



November 2014

# ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization<sup>1</sup>



An ISIS operative holds a shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile on the background of a black ISIS flag  
(Picture sent by ISIS via Twitter)

## Overview

### Objectives

1. This study examines the nature of the **Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS)**, an **Islamic Salafist-jihadi terrorist organization** founded a decade ago as a **branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq**. It established itself during the fighting against the United States in the Sunni regions of western Iraq and spread to eastern and northern Syria during the Syrian civil war. In the summer of 2014 ISIS scored dramatic achievements, among them the occupation of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and the declaration of the "**Islamic Caliphate**," headed by a charismatic Iraqi terrorist operative nicknamed **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**.

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<sup>1</sup> This study has nine sections and an appendix. [The full version is available in Hebrew](#). The overview and the first three sections are included here. Other sections are being translated and will gradually be posted on our website.

2. This study is an **overall analysis** of ISIS. It examines the historical background and reasons for its founding and increase in strength, its ideological attraction, its tactical and strategic objectives and its military, governance and financial capabilities. The main objective of this study is to understand what lies behind its successes and how it became a threat not only to Syria and Iraq but to the Middle East and the international community as well. The study also deals with the campaign the United States declared against ISIS, examines the results so far and weighs the chances of its success in the future.

## The Roots of ISIS

3. ISIS began as a branch of Al-Qaeda, founded in Iraq in 2004 after the American invasion and headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri. **It filled the security and governmental void created by the disintegration of the Iraqi army and Saddam Hussein's regime, accompanied by the increasing alienation of the Sunni Muslims from the central, Shi'ite-affiliated government** in Baghdad sponsored by the United States. The branch of Al-Qaeda gradually established itself in Iraq during the fighting against the United States and its allies, adopted the name the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), and became a central force among the anti-American insurgents.

4. Towards the end of the American presence in Iraq the ISI was weakened (as were other insurgents), the result of America's military successes combined with its wise policy of fostering the Sunni tribes in western Iraq (ISIS' principal domain). However, the Americans did not continue the policy, and later policies carried out by Shi'ite Adnan al-Maliki and the American withdrawal from Iraq **all contributed to strengthening the ISI**. That gave it a convenient starting point for its operations when the Americans eventually withdrew from Iraq.

5. The civil war that broke out in March 2011 made Syria fertile ground for **the spread of the ISI to Syria**. In January 2012 the **Al-Nusra Front** ("support front") was founded as the Syrian branch of the ISI. However, the two disagreed early on and the Al-Nusra Front split off from the Islamic State in Iraq, which then changed its name to **the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS)**. Al-Qaeda, under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri, announced its support for the Al-Nusra Front and its dissociation from the ISI. After the split ISIS gained military successes, leading it to declare the **Islamic State (or the "Caliphate State")**, while the rival **Al-Nusra Front has weakened**.

## ISIS Ideology

6. ISIS is an **Islamic Salafist-jihadi organization**. Salafism is an extremist Sunni political-religious movement within Islam that seeks **to restore the golden era of the dawn of Islam** (the time of the prophet Muhammad and the early Caliphs who followed him). That is to be done, according to Salafist jihadist ideology, by jihad (a holy war) against both internal and external enemies. Jihad, according to Salafist jihadism, is the personal duty of every Muslim. Al-Qaeda and the global jihad organizations (of which ISIS is one) sprang from Salafist jihadism.

7. According to the ISIS concept, Islam's golden era will be restored through the establishment of a **supranational Islamic Caliphate** modeled after the regimes of the first Caliphs after the death of Muhammad. It will be ruled by Islamic religious law (the sharia), according to its most extreme interpretation. The Caliphate will arise **on the ruins of the nation states established in the Middle East** after the First World War. Some of them, including Syria and Iraq, where ISIS operates, are in the process of disintegrating in the wake of the upheaval in the Middle East, creating favorable conditions for the vision of an Islamic Caliphate.

8. The territory of the Caliphate State, whose establishment was declared by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, lies in eastern Syria and western Iraq. ISIS seeks to expand the Caliphate throughout Syria and Iraq and finally take control of them. After that, **the states belonging to "greater Syria" will be annexed**, that is, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and **after them other countries in the Middle East and beyond**. According to the ISIS vision as it appears on its maps, the future Islamic Caliphate will include vast stretches of North Africa, Asia and the Caucasus, and parts of Europe that were once under Muslim rule, such as Spain and the Balkans.

## The Main Characteristics of ISIS

9. The main characteristics of ISIS are the following:

- 1) **Military capabilities: ISIS has an estimated 25,000 operatives in Syria and Iraq**, and their number is growing.<sup>2</sup> **In ITIC assessment, as many as 12,000 are operatives from Syria and Iraq, and more than 13,000 are foreign fighters.** Most of the foreign fighters come from **the Arab-Muslim world**. An estimated

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<sup>2</sup> According to a CIA report issued publicly, there are between 25,000 and 31,500 ISIS operatives. In the estimation of a Centcom commander, ISIS has between 9,000 and 17,000 operatives.

**3,000** come from Western countries (about half from France and Britain). They usually arrive in Syria via Turkey, are given short military training by ISIS and engage in fighting. For the most part they return to their countries of origin. During their stay in Syria they gain military capabilities and receive Salafist-jihadi indoctrination, and pose a security threat to their countries of origin and to a certain extent to Israel (as illustrated by the attack on the Jewish museum in Brussels, which was carried out by a French national who fought in the ranks of ISIS).

2) **Possession of weapons:** ISIS has a large arsenal of weapons, **most of them plundered from the Syrian and Iraqi armies**. They include light arms, various types of rockets and mortars, and anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles. In addition **ISIS possesses heavy arms and the advanced technologies usually found only in regular national armies:** artillery, tanks and armored vehicles, **shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles and drones**. It has used **mustard gas** a number of times in Syria and Iraq and **may have other types of chemical weapons, such as chlorine gas**. Chemical weapons were used to attack the Kurdish militias in Ayn al-Arab (Qobanê) in northern Syria and against the Iraqi security forces. ISIS also has at least one Scud missile (technically flawed, in ITIC assessment) and a number of planes (operating from an ISIS-controlled airport).

3) **Areas of control:** Today ISIS controls **an estimated third of the territory of Iraq and between a quarter and a third of Syria, from the outskirts of Baghdad to the outskirts of Aleppo**. The vast area, according to various estimates, is home to between five and six million people.<sup>3</sup> Several important cities are in the ISIS-controlled region, among them **Mosul** (the second largest city in Iraq), **Fallujah** (symbol of the struggle against the United States) and **Al-Raqqah** (the ISIS "capital city" in northern Syria). It is noteworthy that a relatively small number of ISIS operatives control a broad swath of territory, which is one of ISIS' weak points. To overcome it, ISIS relies on local supporters and allies, and is making an effort to enlist operatives from Syria, Iraq and abroad.

4) **Establishment of alternative administration networks:** In the areas under its control **ISIS instituted alternative administrations to replace those of Syria and Iraq which collapsed. They include educational, judicial, policing**

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<sup>3</sup> British correspondent John Cantlie, who was abducted by ISIS, claimed in an ISIS propaganda video issued in October 2014 that eight million people lived in regions controlled by the organization. The number seems exaggerated.

**and law enforcement networks.** ISIS uses them to provide **vital services** and at the same time **to enforce its Salafist-jihadi ideology on the local population.** To that end it uses **brutal measures against its opponents and the minorities living under its control** (including mass executions). Nevertheless, so far the local populations seem to have come to terms with ISIS control and sometimes even support it. They do so **especially in view of its ability to provide basic services, restore daily life to the status quo ante, and fill the administrative void that was created.**

5) **High financial capabilities:** In Syria and Iraq ISIS **took control of the state infrastructure,** including **most of the oil fields in eastern Syria** and **several oil fields in Iraq.** The export of petroleum products is the main source of ISIS' income and **its profits are estimated at several million dollars a day.** However, profits fell in the wake of the aerial attacks carried out by the United States and its allies on its oil infrastructure. Other sources of ISIS income are **various types of criminal activity** (extortion, collecting ransom for abductees, trading in antiquities), **collecting donations and imposing local taxes.** Thus it is an exceptional example of **a terrorist organization which managed to acquire semi-national financial capabilities** to fund its military infrastructure and allow it to establish an alternative governmental system.

## **Military Measures Taken by ISIS in Syria and Iraq (Updated to mid-November 2014)**

10. **In June 2014 ISIS began a military campaign in Iraq whose objective,** in ITIC assessment, **was to take over most of the territory of northern and western Iraq to launch an attack on Baghdad.** At the same time it waged campaigns for the control of various districts **in eastern and northern Syria** and to weaken its rivals and enemies (the Syrian regime, the Al-Nusra Front, the Kurdish militias and the other rebel organizations). Its military achievements so far have enabled it to create a **supranational territorial continuum** of the vast area under its control, where it is actively working to establish the rule of its self-declared Islamic Caliphate.

11. To date ISIS' military campaign in Iraq has had **three stages:**

1) **Dramatic success (June – August 2014):** ISIS captured the oil city of Mosul from the Iraqi army. The Iraqi army, in whose establishment and training the United States invested enormous resources for years, collapsed and fled. An ISIS force also captured the **Mosul Dam** with its hydroelectric plant (north of the city on the Tigris), driving out the Kurdish Peshmerga force defending it. (An ISIS

force also tried to capture the **Haditha Dam** on the Euphrates, the second largest dam in the country, but was met with resistance from the Iraqi army stationed there.) ISIS also took control of the city of **Tikrit**, Saddam Hussein's birthplace and a former stronghold of the Iraqi Ba'ath party.

2) **Containment and halt (second half of August – September 2014)**: During the second half of August and September 2014 (when the United States began its pinpointed aerial attacks) **ISIS' advance was halted**. The Kurdish Peshmerga forces, the Iraqi army and the Shi'ite militias **retook the Mosul Dam**. The Iraqi army drove ISIS forces **from the large Haditha Dam and the oil city of Baiji** (an important logistic passage besieged by ISIS). ISIS enemies saved the lives of minority groups considered "infidels" by ISIS and targeted for harassment, attack and slaughter: Yazidi refugees were rescued from **Mt. Sinjar** (in northern Iraq) and the siege of the predominantly Shi'ite-Turkmen **town of Amerli** (south of Kirkuk) was lifted.

3) **Establishment of control over the Al-Anbar province, possibly a step in a campaign against Baghdad** (end of September – mid-November 2014): ISIS forces cleared pockets of resistance in the Al-Anbar province (Iraq's largest Sunni district) and advanced towards the capital city of Baghdad. At the same time, ISIS carried out a series of suicide bombing attacks in Baghdad, mainly in Shi'ite neighborhoods. The news agencies reported ISIS forces located several dozen miles from the city and fighting in the city of **Abu Ghraib**, west of Baghdad. However, the Iraqi army, the Shi'ite militias and the Kurdish forces had several military achievements, the most prominent of which was relieving the siege of Baiji.

12. So far ISIS has not yet taken full control of the Sunni Al-Anbar province. In ITIC assessment, in the future ISIS is planning to take over Baghdad, but apparently **the campaign will be far more difficult than the easy conquest of Mosul**, because its operatives are liable to encounter fierce resistance from the Shi'ite militias and the Iraqi army, which will have Iranian support and aerial cover from the American-led coalition. It is also likely that ISIS' rivals will cooperate against it. It can be expected that ISIS will attempt to overcome resistance **by besieging Baghdad and disrupting life in the city** (by firing rockets and mortar shells, and detonating IEDs and car bombs). During October and to mid-November 2014 **hundreds of civilians were killed in Baghdad**, most of them Shi'ite, in suicide bombings and car bomb attacks, for at least some of which ISIS was responsible.

13. While launching military campaigns, ISIS has **firmly established its grip on extensive areas of eastern and northern Syria**. It has **expelled its rivals and enemies** (among them other rebel organizations, the Al-Nusra Front and the Syrian army), **and attempted to gain control of new key areas (as of this writing the campaign for the Kurdish region of Qobanê near the Turkish border has not yet ended)**. It established its control over Al-Raqqah, turning it into its "capital city" in Syria, and solidified its control over the local population. **Its accomplishments are funded by the enormous sums of money pouring in from its control of the country's infrastructure, especially the sale of petroleum products from the fields in eastern Syria** (although its profits have decreased since the Americans and their allies began aerial attacks).

## **The Significance and Main Implications of ISIS' Achievements in Syria and Iraq**

14. The foothold gained by ISIS in Syria and Iraq has **far-reaching local, regional and international significance and implications:**

1) **Iraq:** ISIS conquests in the summer of 2014 **accelerated the disintegration of Iraq into religious and ethnic components**. It can be said that **Iraq no longer functions as a nation state**. Three quasi-entities arose: a Sunni district controlled by ISIS in western and northern Iraq; an autonomous Kurdish region in the north and a Shi'ite region in the center and south affiliated with the Shi'ite regime in Baghdad. The borders between them are blurred and unstable, and **ISIS, which is gaining strength, can be expected to continue its efforts to enlarge the areas under its control at the expense of the other entities, which are currently on the defensive**.

2) **Syria:** In Syria as well ISIS' increase in strength contributed to **deepening the country's de facto division**. ISIS secured its control over the northern and eastern parts of the country and weakened its various rivals (the Syrian regime, the Al-Nusra Front and the other rebel organizations). However, ISIS has not been able to break the Syrian regime's hold on Damascus and other core areas in the north and west, or of the rebel organizations on the southern part of the country (including most of the area of the Golan Heights along the border with Israel). The strengthening of ISIS and the American-led campaign against it **increased the existing complexity of the Syrian civil war and made the situation more volatile**, making it more difficult to resolve the Syrian crisis in the foreseeable future.



