The Islamic State after the Caliphate

by Truls Hallberg Tønnessen

Abstract

Following the Islamic State loss of most of its territorial control and the fall of its self-declared Caliphate, many have warned that it is too early to declare that the group is defeated. The group has previously been able to come spectacularly back from defeat. However, this article will argue that while the Islamic State is roughly following the same strategy as last time when it was also weakened, it was specific historical circumstances that then enabled the dramatic rise of the Islamic State. The article will also argue that in order to be successful, the group is dependent on conflicts and root causes that exist independently of the group, but which it can exploit.

Keywords: Islamic State, Iraq, Syria, jihadism

Introduction

The aim of this Special Issue of *Perspectives on Terrorism* is to discuss various aspects and potential developments for the Islamic State in particular and the jihadi movement in general following the fall of the group's self-declared Caliphate. The aim of this introductory article is to use the group's history to highlight some factors that have been important for the evolution of IS and that might be important for its future trajectory.

Since the group's dramatic takeover of Mosul in mid-2014 and the subsequent declaration of the Islamic State and the Caliphate there has been an avalanche of publications on various aspects of the Islamic State.[7] Some of this literature is focused on factors that have been more or less constant throughout the existence of the group, including its ideology and overall strategy.[8]

The group currently known as the Islamic State (IS) has a long history and its origin is often traced back to the training camp established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Herat, Afghanistan in 1999.[1] Throughout its history, the group has gone through an almost cyclic process of rising and falling. The group's first rise culminated when al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), the group founded by al-Zarqawi, together with some lesser-known Sunni Arab insurgent groups established the so-called Islamic State of Iraq in October 2006. The combination of a Sunni Arab uprising against the group (often referred to as *al-sawha* or "The awakening") and improved U.S counterinsurgency strategies led to a gradual weakening of the group, and by 2008 both the U.S and Iraqi governments declared that the group was close to defeat.[2] It was, however, far too early to conclude that the group was defeated for good.[3] Not only did the Islamic State of Iraq make a comeback, it was able to establish what has been referred to as the most powerful jihadist group in modern history.[4]

The latest comeback started a long time before 2014 . After Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in May 2010, the group gradually regained strength. The comeback was to a large extent facilitated by the U.S withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and by the increasingly violent conflict in Syria from 2011 and onwards. This period of rising prominence culminated with the group declaring the establishment of the Islamic State and the Caliphate in June 2014. The group's territorial expansion, its brutal violence against the Yazidis and other ethnic and religious groups in the region, and its threats against the West, all combined to trigger an multinational offensive against the group. As a result of this offensive the group has lost most of its territorial control, and Iraqi, Russian and U.S governments have declared that the group has been defeated.[5] However, many analysts have also cautioned that it is too early to declare victory

and indeed there are already signs of a resurgent Islamic State, especially in Iraq.[6]

If we are to understand the cyclic process of rising and falling —in other words, to explain the dynamics of *change*—it is necessary to focus on those factors that have evolved over time. Although the group's ideology is key to understanding its behavior, it does not explain changes in its behavior and why it succeeds during some periods of time and fails during others.

The three factors emphasized in this introductory article are: 1) leadership and recruitment dynamics, 2) the size and strength of the group, and 3) the opportunity structure within the operating environment. The first two factors are internal to the group, while the third factor (the opportunity structure) refers to all the external factors that are outside the control of the group —such as the overall security and political situation that the group has to operate in—but which the group can to some extent influence and exploit through its armed activities. Throughout the group's existence, these parameters have changed considerably, and as this article aims to illustrate, these variations have had important ramifications both for the group's behavior and its potential for success. They can also suggest potential future developments for the group.

The article will argue that in the past changes in the opportunity structure the group has operated in have been most consequential for the group's potential for success. It will illustrate that although the group never went away and has roughly been following the same overall strategy and ideology, the *impact* of this strategy has varied considerably due to changes in the opportunity structure. Furthermore, the article will argue that the primary strength of the Islamic State is its ability and willingness to exploit conflicts that exist independently of the group, and that specific historical circumstances enabled the dramatic rise of the Islamic State.

