM have both been experiencing separations, fractures and

defections to the Islamic State. This, however, has provided an opportunity for African jihadists to find a "third way" between an aging but strategically sound al-Qaeda and a dynamic yet often over-reaching Islamic State. Mokhtar Belmokhtar is the type of militant who, at least in the Sahel and Nigeria, has both the intent and the networks to find a "third way" and unite jihadists in a constellation of cells and factions that shift between the space and functionalities of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. His willingness to re-join AQIM shows that this "third way" will likely be channeled through al-Qaeda and could present a significant challenges to the Islamic State's continued growth on the continent.

While thus far Shekau has managed to maintain the unity of ISWAP since his pledge to al-Baghdadi, there are other influential and perhaps better connected militants—such as al-Barnawi, Mamman Nur and Mahamat Daud, the latter who connected "Boko Haram" to Malian militants and trainers and facilitated Shekau's communication with the Islamic State—who could abandon Shekau and re-form a new al-Qaeda network in Nigeria as Ansaru was. They could build this "third way" in Nigeria and the Sahel under the guidance of Belmokhtar or even al-Barnawi, who prefers anonymity and is likely more economically and strategically influential (and more operationally unencumbered due to his low profile) than Belmokhtar in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

Conclusion

While 2015 was the year of the Islamic State's widely publicized expansion in Nigeria, 2016 could see the revival or reconstitution of al-Qaeda networks in Nigeria and other areas of Africa, although they may not publicly declare themselves as "al-Qaeda." Nonetheless, in the near-term future, the Islamic State is likely to continue to influence ISWAP beyond the fully integrated strategic communication and media cooperation that was established in 2015. The competition between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Nigeria and West Africa could also lead to a period of "outbidding" where each side tries to carry out more spectacular attacks than the other.

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Notes

1. The militants mostly retreated from the territories they held after Nigeria and neighboring countries launched a military offensive against the militants in northeastern Nigeria in February 2015.
2. There have been over 100 young girls deployed in

more than 70 incidents of female suicide attacks since the Chibok kidnapping in April 2014. Although no Chibok girls have been deployed in these attacks, the network that masterminded the Chibok kidnapping—which is most likely a "rogue" former Ansaru faction— is likely also behind the deployment of female suicide bombers. The rate of ISWAP's female suicide attacks far exceeds that of other terrorist groups historically, including the Tamil Tigers, Chechen "Black Widows", and Kurdish groups. The only other terrorist group to organize so many female suicide attacks in a short time—although still not as many or for as long a time period as ISWAP—was the predecessor to IS under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, ordered such attacks mostly for the purpose of "shaming" men into also carrying out suicide attacks. However, ISWAP's purpose appears to purely operational and not as a form of motivation to men or propaganda. Nonetheless, it is notable that al-Zarqawi ordered these attacks during the time when he was leaving al-Qaeda's orbit and moving toward establishing what became the IS around 2006-2007, which is about the same stage that the "rogue" former Ansaru faction would have been in when it began orchestrating these attacks in Nigeria. It also notable, therefore, that Shekau has largely modeled his public persona on al-Zarqawi since 2014.
3. Nigeria's mostly Iran-influenced Shia population includes several million people is the largest African Shia community in Sub-Saharan Africa.
4. The holding and administering of territory is essential to the IS's claim that it has a Caliphate because holding territory—in addition to al-Baghdadi's being from the prophetic Qurayshi Arab tribe and IS's receipt of support from Islamic scholars (*ulema*)— is one of the three conditions of a legitimate declaration of a Caliphate, according to IS. Although ISWAP has not shown that conducts as much administration as IS videos from Syria and Iraq, or even Sinai and Libya, ISWAP videos have shown *sharia* punishments, *salah* prayers with hundreds of worshippers, and convoys of armed vehicles, in ISWAP-controlled areas, which are intended to portray the holding of territory.
5. This, again, suggested, that the IS was following—and endorsing—ISWAP's growing operational presence beyond Nigeria, but whether or not the attacks in neighboring countries were at IS's behest or the result of ISWAP independently nullifying "non-aggression pacts" with Niger, Chad and Cameroon as a result of their offensives against ISWAP is debatable.
6. Thus far there has only been one or two small-scale attacks in Lagos, including a female suicide bombing near a petrol tanker in June 2014.