3) **The establishment of the global jihad in the Middle East:** ISIS' successes in Syria and Iraq turned them into **a new focus for the global jihad, inheriting the place of Afghanistan and Pakistan.** As opposed to the era of Osama bin Laden, today there are two principal hostile, rival jihadi organizations: one, ISIS, affiliated with the global jihad but at odds with the Al-Qaeda leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri; and the other, **the Al-Nusra Front**, a branch of Al-Qaeda in Syria. Between the two are global jihad networks within the Middle East and beyond. Some of the jihadi networks in the Middle East, mainly the Egyptian-based Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, have already taken a stand and sworn allegiance to ISIS, which is gaining power against the Al-Qaeda leadership. In addition, **in the future ISIS' potential for subversion and terrorism is liable to destabilize countries in the Middle East and to export jihadi terrorism to Israel and the West.**

4) **Regional Middle East significance:** The foothold gained by ISIS and the global jihad in Syria and Iraq **reflects and may aggravate the regional upheaval in the Middle East:** the flashpoints include the tensions, schisms and hostility among the various ethnic, religious and tribal groups, **especially between the Sunnis and Shi'ites; the political weakness of the nation states** created and forced upon the region by the French and British after the First World War; **the loss by the key states in the Middle East of their ability to govern;** and the establishment of alternative ideologies and governance in the places where nation states collapsed. The establishment of the Salafist-jihadi organizations in Syria and Iraq are manifestations of **the power of radical Islamic ideology to attract followers and present itself as a magical solution for the ongoing distress and basic ills that have plagued the nation states since their inception.**

15. **Thus additional instability and volatility were injected into the already unstable situation in the Middle East by the establishment of ISIS and the global jihad organizations' power base in Syria and Iraq.** They are liable not only to accelerate the disintegration of Syria and Iraq but to filter into the entire region. In the foreseeable future ISIS can be expected **to continue its military occupation of Syria and Iraq, establish its control and oppose the campaign the United States is waging against it.** However, in the long run, as it establishes itself more firmly in Syria and Iraq, **its influence may gradually spread to other Arab states;** its growing cooperation with the Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis is proof thereof. Veterans of the fighting in Syria who return to their countries of origin in the Middle East are liable to become "carriers" of terrorism and subversion, whether at ISIS instigation or on their



own initiative, thereby contributing to political instability in their own countries (as has already happened in Darnah in eastern Libya, taken over by a jihadi network which expressed its support for ISIS).

## The American Campaign against ISIS and the ISIS Response

16. ISIS' dramatic successes in the summer of 2014 were a strong blow to American foreign policy in Iraq. America's objective was to establish a democratic Iraqi regime that would fight terrorism and provide the country with a stable administration. **That proved to be completely unrealistic.** The Iraqi army, in whose establishment the United States invested enormous resources, was exposed as weak, as was the Shi'ite-affiliated central regime in Baghdad supported by America. Moreover, the Americans regarded the rapid establishment of ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front in Syria and Iraq **as threatening the stability of Middle Eastern countries** (among them Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the Gulf States). In addition, there was a significant rise in the number of foreign fighters who fought in the ranks of ISIS and other jihadi organizations in Syria and Iraq and who might endanger the security of America and other Western countries when they returned to their countries of origin.

17. During the first three years of the Syrian civil war the United States did not attach great significance to ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front, and tended to regard them as part of the general chaos created in Syria and Iraq after the regimes in both countries disintegrated. **The change in American policy began in the summer of 2014** with the fall of Mosul, the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate and the significant increase in the number of foreign fighters. **The media-documented slaughter and executions carried out by ISIS horrified and enraged American and Western public opinion** and also contributed to the change in American policy.

18. The United States **altered its policy** from underestimating ISIS to demonizing it and representing it as a significant regional and international threat. The change in concept required an American response, which was given in two stages: **the first (June – August 2014)** consisted of "pinpointed" responses intended to support the local forces in Iraq in halting the momentum of ISIS attacks. The pinpointed responses mostly involved sporadic aerial attacks, the dispatch of a small number of advisors and providing besieged minorities with humanitarian aid. However, **it quickly became clear that pinpointed responses were ineffective and did not**

**provide a satisfactory answer to the challenges to American interests posed by the successes of ISIS.**

19. For that reason, **the second stage was formulated as a comprehensive strategy for a campaign against ISIS**, as noted in a speech given by President Obama on September 10, 2014. The objective of the new strategy was to "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS in the following ways: **massive aerial bombings in Syria and Iraq; reinforcing the local forces in Syria and Iraq** (the Iraqi army, the Kurdish forces, the so-called moderate rebel organizations in Syria); **damaging the sources of ISIS' power** (especially its financial resources); **improving the United States' and the international community's deterrent capabilities against the foreign fighters and deepening international collaboration against them.** President Obama and spokesmen for the American administration repeatedly stressed that **the new strategy did not include sending a significant ground force to fight in Syria or Iraq, the so-called "boots on the ground."**

20. To implement the strategy, **in a relatively short period of time** the United States established an international coalition of Western and Arab countries. The Western allies (most importantly France and Britain) participated in the aerial attacks on Iraq while some of the Arab states (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan and Bahrain) joined the aerial attacks on Syria. By the end of October 2014 the United States and its allies had carried out **632 aerial attacks** against ISIS' military and economic infrastructure in Syria and Iraq (**286 in Syria and 346 in Iraq**). The attacks have continued into November.

21. **In ITIC assessment, the new American strategy suffers from a series of weaknesses**, which are detailed in this study. The main among them are that **its political objectives**, both declared and undeclared, **seem unrealistic; it is extremely difficult to destroy an organization with a Salafist-jihadi ideology** such as ISIS; **there are limits to what military force** can achieve against jihad organizations in general and ISIS in particular; the local forces in Syria and Iraq that America is counting on are weak; and the **coalition is heterogeneous**, composed of countries with different interests and internal constraints that are liable to make it difficult for them to provide the United States with effective support.

22. Beyond the inherent weaknesses in the American strategy, **societal and political situations in Syria and Iraq are complex and fluctuating. They cannot be fundamentally changed through military action, limited or even extensive.** That is because ISIS and other Salafist-jihadi terrorist organizations arose from the

chaos in security and the societal and political disintegration of Syria and Iraq, and because of the drastic changes caused by the regional upheaval. Iraq and Syria are a swamp in which ISIS and other jihadi organizations thrive. **Rooting out ISIS will be impossible until the swamp has been drained, and that is currently not on the horizon.**

23. However, **ISIS has its own inherent weaknesses**, which are examined in this study. If the United States learns to exploit them the campaign against ISIS **may have positive results, although perhaps less far-reaching than expected by President Obama**. The American-led military, economic and political campaign, if continued with determination, **may eventually weaken (although not destroy) ISIS; its spread throughout Syria and Iraq may be halted** (with the campaign of Baghdad still on the agenda); **and the Iraqi army and local organizations/militias within Syria and Iraq hostile to ISIS can be strengthened**. The campaign against ISIS may also **improve the way the United States and its allies deal with the foreign fighters who return to their countries of origin**.

24. As to ISIS' responses to the American campaign, ISIS has publicly beheaded five abductees, three American and two British. On September 21, 2014, ISIS called on its supporters around the globe to use a variety of methods to kill civilians in the United States and its allied countries. **It is possible that a number of terrorist attacks, including the vehicular and shooting attacks in Canada, the planned beheading of Australians and attacks in other countries were the first responses to the call.**

## The Israeli Aspect

25. The establishment of ISIS is part of the larger picture of the establishment of global jihad organizations in Syria and Iraq, such as the Al-Nusra Front. **For Israel the situation holds several threats and dangers:**

- 1) **The Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula might be turned into active terrorist fronts:** As of today, the Golan Heights are controlled by rebel organizations, the most prominent of which is the Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria.<sup>4</sup> While ISIS does not currently have a significant presence there, the dynamics can easily change **the Golan Heights from a relatively quiet area**

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<sup>4</sup> A senior IDF officer serving on the Golan Heights told correspondents that the with the exception of Mt. Hermon, 95% of the border between Israel and Syria was controlled by various rebel groups. The dominant group is the Al-Nusra Front, which conquered the region of Quneitra two months ago (Haaretz.co.il, September 22, 2014).

**into an active terrorist front** where the Al-Nusra Front may be dominant. In the Sinai Peninsula ISIS-affiliated Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (which has become the Sinai province of the Islamic State) is expected to launch terrorist attacks against Israel, although its strategic priority is its campaign against the Egypt regime.

**2) ISIS support for jihadi organizations and networks in the Middle East, especially the countries bordering on Israel:** ISIS is a terrorist organization with semi-state capabilities: it has advanced weapons and technology captured from the Iraqi and Syrian armies; it earns enormous amounts of money from oil fields and other resources; it has supporters in the Middle East and worldwide who help it enlist foreign fighters; it has an advanced media network which brands ISIS and the global jihad. To date those capabilities are mainly exploited for internal purposes (fighting enemies in Iraq and Syria). However, they may filter into jihadi organizations and networks in the Middle East, including countries and entities bordering on Israel, and strengthen the operational capabilities of local jihadi organizations.

**3) Terrorist attacks in Israel and against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad:** In the foreseeable future ISIS strategy will continue focusing on gaining a firmer foothold in Syria and Iraq. However, in view of the American aerial attacks and the competition between the jihadi organizations, **ISIS may encourage or initiate attacks within Israel from inside the country or from its borders, or against Israeli and/or Jewish targets abroad.** They may receive help and support from the veterans of the fighting in Syria and Iraq who returned to their countries of origin and/or from local operatives and networks that support ISIS.

**4) Cooperation between the United States-led coalition and Iran:** Despite Iran's basic hostility towards the United States, and despite Iran's subversion of American interests in the Middle East, it might collaborate with the United States against ISIS and global jihad in Syria and Iraq, the common enemy. **Such collaboration might occur at Israel's expense and harm its vital interests** (for example, Iran's concessions on the nuclear issue). **In addition, collaborating against ISIS might increase Iranian influence in Syria and Iraq, and might also strengthen Hezbollah's status in Lebanon,** possibly strengthening the Iranian-led radical camp in the Middle East.

26. There are potential dangers both to the West and **to Israel in regional politics** caused by the subversive potential of the increasing strength of Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria and Iraq. The influence of a strong Al-Qaeda and global jihad in

those countries might **filter into the entire Arab world**, including pro-Western countries **such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, which so far have shown themselves strong enough to survive the regional upheaval**. It might also give more power to the global jihad organizations and networks in countries peripheral to the heart of the Middle East which have failed regimes (such as **Libya and Yemen**) or weak regimes (such as **Tunisia**).

## Methodology

27. ISIS (sometimes ISIL) is an acronym for **The Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria**.<sup>5</sup> Once the Caliphate was declared ISIS began calling itself the "**Islamic State (IS)**" or the "**Caliphate State**." However, **this study refers to the organization as ISIS, the term usually used by the international community, the Arab and Western media, and even by "Islamic State" supporters.**

28. In preparing this study the ITIC dealt with a number of challenges:

1) **Turning a large amount of information into a comprehensive picture:**

When ISIS became a regional and international threat, individual bits of information became a daily flood. One of the challenges in preparing this study was turning them into a comprehensive research whole that examined the various aspects of ISIS' rise: its historical and causal background; its Islamic and Salafist-jihadi roots; its objectives; its military, political, administrative and financial capabilities; and the Iraqi, Syrian, Middle Eastern and international environments in which it operates

2) **Frequent changes in the situation on the ground in Iraq and Syria:** During the past half year dramatic developments occurred in Iraq and Syria, with the regional upheaval in the background. In addition, **ISIS is basically a dynamic organization, continually seeking to change the status quo both in the areas in which it operates against a large number of local enemies, and against the international campaign currently being waged against it. That forced the ITIC staff to update the study continually, understand the significance of tactical developments and examine and reexamine the situation on the ground. That situation is still in flux, so this study may be considered an interim report, which will have to be updated in the future.**

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<sup>5</sup> In Arabic Al-Dawlah al-Islamiyyah fi al-'Iraq wal-Sham. The English translation of "Al-Sham" is "greater Syria" and therefore we prefer it to "the Levant."

3) **The need to integrate information from various disciplines and fields:**

ISIS cannot be analyzed and examined only as a terrorist organization operating within a local national framework. A study of ISIS necessitates integrating various fields of knowledge, among them the history of Islam (including the Sunni-Shi'ite schism); the Salafist-jihadi movement from which ISIS sprang; the changes in Al-Qaeda and the global jihad; the developments in the civil wars in Syria and Iraq and the various aspects of the Middle Eastern upheaval. In preparing the study the ITIC used the existing literature and studies, and received support from experts in the various fields.

4) **Problematic sources of information:** In preparing the study we used primary sources from ISIS and other jihadi organizations. ISIS frequently posts information on the Internet about itself and its activities, but it is **self-glorifying propaganda** meant to sully the reputations of its rivals, threaten its enemies and deflect accusations. There is also **a vast amount of information posted by ISIS' many rivals**, which tend to defame the organization and sometimes manipulate the extent of its potential threat. In preparing this study we used investigative reports from correspondents (some of them Western) who had been allowed into areas under ISIS control. However the information to which they were exposed was sometimes directed and supervised by ISIS and intended to serve its political and propaganda objectives. **Because of the awareness of the problem and because of the lack of trustworthy sources of information, all sources were treated carefully and critically.**

29. Extremely valuable sources of information used in preparing this study were the continuing reports and basic research work published by **experts and think tanks working in various disciplines and following ISIS and the developments in Syria and Iraq** (primarily in the United States, Britain and Israel). Other important sources were reports from news agencies and the global media following ISIS and the developments in Syria and Iraq. We also used open source reports issued by intelligence services and governmental agencies in the Western and Arab countries struggling against ISIS (although such reports may have certain biases). For background information previous ITIC studies and bulletins were useful regarding the establishment of organizations affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria (For a list of bulletins see the Appendix).

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- 3) The limited American response (June – mid-September 2014)
- 4) Formulating a comprehensive strategy for a campaign against ISIS (beginning with the speech given by Barack Obama on September 10, 2014)
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- 6) Limitations raised by the UN regarding the legitimacy of the campaign
- 7) Aerial attacks in Syria and Iraq as a main component of the new strategy
- 8) The Khorasan terrorist network: another target for American attacks
- 9) Initial assessment of the aerial attacks
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- 1) Overview of ISIS behavior towards the United States and the West
- 2) The threat campaign (June 2014)
- 3) Abduction of Western hostages
- 4) The use of abducted correspondents for propaganda: John Cantlie
- 5) The use of threats: beheading four abducted Western nationals
- 6) ISIS call to kill Westerners and the initial response (the situation on the ground updated to the end of October 2014)

**Appendix:** Studies and bulletins issued by the ITIC about the establishment of Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Syria and Iraq (September 2013 – July 2014)

## Section One: The Historical Roots and Stages in the Development of ISIS

### Historical background

1. ISIS took root in the new era created in Iraq after the Americans took control of the country in 2003. The Second Gulf War led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, the dismantling of the Iraqi army and the destruction of the existing governmental structure. As a result, a security and governmental vacuum was created and the country's fragile social fabric (in the middle of which was the volatile Sunni-Shi'ite schism) was severely damaged.