Leadership and Recruitment Dynamics

Leaders of terrorist organizations involved in violent conflict are frequently killed or arrested, and the Islamic State is by no means an exception. Throughout the history of the Islamic State, many of the top leaders have been killed and replaced with a new generation. Throughout its 20-year long history the group only had three or four paramount leaders (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi until 2006, Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Umar al-Baghdadi 2006-2010, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi from 2010), but among the leaders in the layer immediately below the top and in the surroundings of the paramount leader there have been frequent changes. For instance, most of those leaders who rose to the top together with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2010 have been killed during the latest offensive, and as far as we know, there are few leaders within the group today who represent continuity.[9]

At the same time, it is likely that a core of central but largely unknown leaders still remain within the organization, and might be in a position to replace the killed top leaders. The articles by Vera Mironova and by Asaad Almohammad and Charlie Winter in this Special Issue both demonstrate how members of the Islamic State's security-intelligence apparatus (*amni)* can be vital for the survival of the group.[10] As Mironova points out, *amni* was a secret organization within IS and its members often used masks in public, making it more difficult to identify them. Thus, if al-Baghdadi is killed his replacement might be someone whom few observers have heard about but who climbed the ranks within the group, not unlike when al-Baghdadi became the new leader of the group in 2010. Very few outsiders knew much about this individual until around 2014, when he was declared a Caliph.

In contrast to (for instance) Jabhat al-Nusra, which operated more as a small elite organization, the Islamic State was joined by a very large number of recruits. The estimates on the number of fighters in the ranks of Islamic State after 2014 varies widely, from 9,000 up to 200,000. The high estimate of 200,000 members also includes personnel who joined its police and security-intelligence apparatus.[11] Although it is difficult to get a correct estimate of how many joined the Islamic State, all estimates agree that the number was in the thousands.

As Mironova illustrates in her article in this Special Issue, the recruits to the Islamic State joined for different reasons. Some joined the group for ideological reasons, others for personal gains.[12] The article by Cole Bunzel further demonstrates that there have been ideological tensions and disagreements within the group.[13] This underscores the fact that the Islamic State was far from a monolithic organization, and that many joined (or at least cooperated with) the group simply because the Islamic State was the dominating actor in large chunks of territory in Syria and Iraq, and because joining the group could potentially provide recruits with access to money, power and protection. Now that the group has lost most of its territorial control and clearly has been on the losing side, it is reasonable to assume that those who still remain as members of the group are a combination of a hardcore of the most ideologically motivated members, along with those who have no other option than to remain. This also indicates that the group might splinter into different factions.

The composition of the recruits has also changed over time. For instance, there have been huge variations in the number and the influence of foreign fighters within the group. AQI, the predecessor of the Islamic State, was founded mainly by Jordanian and Syrians, but over time the leadership became more and more dominated by Iraqis, culminating in 2010 with the appointment of al-Baghdadi as the top leader of the group. Despite the influx of a large number of foreign fighters, and despite that most of the known Iraqis in the top echelon have been killed, there are few known examples of foreigners who have risen to the top ranks of the group. Two important exceptions are the Georgian Chechen Abu Umar al-Shishani, who was killed in 2016, and the Tajik Gulmurod Khalimov, who was killed in 2017. They both reportedly served as the group's Minister of War.[14] Another important exception is the group's current spokesperson Abu al-Hasan al-Muhajir.[15]

Why and how might the composition of the top leadership and the recruits be important for the potential future development of IS? The history of the group indicates the importance of a common background for establishing new units or networks, such as a common nationality or sharing a common experience or acquaintances from a particular recent conflict. For example, while several of the founders of AQI were veterans of the conflict in Afghanistan before 2001, the leaders of IS after 2010 were almost exclusively veterans of the conflict in Iraq, who had never been to Afghanistan nor met the top leadership of al-Qaida. On the other hand, the Syria-based al-Qaida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra was mainly established by the Shami (Levantine) members of ISI.[16] Although there are several other reasons, the lack of deep historical ties between the leadership of the Islamic State and al-Qaida helps explain the conflict between the two groups.

When Jabhat al-Nusra announced in July 2016 that it split from al-Qaida and rebranded itself as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, a small group of mainly Jordanian Afghan-veterans with historical ties to the al-Qaida leadership broke away and established a group that pledged allegiance to al-Qaida's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. In March 2018, this break-away faction announced that it took the name *Hurras al-Din* (Guardians of Religion).[17] Interestingly, this pro-al-Qaida faction included close associates of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, such as the Jordanian Khalid al-ʿAruri, Zarqawi's childhood friend, brother-in-law and one of the original founders of the Herat camp in Afghanistan in 1999.[18] What the leaders of this group—with veterans of both al-Qaida's and Zarqawi's networks—had in common was that they roughly belonged to the same generation, had been to Afghanistan and had a long history of interaction with central members of the al-Qaida network. This group (which included several close associates of Zarqawi, often referred to as the Godfather of the Islamic State) was described by IS as "apostates" (*murtaddin*) and mockingly referred to as *Hurras al-Shirk* (Guardians of Polytheism).[19]

The networks and connections established during the recent conflict in Iraq and Syria will most likely also affect the international terrorist threat against Europe. As Petter Nesser has demonstrated, many of the terrorist cells in Europe trace their origins back to networks established in Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s.[20] Given the historically high number of foreign fighters who have fought in Iraq and Syria, it is likely that some of the connections made and experiences gained during the conflict will provide the basis for future terrorist groups and networks.

There are also indications that the nationalities of the top leaders have had implications on their target selection and agenda. There was, for instance, an increase in threats and plots against Sweden following the promotion of the Swedish-Moroccan Mohamed Moumou to the top ranks of the ISI in the late 2000s.[21] And one of the reasons why there have been so many plots and attacks by IS in France is that the French foreign fighters within IS had important leadership positions in the group's external operations branch *(al-amn al-kharji*).[22]

Therefore it is relevant to note the influence of fighters from former Soviet states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, both within the Islamic State and amongst the Syrian jihadist groups in general. Combined with Russia's central role in the fight against IS and its support for the Assad regime, this helps explain why Russia has become a more important target for the jihadis.[23]

Size and Strength

Throughout its existence the size and strength of the group has also changed dramatically—from being a handful of Arab-Afghan veterans arriving in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2002-2003, to establishing in 2014 something tantamount to a de-facto state, ruling a territory the size of the UK with an estimated population of 10 million people.

The group has also moved back and forth between operating as an underground terrorist group without territorial control and having various degrees of territorial control. As Ahmed Hashim illustrates in his contribution to this Special Issue, these developments had obvious implications for the group's modus operandi.[24] Throughout the group's history one of its key traditional strengths has been its mobility and ability to relocate to another area if the pressure was too much in one place.[25]

After the group succeeded in establishing territorial control of large cities like Mosul and Raqqa, it had to defend its territorial control from potential aggressors, and police the population internally in order to avoid a rebellion or uprising.[26] Since the Islamic State has lost almost all of its territory by early 2019, it has reverted back to its roots—operating mainly as a terrorist organization with only sporadic attempted to re-establish territorial control. It is, after all, easier to survive as an underground movement that does not need to defend a particular territory, but that instead can hide in areas that are difficult for the authorities to control.

The modus operandi of the group following its territorial losses is reminiscent of the tactics the group followed prior to 2014. It has, for instance, established sleeper cells in some of the territories that were liberated from the group.[27] The group has also succeeded in establishing a presence in areas that are difficult for the authorities to patrol, such as rural and remote areas, especially in the border regions between territories controlled by the Iraqi federal forces and the Kurdish peshmerga.[28] IS has also systematically removed potential competitors for influence in Sunni-Arab dominated areas of Iraq by eliminating local leaders and by intimidating the local populations.[29] This has fostered fear among the locals and deters them from informing on the group to the authorities, while also creating power vacuums that the Islamic State can exploit.[30]

The variations in the group's size and strength have also had an impact on the group's behavior vis-à-vis potential allies, and helps explain its cyclic process of rising and falling. When the group is weak, it tends to take a less prominent role and instead concentrates on reorganizing and preparing for a comeback. For instance, there were several indications of improved cooperation between ISI and other Sunni Arab actors in 2009-2010, when the group was in a weak position.[31]

There are also several examples in the history of the group when its presence initially was tolerated and even welcomed by other Sunni Arab actors as long as it did not seek to become the dominant actor, and as long as it contributed to the fight against a common enemy. But each time the group has gained strength, it has

gradually attempted to establish a monopoly of violence by either co-opting or targeting competing actors and those who did not submit to the group's authority.[32] The group's attempts to establish a monopoly of violence has, however, also often backfired and generated Sunni Arab resistance against the group. For instance, in January 2014 Sunni Arab rebels cooperated in successfully expelling the Islamic State from Western Syria. Similarly, one of the main reasons why Sunni Arab insurgent and tribal leaders turned against AQI in 2006 was the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq, as they claimed that the group attacked insurgents and other Sunni Arabs who did not acknowledge the authority of their "state".