2. During the almost nine years (2003 – 2011) the United States army was stationed in Iraq the Americans failed to establish effective Iraqi army and security forces to fill the newly-created security vacuum. While in Iraq, the Americans encouraged the establishment of what was supposed to be a **democratic national Shi'ite regime** headed by Nouri al-Maliki. However, the regime alienated the Sunni population, which had traditionally controlled the country, even though they were a minority (about 22% of the Iraqi population is Sunni Arabs – alongside the Kurds, who are also Sunnis – while about 60% of Iraqis are Shi'ites).

3. **The branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, established in 2004, entered the security vacuum and took advantage of the increasing political-societal Sunni alienation:** It became an important actor in the insurgent organizations fighting the American army, became stronger after the withdrawal of the American troops at the end of 2001, and spread to Syria after the civil war began in March 2011. The establishment of Al-Qaeda and ISIS in Iraq and Syria occurred in four stages:

1) **Stage One (2004-2006) – The establishment of the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and called "Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia:"** It waged a terrorist-guerilla war against the American and coalition forces and against the Shi'ite population. The first stage ended when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in an American targeted attack in June 2006.

2) **Stage Two (2006-2011) – Establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI):** ISI served as an umbrella network for several jihadi organizations that continued waging a terrorist-guerilla campaign against the United States, its coalition allies and the Shi'ite population. ISI was weakened towards the end of the American presence in Iraq following successful American military moves and a wise foreign

policy that supported the Sunni population and knew how to win their hearts and minds.

3) **Stage Three (2012-June 2014) – The strengthening of ISI and the founding of ISIS:** After the American army withdrew from Iraq ISI became stronger. Following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war ISI established a branch in Syria called the **Al-Nusra Front** ("support front"). Dissension broke out between ISI and its Syrian branch, leading to a rift between ISI and Al-Qaeda and **the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS).**

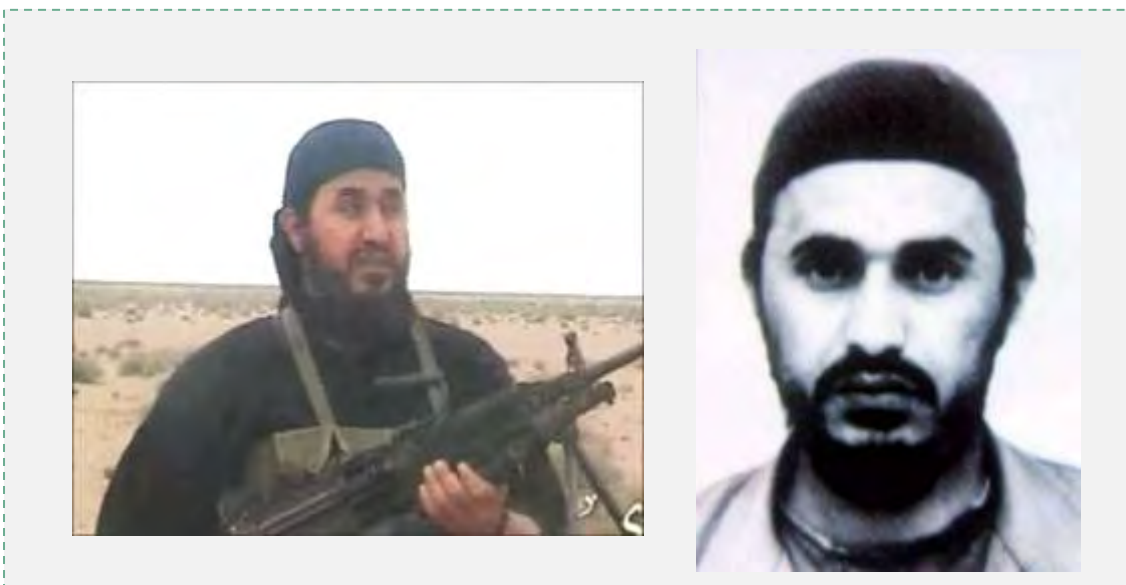
4) **Stage Four (as of June 2014) – Dramatic ISIS military achievements:** The most prominent was the takeover of Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq. At the same time ISIS established its control in eastern Syria where it set up a governmental center (its "capital city") in Al-Raqqah. In the wake of its success, ISIS declared the establishment of an **"Islamic State" (IS) (or "Islamic Caliphate")** headed by an ISIS leader named Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In September 2014 the United States declared a comprehensive campaign against ISIS, which is currently waging a fierce struggle against its many enemies both at home and abroad.

4. In ITIC assessment, historically speaking **there are similarities between the results of the American invasion of Iraq, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.** In all three instances the invading country failed to establish a new political order or to stabilize an effective, supportive regime. **In effect all three invasions had a deleterious effect on the existing delicate political-social fabric: in Afghanistan and Iraq they caused changes that contributed to the establishment of radical Sunni jihadi terrorist organizations and in Lebanon to a radical Shi'ite terrorist organization following Iranian ideology and receiving Iranian support.** The terrorist organizations established in Iraq (the branch of Al-Qaeda), Afghanistan (Al-Qaeda) and Lebanon (Hezbollah) **exist to this day.** ISIS, which developed from a branch of Al-Qaeda, has become strong in Iraq and Syria and **today threatens the order and stability of the Middle East and the entire world.**

## Establishment of Al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the beginning of the campaign against the United States and its allies

5. The establishment of Al-Qaeda and the global jihad in Iraq began when **Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian global jihad operative, went to Iraq in 2002 (before the entrance of the Americans)**. Al-Zarqawi (a nickname for Ahmad Fadil al-Nazal al-Khalayleh) was influenced by the Jordanian Salafist-jihadi movement headed by **Abdullah Azzam, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada** (all three of whom are of Palestinian origin). While in Afghanistan in 1989 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi underwent ideological indoctrination and operational training conducted by Abdullah Azzam (Osama bin Laden's ideological mentor). Al-Zarqawi returned to Jordan in 1993 where he was detained and imprisoned in 1994 and released in 1999, at which point he went back to Afghanistan.

6. After September 11, 2001, al-Zarqawi fled from Afghanistan and **sought refuge in Iran**. In 2002, before the American entrance into Iraq, he went to the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. While there he collaborated with a Kurdish jihadi Islamist organization called **Ansar al-Islam**, established in September 2001 (which is still operative and belongs to the coalition in Iraq collaborating with ISIS). Al-Zarqawi later established his own Islamic jihadi organization, **Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad ("the oneness [of Allah] and jihad")**. After the Americans invaded Iraq in March 2003 **he joined the insurgents fighting the United States and became a prominent figure until he was killed in a targeted American attack**.



Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, founder of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (Left, from Al-Jazeera, July 8, 2006; right, Inbaa.com)



7. In October 2004 al-Zarqawi's organization joined Al-Qaeda. He swore allegiance to Osama bin Laden and was declared the leader (*emir*) of Al-Qaeda in Iraq). (In Arabic *al-qaeda fi bilad al-rafidayn*, Al-Qaeda in the country of the two rivers, i.e., Mesopotamia). It was the first branch Al-Qaeda established beyond the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan. With its founding, al-Zarqawi was no longer the leader of a local Islamic jihadi organization but rather had become the official representative of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and later one of the prominent terrorists among the global jihad networks. The jihad network al-Zarqawi established in Iraq, initially composed of operatives who had been affiliated with it in Pakistan and Afghanistan, later enlisted operatives from Iraq, Syria and other Arab countries.

8. As the *emir* of Al-Qaeda in Iraq al-Zarqawi formulated a strategy for the campaign against the United States. He had the following objectives: **harm U.S. forces and its allies; discourage Iraqi collaboration** by targeting government infrastructure and personnel; **target reconstruction efforts in Iraq** with attacks on Iraqi civilian contractors and aid workers; and draw the U.S. military into **a sectarian Sunni-Shiite war by targeting Shiites**.<sup>6</sup> The wave of terrorism he initiated against the Shi'ite population, the result of his strong anti-Shi'ite doctrine, was carried out by suicide bombers and the use of car bombs which caused many civilian casualties, sowed chaos throughout Iraq, made it difficult to stabilize the internal situation and **added a murderous gene to the ISIS DNA**.

9. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's strategy, which stressed broad attacks on the Shi'ite population (and sometimes on Sunni civilians as well), was **criticized by both Osama bin Laden and his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri. They were concerned that the indiscriminate killing of innocent Muslim civilians would erode public support for Al-Qaeda throughout the entire region**. In July 2005 they criticized his strategy and instructed him to stop attacking Shi'ite religious and cultural sites. He refused, and **his relations with the Al-Qaeda leadership deteriorated**.<sup>7</sup> The dispute held the seeds of the tensions and rivalry between the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the central Al-Qaeda leadership, as it was manifested through ISIS' independent actions and policy, and ISIS and the Al-Qaeda leadership headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri.

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<sup>6</sup> Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters, Council on Foreign Relations: "Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria," June 12, 2014, updated August 8, 2014; <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state-iraq-syria/p14811>.

<sup>7</sup> Laub and Masters.

10. The terrorist-guerilla campaign of the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq was mainly carried out in and around Baghdad and in western Iraq. The local Sunni population in those regions became hostile to the central Iraqi government and to the United States, and today forms ISIS' societal and political power base. The most important city in the Sunni region was **Fallujah**. Fallujah is located in Al-Anbar, the largest province in the country, which became **al-Zarqawi's power base and symbolized the jihadi campaign against the American army**. Al-Zarqawi's main campaign was concentrated in Iraq, but he had made attempts to export jihadi terrorism to other Arab states, including Jordan, his country of origin (See below).

11. **Ideologically**, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi handed down to his heirs a **radical Islamic, uncompromising legacy whose traces are evident in ISIS' actions to this day**. Noteworthy is **its hostility toward Shi'ites in general and Iraqi Shi'ites in particular**, whom he referred to in strong terms ("human scum," "poisonous snakes," "deadly poison"). He regarded the Shi'ites as a fifth column who, along with pro-American Sunnis, were trying to institute a new Shi'ite regime in Iraq, anti-Sunni and pro-American. That anti-Shi'ite legacy, based on Arabic Islamic sources from the Middle Ages, **gave al-Zarqawi what he considered "Islamic legitimacy" to carry out mass-killing attacks on Shi'ites and the Shi'ite-affiliated central government**. His objective was to instigate a Shi'ite-Sunni civil war that would destabilize public order, prevent the establishment of a Shi'ite regime and support Al-Qaeda's takeover of Iraq. **ISIS has continued its brutality towards the Shi'ite population in Iraq and Syria**, implementing the legacy of al-Zarqawi who, after his death, became a revered figure and role model.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the ISIS training base in the Syrian city of Al-Raqqah is named after him. In Iraq and Syria, youth groups are nicknamed "al-Zarqawi's [lion] cubs."



Abu Musab al-Zarqawi turned into a role model: operatives in the Abu Musab al-Zarqawi camp. The banner reads, "ISIS – the camp named for the conqueror, the jihad fighter Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – may Allah receive him [as a shaheed in paradise]"

## The establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) and expanding the campaign against the United States and its allies

12. On June 7, 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in an aerial targeted attack carried out by the American army on a house in the city of **Baqubah**, northeast of Baghdad. His position as head of the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq was inherited by **Abu Hamza al-Muhajir**, aka **Abu Ayyub al-Masri**.

13. **Abu Hamza al-Muhajir**, to this day considered by ISIS as one of its founding fathers, was an Al-Qaeda operative of Egyptian origin, born in 1968, and was close to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In 1982 he joined the Egyptian jihadi organization headed by Ayman al-Zawahiri and was sentenced to death by Egypt in 1994 (apparently in absentia). Between 2001 and 2002 he underwent training in Afghanistan where he met Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He specialized in preparing IEDs used in Afghanistan and Iraq which caused the United States army many losses.

14. During the years Abu Hamza al-Muhajir headed the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (2006-2010), he maintained contact with Al-Qaeda operatives outside Iraq to receive support and to carry out terrorist attacks. He was involved in moving **Al-Qaeda operatives from Syria to Iraq and in sending suicide bombing terrorists and car bombs to Al-Qaeda networks beyond Iraq's borders**. His name is on the list of terrorists wanted in Iraq issued by the United States Central Command (Centcom) in February 2005 and a price of \$50,000 was put on his head.

15. On **October 15, 2006**, about four months after the death of al-Zarqawi, **an umbrella network called the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) was established for Sunni jihadi organizations**, dominated by the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq established by al-Zarqawi. The network was headed by **Abu Omar al-Baghdadi**, an Iraqi jihadist operative, whose real name was **Hamid Daoud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi**. In 1987, during the Saddam Hussein era, he was expelled from Iraq and joined jihad operatives in Afghanistan who were fighting the Russians. Between 2004 and 2005 he participated in the battles for Fallujah and received a head wound. He later had a senior role in the Al-Qaeda in Iraq leadership, retaining it until he was appointed to head the new umbrella network.



**Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (left), who inherited the leadership of the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq from al-Zarqawi, and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (right), who was appointed leader of ISI. The pictures were made public by the Iraqi government after the two were killed in a targeted attack in April 2010.**

16. The new umbrella network was composed of Sunni jihadi organizations which had fought the American army in Iraq. It was apparently established because of the blow Al-Qaeda suffered with the death of al-Zarqawi. To reestablish its power, the branch of Al-Qaeda in Iraq joined forces with other organizations with a similar ideology. However, Al-Qaeda in Iraq was the dominant factor in the umbrella network and has continued in that role to this day in ISIS. Among the jihad organizations that joined the network were Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen, Jaish al-Fatihin, Jund al-Sahaba and Katibat Ansar al-Tawhid wal-Sunnah.

17. The ISI took root **mainly in western Iraq**, which had a tribal Sunni society (especially in Al-Anbar province, which extends to the Syrian border). The guerilla and terrorist activities the organization carried out after the death of al-Zarqawi peaked in 2006-2007 with many attacks against the United States and the Shi'ite-

affiliated Iraqi government. At the same time it began establishing a civilian administration within the Sunni population in the area under its control, as an alternative to the central government.

18. **Between 2008 and 2011 ISI's power waned.** That was mainly because of the American army's extensive military campaign which began at the beginning of 2007, called the "**surge.**" The American forces were assisted by **Sunni tribesmen** in the campaign against the jihadi group, especially in Al-Anbar province, where the tribes despised the brutal practices of Al-Qaeda and the jihadi organizations. The tribesmen, who at the time received large financial incentives from the Americans, organized into groups called "**awakening councils**" or "**awakening groups.**"

19. However, as the date of the American withdrawal from Iraq approached, the amount of aid the councils received decreased and the security situation began to deteriorate. On the other hand, **the Shi'ite al-Maliki regime, which became more sectarian, was enforced on the Sunnis.** As a result the status of the awakening councils was eroded and the tribal heads, who had ruled under the aegis of the Iraqi administration, lost their status as well. **That prepared the ground for the Sunni tribes to join the ranks of ISIS in the campaign against the Iraqi regime when it began some years later.**

20. One of the more conspicuous successes of the American campaign against the jihadi networks in Iraq was **the elimination of two prominent ISI figures in April 2010.** The Iraqi security forces, in collaboration with the American forces, **killed both Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir. The leadership of ISI was inherited from Abu Omar al-Baghdadi by a prominent Iraqi jihadist named Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,** who heads ISIS today.