As many of the Sunni Arab insurgents in Iraq laid down their arms following the Sahwa process in 2007-2008, the Islamic State—which had continued to maintain a presence in its core areas—was in a prime position to exploit the Sunni uprising against the Iraqi regime that escalated in 2012-2013.[33] Together with the influx of foreign fighters into the group, this was an important explanation for why it was able to establish itself as the dominant actor in large areas of Iraq and Syria.

The group also has a tendency to be expansive and tries to increase the size of the area it is controlling, as reflected in the official motto of "remain and expand" ('baqiyah wa tatammadad'). This approach increases the risks of provoking a military offensive against the group, which over time can jeopardize its territorial control.[34]

However, despite the fact that the Islamic State is roughly following the same strategy as the last time it was weakened, it was specific historical circumstances not created by the group that enabled its dramatic comeback, as the next section of this discussion will make clear.

Opportunity Structure

The third factor that has changed significantly throughout the group's history is the opportunity structure, defined as all the exogenous factors outside the control of the group and the environment that the group had to operate in. These factors created constraints and limitations, but also opportunities that a group like the Islamic State could exploit—for instance, by triggering a sectarian conflict between Shiites and Sunnis by means of one of the most comprehensive suicide attack campaigns in history.[35]

The history of the group clearly illustrates that even if it has been roughly following the same overall strategy, the *impact* of this strategy has varied considerably due to changes in the opportunity structure. It also demonstrates that the primary strength of the Islamic State is its ability and willingness to exploit conflicts that existed independently of the group.

There is not room here for an exhaustive history of the origins of the Islamic State, but there is a general agreement that one of the most important roots of the group lies in the U.S invasion of Iraq and the toppling of the Sunni-Arab dominated regime of Saddam Hussein.[36] The dissolution of the Baath party and the Iraqi army led to a historical transfer of power in Iraq from the Sunni-Arab minority to the Shia-majority and the Kurds. The dissolution of the Iraqi army was particularly important for the rise of the Islamic State, as illustrated by the prominent role played by former Iraqi officers within the group's top leadership, especially after 2010.[37] This process resulted in the disenfranchisement of a Sunni Arab ruling elite and a feeling among Sunni Arabs of being politically and militarily marginalized by consecutive regimes which were all dominated by the Shia-majority. Although AQI initially was just a small group within a much larger Sunni Arab insurgency, this grievance has been a consistent recruitment tool for the group. AQI could exploit the fear and rage many Sunni Arabs felt towards U.S. forces and Shia militias, especially amongst those Sunnis who had been victims of atrocities committed by U.S. forces or Shia militias.

Pollings of Iraqis illustrate how the Sunni community's support for violent activities tends to be correlated with how the Sunni community perceived its security situation, and provides an indication of how IS has thrived in periods of insecurity. The Sunni Arabs' support for violence increased as the security situation deteriorated,

and conversely, when the security situation improved, the support for violence decreased. This is illustrated by the "Where Things Stand" (WTS) series, consisting of six polls conducted in Iraq from 2004 until 2009.[38] The WTS series documents a continuously deteriorating security situation from March 2004 until March 2007, as a rapidly growing proportion of Iraqis—especially among Sunni Arabs—described a difficult security situation.[39] However, from March 2007 to March 2008 the view among the Sunni Arabs turned dramatically more positive - a turnaround coinciding roughly with the fall of AQI.[40] The relationship between the fall of AQI and this feeling of an improved security situation may have been spurious, as there were additional factors accounting for the reduction of violence during 2007-2008, such as Muqtada al-Sadr's announcement of a cease-fire in August 2007 and his efforts to rein in the violence of the Sadr-led Jaysh al-Mahdi.[41] However, the polls do at least indicate that the potential to mobilize Iraqis to participate in violent activities correlates with the Sunni community's perception of their own security, and reflects how AQI thrived in a climate of fear and insecurity.