21. While the military campaign in Iraq was being waged, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and after him ISI, constructed **a covert operational infrastructure in Syria.** Its objective was to provide logistic support for the armed jihad campaign in Iraq against the United States and the coalition; the Syrian regime turned a blind eye and did not take effective steps against it. According to the British Quilliam Foundation, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi began constructing the jihadi infrastructure in Syria as early as 2000 by sending a number of jihadists veterans of his operations in Afghanistan, to Syria and

Lebanon. They established "guesthouses" in Syria from which they recruited operatives to fight in Iraq.<sup>9</sup>

22. Thus **during the campaign against the United States and the coalition in Iraq, Syria served as a way station for thousands of foreign Arab-Muslim jihadists en route to the fighting in Iraq.** The direction has been reversed and during the Syrian civil war thousands of jihadists from ISIS have gone from Iraq to Syria and joined the ranks of the rebels against the Assad regime.

## **Rebuilding the force of the ISI and the increase in its activities after the withdrawal of the American army**

23. The withdrawal of the American forces from Iraq in December 2011 left a military-security vacuum, enabling ISI **to rebuild and gather strength to renew its terrorist campaign against the Shi'ite population and the central Iraqi government.** That was done to encourage a civil war between Sunnis and Shi'ites. In addition, the civil war that broke out in Syria in March 2011 weakened the Assad regime and provided ISI with an opportunity to dispatch operatives to Syria and export its jihadi influence and ideology, until it managed, within a few years, to take over between a quarter and a third of Syria's territory in the east and north.

24. In the three years since the withdrawal of the American forces from Iraq (2012-2014), ISI has waged **an increasingly powerful terrorist-guerilla campaign against the Shi'ite population and the central Iraqi government.** According to UN statistics, the total number of civilian casualties (including police) in **2013 was the highest since 2008, with 7,818 killed** (6,787 in 2008) and **17,981** (20,178 in 2008) **injured.**<sup>10</sup>

25. The highlight of the ISIS attack on Iraqi regime institutions in 2013 was **breaking into the Abu Ghraib prison, near Baghdad.** The prison, the largest and best guarded in Iraq, notorious even during the Saddam Hussein regime, housed the rebels who fought the American army when it was in Iraq. After the American

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<sup>9</sup> Noman Benotman and Roisin Blake "Jabhat al-Nusra, a Strategic Briefing." [quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/jabhat-al-nusra-a-strategic-briefing.pdf](http://quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/jabhat-al-nusra-a-strategic-briefing.pdf). Also see the ITIC September 17, 2013 bulletin, "The Al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) is an Al-Qaeda Salafist-jihadi network, prominent in the rebel organizations in Syria."

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1499:un-casualty-figures-for-december-2013-deadliest-since-2008-in-iraq&Itemid=633&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1499:un-casualty-figures-for-december-2013-deadliest-since-2008-in-iraq&Itemid=633&lang=en)

withdrawal it was used by the Iraqi government **to imprison hundreds of Al-Qaeda operatives.**

26. Abu Ghraib was broken into on **July 21, 2013, according to a plan devised by ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.** It began with artillery fire to soften resistance, after which the walls were breached by two car bombs. Fifty ISIS operatives entered the prison armed with machine guns and grenades, **opened the cells and released about 500 Al-Qaeda operatives.** The operation, which lasted about an hour, met with no significant resistance from the Iraqi prison guards, most of whom fled when ISIS began firing artillery. The operatives who were released were taken from the prison by waiting ISIS vehicles and driven to nearby Syria (Lisireport.worldpress.com, Alsharqiya.com, YouTube, Time.com). **The released operatives had extensive terrorist experience and provided significant reinforcements for ISIS (Note: Some of them were detained by the American army before it withdrew from Iraq). That apparently contributed greatly to ISIS' later successes.**



Abu Ghraib prison (Alsharqiya.com)





Scene from a video showing the ISIS vehicles waiting for the prisoners who were broken out of Abu Ghraib (YouTube)

27. The year before the Abu Ghraib jailbreak ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi issued a audio cassette for his supporters reporting **his plans to release prisoners**. He called the campaign "Breaking Walls." During a 12-month period ISIS conducted 24 complex attacks using car bombs. Its operatives **broke into eight Iraqi prisons** in addition to Abu Ghraib, and released dozens of Al-Qaeda operatives (Time.com, December 16, 2013).



From the video of the Abu Ghraib jailbreak (YouTube)

## Dispatching suicide bombers: the operational trademark (in its various forms) of the Al-Qaeda branch in Iraq

28. The use of suicide bombers in Iraq has been the trademark of Al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq and currently of ISIS. At the end of the American invasion of Iraq Osama bin Laden and his second-in-command called on Iraqi civilians to carry out suicide bombing attacks to hurt the American invaders: "Use bombs wisely, not in forests and on hills...**The enemy is scared primarily by fighting in the streets in cities...We emphasize the importance of suicide operations against the enemy**"<sup>11</sup> [ITIC emphasis].

29. Bin Laden's call did not fall on deaf ears. During the first two years of the American presence in Iraq, there were 18 suicide bombing attacks carried out by an estimated 270 suicide bombers. Some of the attacks were carried out by operatives belonging to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's organization, which had joined Al-Qaeda.<sup>12</sup> Others were carried out by operatives belonging to ISI, established after al-Zarqawi was killed. They targeted the forces of America and the coalition, the new central Iraqi administration established by the United States and Iraqi Shi'ites. In some instances the suicide bombers detonated the car bombs in military bases and government facilities (sometimes by men wearing Iraqi army uniforms as camouflage).

30. There were **98 suicide bombing attacks in Iraq** in 2013 as opposed to **50 in Syria**.<sup>13</sup> ISIS did not claim responsibility for several of those that caused many Shi'ite

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<sup>11</sup> Bin Laden tape: full text, [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com), February 12, 2003, as cited in Yoram Schweitzer and Sari Goldstein Ferber, *Al-Qaeda and the Internationalization of Suicide Terrorism*, Memorandum 78, Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, November 2005, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See the article by Yotam Rosner, Einav Yogev and Yoram Schweitzer, "A Report on Suicide Bombings in 2013," INSS Insight No. 507, January 14, 2014. (<http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=6408>) According to the article, in 2013 there were 291 suicide bombing attacks carried out in 18 countries worldwide, causing the deaths of approximately 3,100 people. About 50% of the attacks (148 of the total) were carried out in the Middle East, **most of them (98) in Iraq**. The data thus indicate that **the number of suicide bombing attacks carried out in Iraq during that period was greater than the number carried out in Syria, although international attention focused less on Iraq than on Syria**.

civilian casualties.<sup>14</sup> The mass-killing attacks undermined the al-Maliki regime (according to Time Magazine, in September-December 2013 more than 3,000 people were killed in Iraq by suicide bombing attacks). **Nevertheless, Iran and the Shi'ite militias fighting the American army until its withdrawal preferred to send 7,000-8,000 Shi'ite operatives to Syria to defend the Assad regime, rather than to cope with ISI in Iraq**, underestimating its potential threat.<sup>15</sup>

31. **During 2014 ISIS-instigated suicide bombing attacks in Iraq continued.** Prominent among them was a series of deadly attacks carried out throughout October 2014 in residential areas in Baghdad, mainly among the Shi'ite population. The attacks, which killed hundreds of people, can perhaps be considered as increased ISIS pressure on Baghdad in addition to the attacks on Al-Anbar province, possibly in preparation for a campaign against Baghdad (See below).

## The expansion of ISI into Syrian territory, the establishment of ISIS and its growing strength

32. At the end of 2011 ISI sent **Syrian and Iraqi jihadists skilled in guerilla warfare to Syria to participate in the campaign against the Assad regime.** In January 2012 they covertly **established the Al-Nusra Front** ("support front"), a jihadi organization headed by **Abu Muhammad al-Julani**, thereby establishing an additional power base for ISI outside Iraq.<sup>16</sup> Al-Julani was appointed "*emir*" of Syria, i.e., the commander of the organization's Syrian branch, and was initially subordinate to ISI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

33. The gradual formation of the Al-Nusra Front as an independent jihadi organization was accompanied by **a deepening rift with ISI**, its parent organization. In an attempt to halt the process, **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the unification of the two organizations under his leadership**, changing the name of ISI to a new

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<sup>14</sup> For example, on September 11, 2013, a suicide bomber blew himself up at the Shi'ite Tamimi Mosque in a Husseiniya (a Shi'ite social-religious institution). It was carried out in the Shi'ite neighborhood of Al-A'zamiya. Forty Shi'ites were killed and dozens wounded. Despite the fact that ISIS did not claim responsibility for the attack, in ITIC assessment the organization was responsible. On September 21, 2013, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a car bomb in the Shi'ite Baghdad neighborhood of Madinat al-Sadr, killing eight people. In that case as well, ISIS did not claim responsibility but apparently it was nevertheless responsible.

<sup>15</sup> For further information see the March 18, 2014 bulletin "Shi'ite Foreign Fighters in Syria.)

<sup>16</sup> For further information see the September 17, 2013 bulletin "The Al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) is an Al-Qaeda Salafist-jihadi network, prominent in the rebel organizations in Syria. It seeks to overthrow the Assad regime and establish an Islamic Caliphate in Greater Syria, a center for regional and international terrorism and subversion."

name that would express the unification, "**The Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria [al-Sham], or ISIS<sup>17</sup> (April 9, 2013)**". However, Abu Muhammad al-Julani refused to subordinate himself to al-Baghdadi and quickly swore allegiance to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. In the developing rivalry between the two, Al-Zawahiri took sides and on June 10, 2014, announced the unification had been annulled. On January 3, 2014, **al-Zawahiri announced he had severed all connections with ISIS and that ISIS was no longer a branch of Al-Qaeda.**

34. In response, in February 2014 ISIS issued a public statement attacking the Al-Qaeda leadership and the Al-Nusra Front. **Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, a senior ISIS figure and its spokesman, accused the Al-Qaeda leadership of "straying from the correct path."** He said Al-Qaeda was no longer the foundation for jihad and that **ISIS was the only jihadi organization operating according to the vision of Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi** (YouTube, April 17, 2014). Thus the split between the Al-Qaeda leadership and ISIS became open. As a result, disputes between ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front and other rebel organizations in Syria worsened, **leading to violent clashes between them.** Since then the Al-Nusra Front has been operating in Syria independently, **while ISIS also operates both in Syria and in Iraq, its home countries and power base** (giving it an advantage over the Al-Nusra Front).

35. Since the public split between ISIS and the Al-Qaeda leadership, **the jihad organizations have become polarized, each adopting its own modus operandi:** ISIS has a reputation for conducting its relations with the population and its rivals in a strictly brutal fashion **based on al-Zarqawi's legacy, using force to implement Islamic religious law here and now in every region over which it has control.** The Al-Nusra Front's **policies** towards the population and its rivals **are more pragmatic**, enabling it to gain the support of the local residents and to actively cooperate with the other rebel organizations operating in Syria.

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<sup>17</sup> It is sometimes called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). "Greater Syria" seems to be the more correct translation of the term *al-sham*, which is why the ITIC prefers ISIS and not ISIL.

## Documents dealing with the confrontation between ISIS and the Al-Qaeda leadership



Announcement from Ayman al-Zawahiri about Al-Qaeda's rejection of ISIS, issued on January 3, 2014 on Al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic forums (Muslim.org).



ISIS announcement attacking Al-Qaeda and the Al-Nusra Front, February 4, 2014 (Alplatformmedia.com).

36. In retrospect, it can be said that **since the split ISIS has become stronger in Iraq and Syria and overshadowed the Al-Nusra Front**. In ITIC assessment that is because of **the attraction of its ideology** (which increased after the self-declaration of the Islamic Caliphate); **its brutality** (which frightens its enemies); **its military achievements** (resulting, among other factors, from its ability to move forces and weapons to and from eastern Syria and western Iraq); and its **many resources**

(weapons and money stockpiled during 2014). ISIS' strengthening over the past year is expressed in many ways: commanders and entire units of the Al-Nusra Front and other rebel organizations have joined it; parts of the Sunni opposition in Iraq collaborate with it; **foreign fighters, including those from Western countries, tend to join the ISIS' ranks rather than those of the Al-Nusra Front**; oaths of allegiance have been taken to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by jihad organizations beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria (most notable so far was the Egyptian Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis).

## Section Two – ISIS's ideology and vision, and their implementation

### ISIS as an Islamic Salafist-jihadi organization

1. **ISIS** is a Salafist-jihadi Islamic organization, part of the Sunni Islamic extremist faction which seeks to restore early Islam's days of glory **through jihad**, a holy war directed against internal and external enemies. **The Salafist movement** perceives the time of the Prophet Muhammad as ideal and the first Caliphs who succeeded him as role models (the Arabic word **Salaf** means ancestor or first generation). The modern Salafist movement began in Egypt, a result of the desire to purify Islam of its flaws and return to what was perceived as the Golden Age of Islam.

2. Initially, the Salafist movement focused on religious studies and the winning of hearts and minds (*da'wah*) as a way of creating an Islamic society and a state ruled by Islamic law. However, within the Salafi movement **an extremist faction called *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* (i.e., jihadi Salafism) developed, from which Al-Qaeda and the global jihad organizations, including ISIS, have emerged.** An ideologically important contribution to the development of the movement was made by **Sayyid Qutb** (1906-1966), an Egyptian ideologue whose ideas inspired the establishment of Islamic organizations that supported **violent struggle** (including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden's successor as leader of Al-Qaeda).

3. From a **Salafist-jihadi** perspective, Muslims must strive to disseminate and implement Islam in all areas of life by liberating the lands of Islam from other cultures (especially Western culture) **through jihad** (holy war), which is perceived as **the personal duty (*fard 'ayn*) of every Muslim**. Thus Muslim must fight the enemies of Islam through **violent and uncompromising military struggle**. Moreover, according to the Salafist-jihadi perception, the enemies of Islam are not only external (mainly the US and the West), but also Arab regimes that cooperate with the West or secular Arab regimes that are considered "infidel." Therefore, according to Salafist jihadists, Islamic religious law justifies overthrowing them.

### The borders of the Islamic Caliphate established by ISIS: vision and reality

4. The return to the Golden Age of Islam, according to ISIS, takes place through the reestablishment of an **Islamic Caliphate, based on the Salafist-jihadi interpretation of Islamic religious law (the sharia). The Caliphate State**, whose



establishment was declared by ISIS, currently includes large parts of Iraq and Syria, from the outskirts of Baghdad to the outskirts of Aleppo. However, ISIS seeks to expand its self-declared Caliphate State to the rest of Iraq and Syria, topple the regimes in Baghdad and Damascus, and **subsequently spread from there to the rest of the region, most of it included in Greater Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*)** according to ISIS: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, and even Kuwait (See map).

5. However, ISIS's ambitions **extend beyond the areas of Greater Syria**. According to its vision, the Caliphate in Greater Syria will be the core of an extensive **Islamic Caliphate**. It will include the countries of the Middle East; North Africa; parts of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Khorasan); European countries that were conquered from the Muslims in the past (Spain, the Balkans); and other Muslim countries (Turkey, the Caucasus).

6. **Following are three maps of the Caliphate State** posted on ISIS and jihadi forums:

- A. The Caliphate State with its present borders.
- B. The area of Greater Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*) to be controlled by ISIS in the future.
- C. The Caliphate State with its extensive borders, from West Africa to Central Asia (including some areas in Europe).



The ISIS self-declared (June 2014) Caliphate State ISIS in large areas of western Iraq and eastern and northern Syria. The map was posted on jihadi forums on August 18, 2014 (Alplatformmedia.com; Hanein.info).





The ISIS insignia superimposed on Greater Syria (Bilad al-Sham) (Albawabhnews.com).



Left: Map of the Islamic Caliphate in English with a picture of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at the right (Hanein.info). Right: The Islamic Caliphate State with its extensive borders. Only Islamic names appear on the map, not the names of the modern nation states (Hanein.info).

## The Caliphate in Islamic history<sup>18</sup>

7. Reestablishing the Islamic Caliphate is the vision of the Salafist-jihadi movement, which ISIS has begun to put into practice. Various Islamic factions, entities and activists (for example, Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Party of [Islamic] Liberation, founded in 1953) and Islamic thinkers championed the concept of reestablishing the Caliphate. Some of them (such as Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden's mentor) even attempted

<sup>18</sup> Based in part on Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Chapters in the History of the Arabs and Islam* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, Reshafim Publishing House, 1968), pp. 102-127.

to chart a path to its establishment. For Salafist-jihadists, the establishment of the Caliphate means subjecting all **Muslims to a single accepted and agreed-on ruler, eliminating nation states** (the fruit of the "imperialist plot"), **eliminating the "infidel regimes" in Arab and Muslim countries and establishing a single Muslim theocracy. The theocracy will be governed in accordance with the model of the Islamic Caliphate in its Golden Age**, (i.e., the generations after the Prophet Muhammad) according to the radical Salafist-Jihadi interpretation of Islam, and will be headed by a single ruler, the Caliph.

8. The Caliphate vision is inspired by the period following the death of Muhammad (632 AD), when it was necessary to appoint his substitute (a successor was not appointed because no mortal could not succeed him). The Arabic title given to the rulers who came after Muhammad was **Khalifat Rasul Allah**, i.e., "substitute for the messenger of Allah" or, in its short form, Caliph ("substitute").

9. **The period of the first four Caliphs of Islam**, Abu Bakr (whose name was adopted by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), Umar, Uthman and Ali (632-661), was the most politically cohesive period in the history of Islam and is **considered its Golden Age**. They were the four Caliphs who established the first Islamic state, conducted the major conquests beyond its borders and laid the economic and administrative foundations for the Muslim Empire. Within a few generations, Muslim Arabs, who were unknown in the history of the world until then, established a huge empire on which they imposed the Arabic language and the religion of Islam.

10. For those reasons the first four Caliphs have been greatly admired in Islam throughout the ages, and many Sunni Muslim movements perceive them as their spiritual fathers. The collective term for the first four Caliphs is **Rashidun**, i.e., those who follow the straight path as instructed by Muhammad. **The institution of the Caliphate has since become a foundation of Islam**, and Caliphs from the Quraysh tribe (Muhammad's tribe) ruled it in practice until the time of the Ottoman Turks (1517). They were replaced by Ottoman-Turkish Caliphs, who gave themselves the director title of Sultan. They ruled until 1924, when Turkey, which became a republic under the leadership of Atatürk, announced the abolition of the Caliphate.

11. **As to the justification for idealizing the Caliphate justified**, while the period of the first four Caliphs is considered by many Muslims as Islam's Golden Age, an examination **shows the idealization to be exaggerated**: three of the first Caliphs were murdered and during their reign the weakness of Islam was revealed, i.e., its lack of unity and its inability to prevent civil war (*fitna*) and bloodshed. Shortly after the

rise of the Abbasid rule (750 AD), the institution of the Caliphate began to gradually decline. When the Abbasid Empire began to disintegrate at the end of the ninth century AD, local rulers declared themselves Caliphs to legitimize their rule, and the institution of the Caliphate was gradually emptied of content.

## **Annuling the existence of the nation states in the Middle East**

12. **Islam, from its inception until the end of the First World War, did not recognize national borders in the territorial areas that it ruled** under various dynasties (until the end of the Ottoman Dynasty). Nation states in the Middle East were created only from the beginning of the twentieth century after the First World War. **ISIS does not recognize nation-state legitimacy or the national borders of the Middle East** as outlined in the Sykes-Picot Agreement and formulated by the superpowers during and after the First World War.

13. For example, in a video distributed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in January 2014, he objected to the political boundaries of the regional nation-states and stressed that ISIS intended to establish an Islamic state with no national boundaries. He described the Islamic state based on regions occupied by ISIS as "A country **whose way was paved by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi** [who founded Al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq], and has absorbed the blood of our senior leaders **Abu Omar al-Baghdadi** [head of ISI until he was killed in a targeted attack] and **Abu Hamza al-Muhajir** [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's successor as the leader of Al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq, who was killed in a targeted attack together with Abu Omar al-Baghdad]."

14. On June 29, 2014, ISIS posted a pair of videos (in English and in Arabic), expressing its ambition to annul the Sykes-Picot Agreement and "shatter" the borders of the nation-states established in the Middle East following it. The English-language video is entitled "**The End of Sykes-Picot.**" It includes a map showing the Iraq-Syria border and states that a single Islamic state with no national borders has now been established. According to the video a **single supranational Muslim state will be established, to be headed by a single Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**, who always says he breaks down barriers. The video adds that with the help of Allah, **they will break down the barriers in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and in all countries, until they reach Jerusalem, with the help of Allah** (Youtube.com).



Background slide of the audiotape posted on YouTube and elsewhere (June 29, 2014), entitled "The End of [the] Sykes-Picot [Agreement]"



From a ceremony marking the "shattering of the borders" between Iraq and Syria, in a video posted by ISIS on June 29, 2014 (MEMRI, July 2, 2014)

## The roots of ISIS's hostility to the United States, the West and Western values

15. **ISIS is intensely hostile to the United States, other Western countries, Israel and the values of the modern liberal West** (democracy, pluralism, freedom of the individual, freedom of worship, equal rights for women, etc). Anti-Americanism and hostility to the West and its values are not unique to ISIS. **It is one of the salient characteristics of radical Islam, in both its Sunni (Al-Qaeda) and its Shi'ite formats** (Iran's Khomeinist regime). The Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, is no different from ISIS in that respect. The source of their hostility to the United States is not only political. **The depth of their hostility is reflected by a total**

**rejection of American culture (the ultimate expression of modernity) and Western culture in general.** This culture is perceived as a dangerous temptation threatening to poison the Islamic world. It is a temptation Muslims are liable to become addicted to and therefore is perceived as more dangerous.<sup>19</sup>

16. Like other organizations of its kind, **ISIS is hostile to the United States and the West and is committed to waging jihad against them.** ISIS has made that clear in many publications directed at the Western countries and through its actions, especially after the start of the American campaign against it (executing hostages and encouraging its supporters to carry out terrorist attacks against Western civilians worldwide). In practice, however, **ISIS's current top strategic priority is realizing the first stage of its vision, taking over Iraq and Syria and establishing the Caliphate State that has been set up in a significant portion of their territories.**

## **The concept of *takfir* (denouncing a person as an infidel thereby enabling his execution) and its implications**

17. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah frequently refers to Salafist-jihadi Islamic organizations (the most prominent of which are ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front) as **"takfir groups"** (*jama'at takfiriyya*), i.e., groups that declare a Muslim or group of Muslims as infidels because they do not adopt the Sunni radical concept of Islam (as it is perceived by those who make the declaration). **The declaration means "infidels" may be executed**, so it is a **serious accusation** and permits the killing of individual people and groups. ISIS and similar Salafist-jihadi Islamist organizations translate the concept into **executions and harassment of Shi'ites, Christians, Yazidi and members of other ethnic and religious communities.**

18. The concept of *takfir* was previously used by Salafist-jihadi Islamist organizations such as **Al-Takfir wal-Hijra** in Egypt<sup>20</sup> and **Al-Qaeda**. However, the roots of ISIS's extreme intolerance of Iraqi Shi'ites and minority groups can also be seen as **the murderous legacy of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi**, the founder of the Al-Qaeda branch in Iraq, from which ISIS emerged. Al-Zarqawi called for total war against the Shi'ites in Iraq and practiced on the ground. That is reflected by the indiscriminate, murderous

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<sup>19</sup> See Emmanuel Sivan, *The Clash within Islam* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, Am Oved / Ofakim Library, 2005), the chapter entitled: The Roots of anti-Americanism, pp. 57-65.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Takfir wal-Hijra carried out a wave of terrorist attacks in Egypt in the 1970s and early 1980s.

terrorist attacks that have been carried out by ISIS and its predecessors in Iraq against Shi'ites and against other ethnic and religious groups, while damaging the burial sites and holy sites of the various religions.

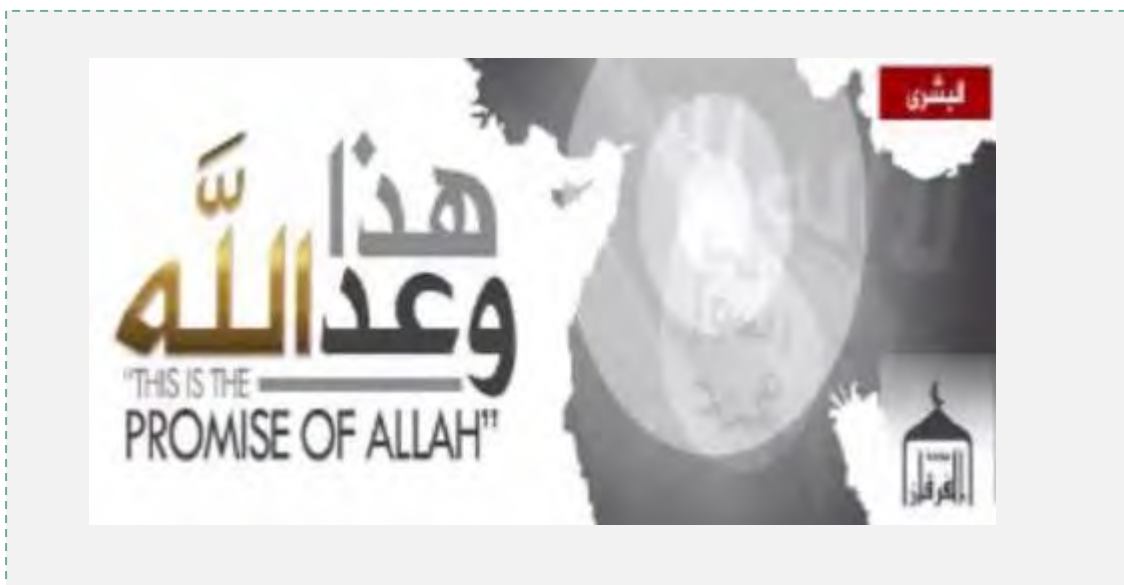


ISIS publication on behalf of the Nineveh province showing a Shi'ite mosque in the city of Mosul being blown up (Iraq.shafaqna.com)

## Beginning the implementation of the vision: declaring the Islamic Caliphate

19. **On June 29, 2014**, ISIS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani declared the establishment of the **Islamic Caliphate, headed by Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**. The announcement was made by a spokesman for ISIS on an audiotape posted to YouTube and elsewhere. On the occasion of the establishment of the Caliphate, Caliph al-Baghdadi announced an amnesty for detainees held by ISIS.





Background slide of al-Adnani's audiotape entitled "This is the promise of Allah," declaring the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate (YouTube)

20. Following are the highlights of the declaration of the Caliphate:

A. Allah sent his messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, **and ordered him to carry out jihad to ultimately establish an Islamic Caliphate.** The nation is in a state of ignorance (*jahiliyya*, the period of ignorance that preceded Islam), and that is its situation is so deplorable. Allah has taken the Arab tribes and turned them into an Islamic nation and **the time has come to renew its glory.** There are signs of victory in battle and it is therefore essential to establish the Caliphate now.

B. Thus the **ISIS Shura Council** (the supreme organ of the organization) was convened. It discussed the issue and decided to establish **the Islamic Caliphate in the territories conquered by ISIS in Syria and Iraq ("from Aleppo to Diyala").** The Shura Council also decided to appoint **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as Caliph and Imam of Muslims everywhere.**<sup>21</sup> It was decided **to change the organization's name from The Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) to The Islamic State (*al-dawla al-islamiyya*, IS).**

<sup>21</sup> In the Caliphate created after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD, **the Muslim Caliph also bore the title of imam.** In Prof. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh's book, Prof. Moshe Sharon writes: "The role of the Caliph was therefore an entirely practical and secular role. He had no spiritual advantages or spiritual powers that ordinary Muslims did not have. Nevertheless, his position was cloaked in a religious aura, by its very creation. Thus, for example, he bore the title of **Imam** (a title that was later used for Caliph as well), i.e., the leader of public prayer, thus he could, if he wished, lead the prayer ceremony and deliver the Friday *khutbah* (sermon) ..." (Moshe Sharon, Chapter V: The Caliphate, in Hava Lazarus-Yafeh', p. 125).