Despite the group's decline in the period 2008-2010, the group was responsible for several large and coordinated terrorist attacks throughout Iraq. Based on statistics from the U.S National Counterterrorism Center, Iraq led the world in the number of terrorist attacks and in the numbers of people killed from 2008 to 2010.[42] The Global Terrorism Index ranked Iraq as the country most impacted by terrorism in 2011.[43] Based on empirical data, such as the number of attacks ISI were responsible for and the production of propaganda, the beginning of ISI's "comeback" might specifically be pinpointed to 21 July 2012, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the beginning of the so-called "Breaking the Walls" campaign.[44] If we are to measure by the numbers of Iraqi civilians killed by violence, it was not the increased of ISI activity in 2012 that triggered the increase of violence in Iraq and the deteriorating situation in Iraq. Rather, it appears to have been the Maliki regime's crackdown on a protest camp in Hawija, in April 2013.[45] Based on the Iraqi Body Count database of violent civilian deaths in Iraq, the level of violence against civilians in Iraq was fairly constant from 2009 until April 2013, despite the increase of activity from ISI. The crackdown on the Hawija camp took place 23 April 2013, and from May 2013 there was a rapid increase in the number of civilians killed.[46] This increase is also reflected in the United Nations casualty figures from Iraq.[47] Incidentally, it was also in April 2013 that ISI announced its presence in Syria under the new name of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham.

The relationship between the rise of the Islamic State and the escalating conflicts in Iraq and Syria is detailed elsewhere, but the important point here is that the group initially played only a minor role in both of these conflicts. There were primarily other Sunni Arab actors who led the uprising in Syria against Bashar al-Assad and in the demonstrations in Iraq against the regime of Nuri al-Maliki. But these two conflicts eventually led to a breakdown of security and a fragmentation of the political and military authority in the traditional core areas of AQI/IS, the Sunni-Arab dominated areas in Northern Syria and Western Iraq. This provided IS with an opportunity to use its long experience of organizing militant activity, access to resources and ability to recruit the incoming foreign fighters in order to exploit the power vacuum and fragmentation, and to establish itself as one of the dominant actors in these areas.[48] Thus, one of the most important reasons for the resurgence of the group was that it was one of the strongest and most organized actors in a highly chaotic environment of otherwise weak, uncoordinated and fragmented actors. This means that the group operated within a vastly different opportunity structure compared to the years 2003-2011, when there were over 100,000 U.S. troops stationed in Iraq pursuing the stated mission of fighting and defeating al-Qaida.[49]

Concluding Remarks

This article has argued that specific historical circumstances enabled the dramatic rise of the Islamic State.

Although the group was never completely defeated and would most likely have been able to survive in Iraq as a terrorist organization even without the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011, it would have been impossible for the group to become so strong.

To be successful, the group was—and arguably remains—dependent on conflicts and root causes that exist independently of the group, but that the group can exploit. Unfortunately, there seems to be no lack of root causes which the Islamic State (or another extremist group) can exploit. In Iraq, IS has recruited amongst what we might term a "lost generation" of Sunni Arabs who have grown up after the fall of Saddam Hussein and who have experienced much conflict and loss and grievances throughout their life. This generation has been even more lost during recent years due to the destruction inflicted upon the Sunni Arab areas, both due to the activity of the Islamic State itself and by the offensives against the group. These once occupied cities that became targets of allied aerial and artillery are today in dire need of reconstruction, but this process has hardly gotten off the ground.[50]

Another important challenge will be to re-integrate the family members of former Islamic State fighters. According to some estimates, as many as around 100,000 Iraqis had at least one family member who joined the Islamic State, and a large number of these family members have been driven out of their homes, and are kept imprisoned in camps. This means that there exists a large pool of potential recruits for a group like the Islamic State or some other extremist organization.[51]

It is also a challenge and a potential grievance that much of the Sunni-Arab areas that were controlled by the Islamic State are currently controlled by forces who liberated these areas. In Iraq, these forces are mainly Shia militias with strong links to Iran, and in Syria, Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) now control these areas.[52]

A U.S withdrawal from Syria will most likely intensify the conflict between Kurdish militias and Turkey and Turkish-backed insurgent groups in Syria.[53] This implies that the Kurdish militias—some of the most effective local forces against the Islamic State—will need to shift their focus from combatting the remnants of IS to fighting against Turkey-backed groups, something that might provide IS an opportunity to come back.