C. Abu Muhammad al-Adnani called on all operatives of Islamic organizations **to swear allegiance (*al-bay'ah*) to al-Baghdadi and work together to aid the Islamic State. The current residents of the Islamic State** were the first called on to swear allegiance to al-Baghdadi. Al-Adnani warned Muslims **against adopting Western ideologies such as democracy and nationalism**, and called on all residents of the Islamic State to be united.



ISIS operatives in Al-Raqqqa, ISIS's "capital" in Syria, celebrating the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate (Al-Haq News Agency's Twitter page, July 2, 2014)

## Al-Baghdadi's calls for jihad and his vision of the Islamic takeover of the world

21. ISIS emphasizes **jihad** as its chosen means to overthrow the regimes in Iraq and Syria, establish the Islamic Caliphate, and fight against its many internal and external enemies until the implementation of the vision, **an Islamic takeover of the entire world (and symbolically, "the occupation of Rome," the symbol of Christianity)**. That was reflected in the tape distributed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi shortly after the declaration of the Caliphate.

22. **On July 1, 2014**, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi posted an audiotape in Arabic on YouTube entitled "**Message to jihad fighters and the Islamic nation during Ramadan.**" Al-Baghdadi took advantage of the Islamic religious month of Ramadan and the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate to **encourage Muslim operatives around the world to support the Caliphate, join the ranks of the jihad fighters in Syria and Iraq and wage a jihad that would lead to an Islamic takeover of the world** (according to MEMRI, translations of the audiotape were distributed in English,



German, Russian, Albanian and French through the Al-Hayat Center, the ISIS propaganda unit).

23. The main points made by al-Baghdadi:

A. **Call for jihad:** Al-Baghdadi called on Muslims to help the Islamic nation **through jihad for the sake of Allah**. He promised the jihad fighters that bliss awaited them in paradise and said, "Allah's religion is the victorious one." Al-Baghdadi added that **the Muslim masses around the world lived in suffering**, noting **al-Sham (Greater Syria), Egypt, Iraq, Palestine [which is part of Greater Syria], the Arabian Peninsula, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, China, India, Somalia, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Ahvaz (Khuzestan Province in Iran, with its Arab character)**. He said that the Muslims in those places were waiting for the Islamic State and jihad fighters to come and help them. He described the world **as split into two camps**: one included **Muslims and jihad fighters**; opposite it stood the camp of **the Jews, the "Crusaders" (i.e., Christians) and their allies** in all the "infidel countries," led by **the US and Russia**.

B. **Praise for the Islamic Caliphate:** Al-Baghdadi called on Muslims to **support the Islamic Caliphate to save themselves from enslavement to foreigners**. He noted that the Nation of Islam failed after the abolition of the Caliphate (1924) and was taken over by infidels. The infidels stole their resources, denied their rights, conquered their lands and appointed collaborators to rule over them by force. The collaborators waved false slogans of peace, democracy, pan-Arab nationalism, nation states and Ba'athism. In contrast, the Caliphate whose creation was declared **"united the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, American, Arab, French, German and Australian, who became brothers**, defending each other in the same trench [...] under one flag, the flag of faith." **He said that the Muslims would erode the power of the nation-state model, destroy the model of democracy** and expose the "satanic nature" of those models.

C. **Defending ISIS's methods:** According to al-Baghdadi, what the Arab regimes call "terrorism" is actually resistance to their false slogans and implementation of Islamic religious law (sharia). He added "Is it not terrorism when Muslims are killed and their homes burned in **Burma**, when they are murdered and their limbs cut off in **the Philippines, Kashmir, Indonesia**, when they are deported in **the Caucasus** and buried in mass graves in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**? Is it not terrorism when the homes of Muslims in **Palestine** are

destroyed, their land is stolen and their rights are violated? Is it not terrorism when mosques are burned in **Egypt**, the homes of Muslims are destroyed, their women are raped and the **jihad fighters in Sinai** and elsewhere **are oppressed**? [...] Is what is happening in **Turkestan**<sup>22</sup> not terrorism? Is it not terrorism when women are prevented from wearing the **hijab in France**? [...] All this is not terrorism, but freedom and democracy, he added sarcastically.

**D. Call for Muslims to join the Caliphate which was established by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria:** Al-Baghdadi rejected the concept of the modern nation states and called on Muslims to join the Islamic State he founded. He said, "There is no [need for slogans such as] Syria for the Syrians or Iraq for the Iraqis, since the earth is Allah's [...] The country belongs to the Muslims; Therefore Muslims, wherever they are, immigrated to the countries of Islam, since the immigration to the area (or region) of the Islamic State [Dar al-Islam] is obligatory." He called on Muslims who were able to do so to perform ***hijrah*** (i.e., migration, an important symbolic act in the history of Islam which, in his perspective, is related to the establishment of the Caliphate<sup>23</sup>). He called on **Muslim clerics, led by sharia judges, people with military, administrative and academic capabilities, as well as Muslim doctors and engineers in all fields, to join his self-declared Islamic State, arguing that it was a necessity due to the sorry state of Muslims worldwide.**

**E. The vision – the Islamic takeover of the entire world:** Al-Baghdadi concluded by saying that if Muslims adhered to Islam **they would rule the entire world:** "If you cling to it [faith in Allah and the principles of Islam], **you will even conquer Rome [the symbol of Christianity], and the Earth will be owned by you, with the help of Allah.**"

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<sup>22</sup> **Turkestan** is the Sunni Muslim separatist name for the autonomous region of Xinjiang in western China where the Uighur people live. Uighur operatives have joined the ranks of jihadi organizations in Syria.

<sup>23</sup> ***Hijrah*** - The journey of the Prophet Muhammad and his first followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD, due to the persecution that they were subject to in the beginning. It has become a symbol of the isolation of loyal believers from the sinful and perverted society and as a model for the beginning of a proper Islamic society and the revival of Islam (Uriah Furman, **Islamiyun** [Hebrew]. Tel Aviv: IDF / Maarakhhot Publishing House, 2002, p. 322).

## Al-Baghdadi's public appearance at the Great Mosque in Mosul (July 5, 2014)

24. On July 5, 2014, a video of a Friday sermon delivered by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at the Great Mosque in Mosul on the previous day was posted on YouTube. The video shows armed militants, apparently al-Baghdadi's bodyguards, who were present in the mosque. **His public appearance and the publication of his picture are unusual** and are intended, in ITIC assessment, to dispel reports that appeared in the media at that time (from Iraqi government sources) about his having been injured in an air strike.

25. In the video, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is called by a number of Islamic titles: **Caliph, Imam, and Amir al-Mu'minin, which indicated that he headed the Islamic State.** His main points:

**A. The importance of implementing Islamic law and the establishment of the Caliphate:** "The religion of Allah will not exist, save through the implementation of sharia (Islamic law). Allah has a book which guides the Faithful [i.e., the Quran], and a victorious sword [for Islam]." He said that **jihād fighters established the Caliphate and appointed an Imam** (i.e., Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself) to rule over them. The establishment of the Caliphate, which was lost for centuries [although formally it was in existence until 1924], is the duty of the Muslims.

**B. The importance of the path of jihād:** Jihad should continue for the sake of Allah despite all the difficulties, in order to fight idol worshippers: "Allah has commanded [you] to perform jihad through your property and through your souls [...]" "He who performs jihad, Allah will forgive his sins and lead him through the gates of paradise." Al-Baghdadi finished his sermon by asking Allah to grant victory to the Muslims and the jihād fighters.



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi delivering a sermon at the Great Mosque in Mosul (YouTube, July 5, 2014)



Left: ISIS flag. Right: An armed security guard during al-Baghdadi's sermon at the Great Mosque in Mosul (YouTube, July 5, 2014)

26. The main purpose of al-Baghdadi's rare public appearance was to refute media reports of his injury in an air strike. However, there is no doubt that his public appearance, **where he was presented as a member of the Quraysh tribe**, the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad, **also served to establish the concept of the Caliphate, glorify al-Baghdadi's status** and legitimize his rule in the Muslim world. That was noted by his arch rival, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, when asked why al-Baghdadi had appeared in the media (Al-Akhbar, Lebanon, August 15, 2014):

"It is not his policy to appear in the media, but I think he appeared in order to handle a problem of Islamic religious law. When **ISIS** presented its Caliphate, a dispute arose in the Islamic world between Sunni clerics, namely, **how can we swear allegiance to a man**

whose name we do not know, whose personality we do not know, about whom we have no information or data. For one cannot swear allegiance to an unknown person, we must swear allegiance to someone known. He had to appear in order to become known and pave the way for the swearing of allegiance. That was the consideration behind the move [...] Regarding his declaration that he is a member of the tribe of Quraysh - **the Caliph must be a member of the tribe of Quraysh**, while an Emir [ruler] of a country, like a king, prince or president, is not [considered] in the eyes [of his subjects] as a Caliph of the Muslims. **The Caliph of the Muslims must be a member of the tribe of Quraysh**. Because Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's project is the Caliphate, he must tell them that 'I [i.e., al-Baghdadi] am a member of the tribe of Quraysh' in order for their swearing of allegiance to be genuine" [ITIC emphasis].

## Initial responses to the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate

27. The establishment of the Caliphate State evoked a significant positive reaction among Salafist-jihadi Islamist organizations and operatives and among population groups in the Arab-Muslim world. However, it also encountered resistance. In retrospect, **it can be said it served ISIS well, increased its ideological appeal, strengthened Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's position, and subsequently led to jihadi organizations and networks outside Iraq and Syria swearing allegiance to Al-Baghdadi.**

28. The declaration of the Caliphate met with complete rejection among ISIS's Sunni Muslim adversaries (mainly the Al-Nusra Front), Islamic rebel organizations in Syria, and Salafist-jihadi Islamist networks and individuals outside Iraq and Syria. For example:

A. **The Al-Nusra Front**, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, expressed its opposition to the declaration of the Caliphate and denied reports that it also planned to announce the establishment of an Islamic emirate. The organization issued an audiotape in which its leader, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, said he did not intend to establish an Islamic Caliphate at the present time, although his organization was striving for its establishment. In due time, Al-Julani noted, they would announce the establishment of an emirate, but it would be done with the consent of the jihad fighters and Muslim clerics (Longwarjournal.org, July 13, 2014).

B. According to a Tweet that appeared on the Twitter account of the **Islamic Front** (a coalition of Islamic rebel organizations in Syria) on July 1, 2014, the declaration of the Caliphate was null and void for the following reasons: the

conditions for the establishment of a Caliphate did not currently exist today, the message served an agenda that strived to divide Muslim countries into cantons at the expense of the Sunnis; regional and international entities would exploit the declaration to intervene directly in Muslim lands to thwart the revolutions in Syria and Iraq; and the Syrian regime might exploit the declaration to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the world to increase its activity against the "jihad fighters." The announcement called the declaration of the Caliphate a *fitna* (civil war, a highly negative term in Islam) and called on all factions of jihadi organizations in Syria and Iraq to achieve "unity of line and unity of word."

C. Criticism of the declaration also came from a prominent Salafist-jihadi figure, **Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi** (Isam Mohammad Tahir al-Barqawi), **leader of the Salafist-jihadi movement in Jordan**. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, **who is hostile to ISIS and opposes its actions**, issued a statement on his Facebook page, stating that the declaration of the Caliphate threatened to divide the Muslims (Alghad.com, July 2, 2014). On another occasion, he said that he had been pressured to retract the statement he issued describing ISIS's position as "deviant," but he continued to adhere to his opinion (Al-Sabil, Jordan, July 1, 2014).

## **ISIS's flag and its Islamic significance**

29. **The flag of Al-Qaeda and Salafist-jihadi Islamic organizations, including ISIS's flag, are black with a white inscription of the Testimony (*shahada*), the heart of the Islamic faith: "There is no god but Allah."** Below the inscription there is a white circle, the seal of the Prophet Muhammad, and with an inscription in black reading "Muhammad the Messenger of Allah" (**Muhammad Rasul Allah**, an inscription that has to be read **from the bottom up**; See below). In some cases, the flag (prior to the declaration of the Caliphate) also included the inscription "**The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham**" to distinguish it from other jihadi flags.



The inscription on the ISIS flag



The seal of the Prophet Muhammad





Operatives carrying ISIS flags (Aawsat.com)



Operatives carrying the ISIS flag, with an inscription on the bottom reading "The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham" (Assakina.com)

30. The flag used by ISIS is known by various names, among them "**the oneness flag**" (*rayat al-tawhid*)<sup>24</sup>, "**the flag of the Caliphate**," and is sometimes mistakenly called "**the Flag of the Prophet**." In practice, the flags of the Salafist-jihadi organizations, including ISIS, **are not identical** to the flag of the Prophet. According to tradition, the flag of the Prophet is called "**the banner of the eagle**" (*rayat al-uqab*) and looks different: the *shahada* on it appears in full on a horizontal line, as can be seen on the flags of most Islamist organizations.

<sup>24</sup> The flag is called "the oneness flag" (Oneness of Allah), because it contains the **word of oneness** (*kalimat al-tawheed*): "There is no god but Allah; Muhammad [is] the Messenger of Allah."



31. The inscription "**Muhammad, Messenger of Allah**," which appears inside the white circle, is read **from the bottom up**. According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muhammad adopted a silver seal containing three lines, with one word on each line: Muhammad, Messenger [of] Allah. In most traditions, the words, "Muhammad the Messenger of Allah" were written in the usual order, that is from top to bottom; according to some traditions, the lines are read from the bottom up, as in a seal. Since 2006, the Prophet's seal has appeared on the flags of Salafist-jihadi Islamic organizations (affiliated with Al-Qaeda) **with the lines going from the bottom up**. The jihadi flag was adopted by ISI and later by ISIS.

32. **ISIS has turned its jihadi flag into a brand**, which it has marketed successfully around the world, including in the West. **Being aware of the importance of the battle for hearts and minds, ISIS has made extensive use of its flag** by its military forces and by the institutions of government it has established; the ISIS flag has been hoisted in central locations in the cities it controls and at the executions it has carried out. **Arab and Western media**, with their intensive coverage of ISIS, have made extensive use of the propaganda "raw materials" supplied to them by ISIS, **contributing to the branding of the flag. Use of the flag and insignia quickly became a means to express defiance and/or support of ISIS in the Arab and Muslim world, in the West and in Israel** (see below).



**Hoisting the ISIS flag in the main square of the city of Al-Bab, in the Aleppo province, as a symbol of control and sovereignty (Sef.ps)**

## The Islamic roots of ISIS's desecration of gravesites and shattering of statues

33. In the past year, the Arab and global media have given prominence to the desecration of graves and shattering of Muslim and non-Muslim statues **by ISIS and Al-Nusra Front operatives in Syria and Iraq**. That behavior, which characterizes the conduct of some of the Salafist-jihadi organizations (including Al-Qaeda), **has historical Islamic roots** attributed to a statement by the Prophet Muhammad.

34. From the outset Islam split into the Sunni school of thought (the majority version) and the Shi'ite school of thought (the minority version). Throughout Muslim history, the opposing sides periodically desecrated each other's graves to highlight its own superiority. Acts of desecration were prominent at the beginning of the Sunni Abbasid Dynasty (in the 8<sup>th</sup> century) and the Safavid Shi'ite Dynasty (in the 16<sup>th</sup> century). **Ibn Taymiyyah** (died in 1328 AD) was a senior Sunni Muslim cleric who vehemently opposed the worshipping of graves of individuals considered holy. Ibn Taymiyyah, who possessed a Salafist Islamic worldview, forbade such worship because he saw it as an expression of polytheism, which Islam forbids, in view of the fundamental and uncompromising belief in the oneness of Allah (*tawhid*).

35. In the modern era, graves began to be desecrated with the rise of Wahhabism in the Arabian Peninsula during the 18<sup>th</sup> century AD. The founder of Wahhabism, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1691-1787), espoused highly conservative Sunni Islam (i.e., Salafism) and adopted Ibn Taymiyyah's view regarding a complete ban on worshipping holy gravesites (including those of prominent Sunnis). He initiated an extensive campaign to desecrate holy gravesites in the Arabian Peninsula. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Wahhabi Emirate was destroyed following a punitive campaign conducted by the son of the ruler of Egypt at the time, Muhammad Ali, as ordered by the Ottoman central government.

36. However, it was reestablished in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century following the renewed alliance between the Wahhabis and Emir Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud (who ruled from 1926 to 1953). The emir, who adopted the Wahhabi Islamic world view, was the actual founder of Saudi Arabia. After occupying most of the Arabian Peninsula, Ibn Saud began a holy gravesite cleansing campaign, primarily in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. During the campaign the graves of family members and prominent friends of the Prophet Muhammad were also destroyed.

37. In the past two decades, following the rise of Al-Qaeda and additional Salafist-jihadi organizations, graves have been desecrated and statues shattered in various locations around the world. Thus, for example, a huge statue of Buddha was destroyed by the Taliban in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, in 2001 (it was restored only a decade later); in 2012, Muslim cultural institutions were destroyed by Ansar Dine in Timbuktu, the capital of Mali in West Africa; and holy gravesites (mainly of Sufis) were desecrated by Islamist extremists in Libya in 2012 (not far from the capital Tripoli and in Misrata).

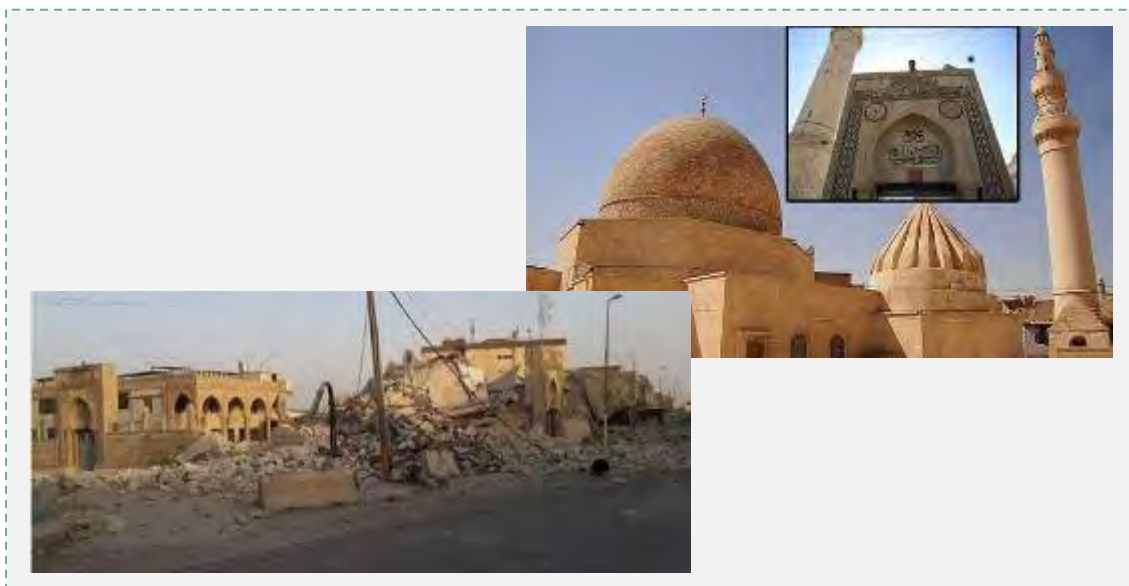
**38. ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front continue the tradition of desecrating gravesites and shattering statues.** That was evident in its recent conquests in Iraq in the summer of 2014. ISIS destroyed **the grave of the Prophet Jonah in Mosul, the grave of the Prophet Daniel in the area of Mosul, and the grave of the Sufi Sheikh Ibrahim** in the Nineveh province. In addition, ancient statues and cultural treasures in Iraq dating from the dawn of civilization were smashed: Here



The grave of the Prophet Jonah in Mosul before and after it was destroyed by ISIS (Alsumaria.tv; Allibad.net)



Left: The destruction of ancient statues in Iraq, cultural treasures dating from the dawn of civilization (Islamist-movements.com). Right: The grave of the Prophet Daniel in Mosul before it was blown up by ISIS (Youm7.com)



Left: The grave of the Prophet Seth after its desecration (Room-alghadeer.net). Right: The desecration of the grave of the Prophet Seth, the son of Adam, who is considered a prophet in Islam (abna.ir)

## Section Three: ISIS's Military Achievements in Iraq in the Summer of 2014 and the Establishment of its Governmental Systems

### Overview

1. In June 2014 ISIS launched a broad military campaign in northern and western Iraq. It had unprecedented achievements, **the most important of which was the occupation of the oil city of Mosul**, Iraq's second largest city, including the takeover of the Mosul dam, the largest in the country, located to its north. That made the force and extent of the ISIS threat clear to the United States and its coalition allies, and motivated the Americans' new strategy (See below).

2. ISIS's achievements in the summer of 2014 were made possible by **its takeover** (with the help of Sunni tribes) **of most of Al-Anbar province in western Iraq at the beginning of 2014**. At that point the important Sunni city of Fallujah was occupied, as was part of the city of **Ramadi**, the Al-Anbar provincial capital. **Since then most of Al-Anbar, the largest of the Iraqi provinces, has not been under the control of the central Iraqi administration**, although there are still pockets of anti-ISIS resistance.<sup>25</sup> ISIS also ramped up its attacks on administration targets and on the Shi'ite population in areas under Iraqi regime control, undermining the regime's authority and status.

3. The achievements provided ISIS with a **firm territorial base** from which, in the summer of 2014, it could launch a **broad attack throughout western and northern Iraq**. During the first stage (June-August) **ISIS scored dramatic successes, the most prominent, as noted above, was the occupation of Mosul and the dam to its north**. During the second half of August and September **ISIS forces were forced from the dam** and its attempts to take over **Samara** (a Shi'ite holy city) and the oil city of **Baiji**, north of Baghdad, have so far been unsuccessful.

4. During October 2014 ISIS renewed its **attacks in Al-Anbar province and in the north**. Its strategic is apparently the capital, Baghdad. The results of such a campaign would have far-reaching consequences for ISIS, Iraq and on the entire region.

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<sup>25</sup> **Ramadi, Al-Anbar's capital city**, and the surrounding territories are still not fully under ISIS control. Clashes continue between ISIS and the Iraqi army for control of the city and its surroundings (updated to mid-November 2014).



## Attacks in northern Iraq: successes (June – August)

5. On June 10, 2014, ISIS initiated a broad military campaign involving about 5,000 of its fighters. It was launched in two directions: **north towards Mosul and south towards three important cities north of Baghdad: Baiji, Tikrit and Samara**. Its victories were swift: the Iraqi army, established and trained by the United States, collapsed almost without firing a shot, **giving ISIS a rapid victory over Mosul**, the capital city of the Nineveh province. With 1.8 million inhabitants, most of them Sunni, Mosul is the second largest city in Iraq after Baghdad. It has oil fields, refineries and pipelines, and is an important crossroads to Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

6. During the occupation of Mosul ISIS freed an estimated 3,000 prisoners from Iraqi administration prisons and took over military facilities which in the past had been used by the American army. It also took control of Mosul's international airport and other governmental facilities (banks, oil facilities, etc.). It carried out mass slaughters, including the killing of hundreds of civilians and Iraqi army personnel who had been taken captive. ISIS released pictures of its acts of slaughter to frighten and deter its internal and external enemies (See below). ISIS also destroyed mosques and shrines, and damaged churches (including, on June 24, 2014, the shrine of Nabi Yunus, the Biblical Jonah, in Mosul).



ISIS forces stage a victory parade in the streets of Mosul after its occupation (Twitter account of ISIS in Baghdad, June 24, 2014).

7. After the takeover of Mosul **ISIS occupied the city of Tel Afar**, about 50 kilometers, or 30 miles, west of Mosul. Most of its 80,000 inhabitants were Sunnis,

with a Shi'ite minority. At the beginning of August 2014 ISIS forces took over the territory near the junction of the Iraqi, Syrian and Turkish borders. During the attack ISIS took control of the **hydroelectric dam on the Tigris, the largest in the country**, located about 50 kilometers north of Mosul. The dam regulates the flow of the river and provides electricity for vast areas of Iraq. Forces belonging to the Peshmerga, the autonomous Kurdish Iraqi army, which were defending the dam, retreated after a battle lasting 24 hours (CNN.com, August 4, 2014).



Left: The Mosul dam (Kitabat.com). Right: ISIS operative waves a flag near the dam (Aliraqnews.com)

8. At the same time as the attack on Mosul ISIS forces attacked **Baiji, Tikrit and Samara**, all north of Baghdad. On June 11, 2014, they took over the **oil city of Baiji**, located about 200 kilometers, or 125 miles, northwest of Baghdad, where the largest oil refinery in the country is located<sup>26</sup> (control of the city later passed to the Iraqi army, see below). On June 11, 2014, the **city of Tikrit** was also occupied; it is the capital of the Salah al-Din province and the birthplace of Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi army tried to recapture it but failed (See below). ISIS also threatened the Shi'ite holy city of Samara, but it was halted by Shi'ite militias dispatched to defend it.

<sup>26</sup> The oil refinery compound is located halfway between Mosul and Baghdad. It can distill 310,000 barrels a day, supplying fuel for northern Iraq and 11 provinces, including Baghdad. The region is also home to a power plant that provides the electricity for most of northern Iraq (Nytimes.com, June 18, 2014). During the first half of 2014 the oil refinery produced 48% of the country's petroleum distillates (Gulfnews.com, September 14, 2014).



The oil facility in Baiji (Bousla.net)



Left: ISIS operatives hoist the organization's flag at an Iraqi army post in the Nineveh province.  
 Right: "Nineveh Unit" forces are briefed before battle (Longwarjournal.org, June 24, 2014)

9. Although the Kurdish Peshmerga were supposed to be a defensive force, they took the initiative at the beginning of the ISIS attack directed against the Iraqi regime. On June 12, 2014, they took over Kirkuk, whose control was disputed by the Kurdish autonomous region and the Iraqi administration. Apparently it was not only a Kurdish preemptive strike but exploited the opportunity to take over an important city with large oil reserves.



## Containment and halt (second half of August – September)

10. During August and September 2014 ISIS continued its momentum, attacking in the north and south, with two goals: **one**, to take control of or gain a foothold in the important cities north of Baghdad (Baiji, Tikrit and Samara); and **two**, to extend its control in the area of Mosul and northern Iraq. This time, however, **ISIS met with more determined resistance, especially from the Kurdish Peshmerga forces**, which had adopted a more offensive posture, as opposed to their defensive posture of June. At this stage the Peshmerga and Iraqi army forces enjoyed increasing **American aerial support**, which contributed to the halt of the ISIS forces and also made it possible for them to retake several locations previously occupied by ISIS.

11. At this stage the situation on the ground was the following:

1) **The Mosul dam**: On August 18, 2014, Peshmerga forces, with the support of the Iraqi army and the American air force, **retook control of the strategically important Mosul dam**. With American aerial support they also forced ISIS out of several villages to the north and east of Mosul.

2) **The oil city of Baiji**: The Iraqi army forced the ISIS forces out of Baiji and its oil refinery. Since then **ISIS forces have besieged the city**, which is a logistic junction in the center of the country. They also have control of the oil pipes leading from the city and prevent the refinery from operating. Three days after American President Obama declared the campaign against ISIS, ISIS forces attacked the refinery with mortar shell fire and caused heavy damage to the oil tanks, setting them on fire (**Note**: In November 2014 the Iraqi security forces announced they had lifted the siege of Baiji).

3) **The city of Tikrit**: After the Iraqi army tried twice, unsuccessfully, to take control of the city, on August 19, 2014, ISIS forces repelled another Iraqi army attempt at conquest. The Iraqi army was met with machine gun and mortar shell fire south of the city and with mines and sniper fire from the west. The Iraqi army declared it would make another attempt to capture the city.



Peshmerga forces take control of the Mosul dam (YouTube.com)

4) **The Haditha dam on the Euphrates (the Qadisiya dam):** The Haditha is a large dam on the Euphrates river in Al-Anbar province near the city of Haditha. It is the second largest dam in Iraq, and both regulates the flow of the Euphrates and produces electricity. In July 2014, ISIS's **Al-Anbar Unit** attacked the Iraqi army base in Haditha. Between then and the beginning of September 2014 battles were fought for control of the dam. On September 8, 2014 **Iraqi army forces supported by Sunni tribesmen and with American aerial support repelled the ISIS forces, driving them from the region around the dam.** The area is now under Iraqi army control.



The Haditha dam (Almustaqbal.com, July 21, 2014).



ISIS vehicles patrol near Haditha (Longwarjournal.org, July 19, 2014).

5) **Lifting the siege of the city of Amerli:** Amerli, south of Kirkuk, was besieged for more than two months, since June 18, 2014. It is home to an estimated 15,000-17,000 **Turkmen Shi'ites**. ISIS considers them infidels, making them candidates for slaughter once the city was occupied. At the end of August 2014 the siege of Amerli was lifted after a joint attack of Shi'ite militias and Kurdish forces with American aerial support. In addition, the city of Sulaiman Bek, near Amerli, which had served as an ISIS stronghold, was captured. In addition to aerial cover for the forces, American, Australian, French and British planes dropped humanitarian aid to the inhabitants of Amerli "at the request of the government of Iraq" (Reuters.com, August 31, 2014).