Meanwhile, as it becomes more difficult for the Islamic State to operate in Iraq and Syria, and increasingly difficult for foreign fighters to enter Iraq and Syria, the foreign fighters might travel elsewhere. The leadership of the Islamic State has recommended that potential recruits travel to other provinces (*wilayat*) of the Islamic State, or that they stay at home and carry out terrorist attacks against countries that were involved in the multinational coalition against the group. As Aaron Zelin and Jacob Zenn point out in their articles in this Special Issue, the affiliates of Islamic State might increase in importance following the decline of the Islamic "core" State in Iraq and Syria.[54] At the same time, as Elisabeth Kendall discusses in her article on the Islamic State in Yemen, the group has to compete with an al-Qaida affiliate (AQAP) that is more firmly rooted in Yemen than the Islamic State.[55]

The foreign fighters, especially those from the Middle East, already present in Syria and Iraq might establish new groups or join other jihadi groups active in the region. One of these groups might, for instance ,be Hurras al-Din. According to a recent report, this group has been able to recruit foreign fighters both from the Islamic State and from Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).[56] Given the historical relationship between the leaders of this group and al-Qaida's top leadership, Hurras al-Din might be able to establish itself as the leading AQ affiliate in the region, especially if it succeeds in attracting more recruits from both HTS and IS.

As Charlie Winter points out in his article in this Special Issue, the propaganda and media warfare of the Islamic State will play an important role in the group's strategy to maintain its "brand", even if its media output has declined as it has lost territorial control.[57] The group has also adapted its propaganda to the new circumstances, focusing more on surviving and urging terrorist attacks against countries involved in the offensive against the group.[58]

To conclude, the Islamic State will most likely remain a security threat for many years, in one form or another. Despite its apparently rigid ideology, the group has shown a remarkable ability to survive and to adapt to changing circumstances. This is one the most important reasons for the group's resilience, and there are several indications that the group has adapted following its recent loss of territorial control. These measures are, however, primarily reactive measures that the deteriorating situation has forced the group to implement. Whether the group will also be able to do more than just "remain" and "expand" again is to a large degree dependent on factors beyond the control of the IS.

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Notes

[1] See ,for instance, Bryan Price et al., "The Group That Calls Itself a State: Understanding the Evolution and Challenges of the Islamic State," *Combating Terrorism Center*, 16 December 2014, 8-9,19 and Charles Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," *Brookings* 2014,16.

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[5] Margaret Coker and Falih Hassan, "Iraq Prime Minister Declares Victory Over ISIS," *New York Times*, 9 December 2017 and Alec Luhn,"Russia Declares 'Mission Accomplished' against Islamic State in Syria," *The Telegraph*, 7 December 2017.

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[9] See, for instance, Martin Chulov, "'We will get him': The long hunt for Isis leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi," *The Guardian*, 15 January 2018.

[10] Asaad Almohammad and Charlie Winter, "From Directorate of Intelligence to Directorate of Everything: The Islamic State's Emergent Amni-Media Nexus," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (February 2019), and Vera Mironova, "Who are the ISIS people?," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (February 2019).

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[12] Vera Mironova, "Who are the ISIS people?," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (February 2019). See also Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2016), 160-172.

[13] Cole Bunzel, "Ideological Infighting in the Islamic State," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (February 2019).

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and "Isis: US-trained Tajik special Forces Chief Gulmurod Khalimov Becomes Isis 'War Minister'," *International Business Times*, 6 September 2016

[15] The identity of Abu al-Hasan al-Muhajir is unclear, but the name al-Muhajir ("the immigrant") indicates that he is a foreign fighter. For speculation on his identity, see Graeme Wood, "The American Climbing the Ranks of ISIS," *The Atlantic,* March 2017.

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