ISIS force besieges Amerli (Almustaqbalnews.net).

## Renewal of military attacks (end of September – updated to mid-November 2014)

12. At the end of September 2014 ISIS renewed its military attacks in the Sunni province of Al-Anbar. Its objectives were to take control over the entire province and to eliminate pockets of Iraqi army resistance, supported by Sunni tribesmen. The attacks may be considered as ISIS's **preparations for a future campaign against Baghdad**. The main targets were the cities of Ramadi and Haditha, and the dam on the nearby Euphrates, all defended by Iraqi army forces with the support of Sunni tribesmen. ISIS also attacked the region north and northwest of Mosul, including Mt. Sinjar. The attacks are ongoing and clashes continue in various focal points.

13. In the attack on Al-Anbar province at the beginning of October ISIS attacked **the city of Hit**, located between Haditha and Ramadi. ISIS executed captured Iraqi army soldiers and dozens of Sunnis from the Albu Nimr tribe. At the beginning of October ISIS took control of a neighborhood in the southern part of Ramadi. At the end of October 2014 clashes were reported in the city of Abu Ghraib, west of Baghdad. In mid-November ISIS reported **fierce battles** in Ramadi, claiming that it controlled more than half the city.<sup>27</sup>

14. On the other hand, Iraqi army and Kurdish forces exerted pressure on ISIS and initiated by initiating military attacks in the areas south of Baghdad and around Baiji, the Rabia border crossing on the Iraq-Syria border, the northern town of Zumar. According to a statement from the Iraqi security forces, their greatest success so far was on November 14, 2014, when they lifted the siege of Baiji. It was broken by the Iraqi army and Shi'ite militias near the refinery compound. Among the Shi'ite militias the Iranian-supported "League of the Righteous" (*asa'ib ahl al-haq*)<sup>28</sup> was prominent, whose operatives played an important role in lifting the siege. The American air force

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<sup>27</sup> Ramadi is home to Sheikh **Ahmed Abu Risha**, the leader of a powerful tribe which was formerly an American ally. His and other Sunni tribes fought at the side of the Iraqi army in Ramadi, Fallujah and other cities in Al-Anbar province (Longwarjournal.org, November 16, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> "The League of the Righteous" is an Iraqi Shi'ite militia established in 2006 by the Iranian Qods Force and operating under its aegis. Its operatives are supported by Hezbollah in Lebanon. Before the Americans withdrew from Iraq the militia carried out a series of attacks against the United States and its allies, including abductions, rocket fire and detonating IEDs. The militia specialized in the use of explosively-formed projectiles (EFPs), placing them along routes used by the American army. Its operatives, who became unemployed with the Americans withdrew from Iraq, were sent to Syria to support the Syrian army, where they were directed and encouraged by Iran.

provided aerial support for the Iraqi army and the Shi'ite militias (Longwarjournal.org, November 14, 2014).

15. At the same time, **ISIS initiated a series of suicide bombing attacks in residential (especially Shi'ite) neighborhoods throughout Baghdad**, to undermine order and sabotage daily life. According to Iraq Body Count, an Iraqi project that monitors the death toll in Iraq, **during October 2014 590 people were killed in suicide bombing attacks**. Most of them were carried out in Shi'ite neighborhoods in Baghdad or at roadblocks manned by Shi'ite fighters (Iraqbodycount.org, November 2, 2014).

16. Some of the attacks were the following:

1) **October 16, 2014** – Two car bombs driven by suicide bombers blew up in Al-Hurriya, a Shi'ite suburb of Baghdad. Three buildings collapsed and dozens of people were killed. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack (Alnilin.com).

2) **October 17, 2014** – Three car bombs driven by suicide bombers blew up in busy areas in Baghdad. At least 25 people were killed (Aljazeera.net).

3) **October 19, 2014** – A suicide bomber wearing an explosive belt killed seventeen people at a Shi'ite mosque in the Al-Harithiyya neighborhood in western Baghdad.

4) **October 21, 2014** – A suicide bombing attack was one of three attacks carried out on the outskirts of the Kadhimiya neighborhood in northern Baghdad. At least 21 people were killed and 23 wounded. Among those killed were several policemen, including Ahmed al-Hafizi, commander of the Iraqi military police. ISIS claimed responsibility for two of the attacks (Alarabiya.net, October 14, 2014).

5) **October 27, 2014** – During the night a car bomb exploded in the center of Baghdad, killing at least 15 people. The area was home to Sunnis, Shi'ites and various ethnic minorities (Csmonitor.com, October 27, 2014).

6) **November 2, 2014** – A suicide bombing attack killed at least 14 Shi'ites during a march held for the Shi'ite holiday of Ashuraa. The suicide bomber blew himself up near a tent where Shi'ites had gathered (Dailystar.com, November 3, 2014).

17. ISIS efforts to establish control over Al-Anbar province have not yet ended. After it does take control, it **may try to occupy Baghdad, topple the Iraqi regime, take over the government institutions and possibly declare Baghdad the capital of**

**the Islamic Caliphate.** However, Baghdad, with its large Shi'ite population, is liable to present fierce resistance to an ISIS takeover, **including the Iraqi army and the Shi'ite militias with American and coalition aerial support** (as well as Iran, which supports the Shi'ite Iraqi regime and regards itself as sponsoring the Shi'ites in Iraq).

18. ISIS and its allies may not be able to take over Baghdad with a rapid military attack as they did Mosul. ISIS knows that, and therefore **its possible course of action may be to besiege the city and disrupt life to the point where it eventually surrenders.** It can do that by **cutting off the main roads leading to Baghdad, preventing supplies from reaching the local population and military reinforcements stationed in the city, damaging the infrastructure** (by blowing up bridges, for example), **firing rockets and mortar shells at the city and its suburbs, and detonating car bombs inside the city** (a modus operandi at which ISIS has shown itself skilled).

19. However, according to American news reports based on anonymous American sources, **the Iraqi army, with the support of the United States and the coalition countries, is planning a large-scale counterattack for the spring of 2015. Its objectives will be to liberate northern and western Iraq (including Mosul) from ISIS occupation** and to restore Iraqi government control over the main roads and the region of the Iraq-Syria border (Nytimes.com, November 2, 2014). Carrying out such an attack will require overcoming major obstacles, including rebuilding the Iraqi army and increasing its order of battle in a relatively short period of time, while at the same time finding solutions for the complex political problems making it difficult for the central Iraqi government to function.

## **Executions of prisoners and killing of ethnic and religious minorities**

### **Execution on Mosul**

20. **ISIS's military occupations have been accompanied by executions and other atrocities targeting the Iraqi army** (especially Shi'ite soldiers), **government officials and ethnic and religious minorities** ISIS regards as "infidels." The executions are widely publicized by the social networks **to frighten and deter ISIS's enemies at home and abroad.** They have in fact sown fear among population sectors targeted by ISIS, and have led to the mass exodus of residents and the increase of Iraq's problem of displaced persons. According to the UN, after the



occupation of Mosul about **half a million people** fled, most of them to the north towards Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region (Nytimes.com, June 14, 2014; Al-Jazeera, June 23, 2014).

21. On June 22, 2014, a CNN report in Arabic was posted on YouTube, **documenting the execution of Iraqi army soldiers who had been captured by ISIS**. The video showed truckloads of corpses. It was probably filmed in **Mosul**, where **hundreds of Iraqi soldiers** were captured by ISIS forces. Most of the people photographed were wearing civilian clothing but some of them were in uniform.



The execution of Shi'ite Iraqi army personnel captured by ISIS. The Arabic reads, "This is the fate of the Shi'ites whom Nouri [al-Maliki] sent into battle against Sunnis" (Alplatformmedia.com)



ISIS's "Salah al-Din unit" executes Iraqi prisoners (Alplatformmedia.com).





Iraqi soldiers who were captured by ISIS's "Salah al-Din unit" Alplatformmedia.com)

## Attack and harassing Christians

22. **Attacks on the Christians in Mosul** began immediately after the city was occupied. One of those who fled the city was Mosul **Archbishop Nikodimos Daoud**. Interviewed in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish autonomous region, he said **ISIS was planning to commit the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Mosul's Christians**. He said the Christians had been given the alternatives of conversion, a head tax or execution (Russian Today TV, July 23, 2014, according to MEMRI, August 8, 2014).



A Mosul church vandalized after ISIS occupation the city in June 2014. The media claimed that it had been demolished by IEDs (Abnar.ir).

## Executions of Iraqi soldiers in Tikrit

23. On September 2, 2014, Human Rights Watch exposed reports of mass executions carried out by ISIS in Tikrit after its forces occupied the city on June 11, 2014. According to the reports, between 560 and 770 people were executed in Tikrit, most of them Iraqi soldiers who had been captured by ISIS forces. Human Rights Watch examined the evidence, including videos and satellite pictures, and found a number of gravesites in addition to those exposed in the past (Hrw.org, September 2, 2014).

## Aid for the Yazidi on Mt. Sinjar

24. At the end of July-beginning of August 2014 ISIS forces took control of **Sinjar**, a city west of Mosul, **the traditional stronghold of the Yazidi community**. The Yazidi are a minority group of Kurdish extraction who have a complex religion with mystical ideas and ritual elements taken from ancient faiths.<sup>29</sup> The Yazidi were persecuted by the Ottoman Empire, which accused them of paganism. They were also persecuted by Saddam Hussein's regime. ISIS regards them as "infidels" and gave them the choice given to all "infidels" in regions it occupies: convert or die. During its takeover of Sinjar ISIS murdered at least 500 Yazidi who refused to convert.

25. **The Yazidi were brutally harassed by ISIS**. A UN investigation dealing with the ISIS reign of terror in Syria and Iraq quoted **Dabiq**, an ISIS online magazine in English used for propaganda and recruitment, which reported what happened to Yazidi women captured by ISIS and divided among its operatives as "the spoils of war"<sup>30</sup> (Website of the UN Council for Human Rights, November 14, 2014).

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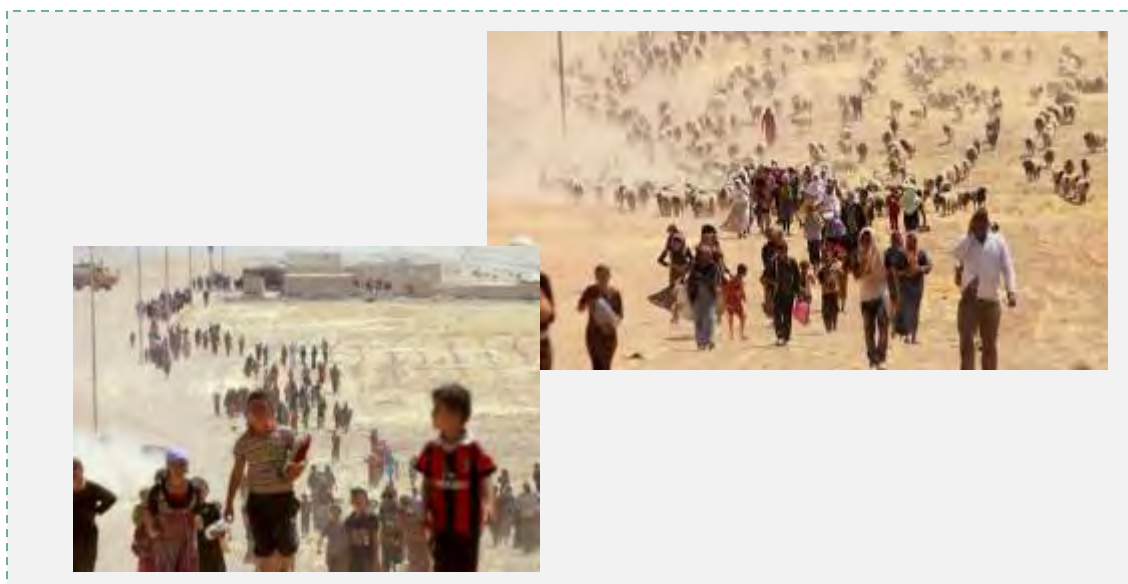
<sup>29</sup> There are close to a million Yazidi in the world today (maximum estimate). About two thirds of them live in northern Iraq, most of them in the Nineveh province. Most experts are of the opinion that the name Yazidi comes from the name of the second Umayyad Caliph, Yazid bin Muawiyah, whose army defeated the Shi'ite Imam Hussein bin Ali at the battle of Karbala. The Yazidi consider Yazid bin Muawiyah an incarnation of the Divinity. Yazidi culture is Kurdish and most Yazidi speak Kurmanji, a holy language unique to the community. The Yazidi religion is influenced by Islamic Sufism, but most of its beliefs are not related to Islam and to a great extent its cosmology is reminiscent of ancient Persian faiths.

<sup>30</sup> The concept of minority-group captives as spoils of war were explained by an ISIS operative to the Egyptian terrorist organization Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis on the ISIS forum on November 4, 2014 (See below). One of ISIS's suggestions was for jihadi fighters in Egypt to attack Christians and Shi'ites. The reason was "because they are sectarian groups that cannot be trusted and with whom no agreement can be reached. **They are nothing more than the spoils of war given to you by Allah.**"

After capture, the **Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Shariah amongst the fighters...** who participated in the Sinjar operations, after one-fifth of the slaves were transferred to the IS's authority to be divided as khums [spoils of war].

DABIQ (ISIS publication)

26. Following the clear and present danger to their lives, between 3,000 and 4,500 Yazidi fled to Mt. Sinjar, near the Syrian border (according to other accounts, it was tens of thousands of refugees). They were without shelter, food or equipment. The United States air-dropped humanitarian aid and the Kurdish force from Syria (the YPG, the People's Protection Units) and possibly the Turkish PKK (the Kurdistan Workers Party) went to Mt Sinjar, clashed with ISIS operatives and **helped Yazidi escape to the al-Hasakah province in Syria, saving them from death.**



**Yazidi refugees leave Mt. Sinjar for Syria (24.ae).**

27. During the first half of October 2014 ISIS operatives again attacked Mt. Sinjar, from the north. According to reports they took control of a number of villages and threatened the local Yazidi fighters. During the second half of October 2014 there were reportedly 750 families on Mt. Sinjar, about 5,000 Yazidi fighters and hundreds of YPG fighters (Alquds.co.uk, October 20, 2014; Shafaaq.com, October 20, 2014)

## The establishment of a governmental system in Mosul

28. In Mosul and the other areas it occupied, **ISIS set up a governmental network** to establish its control over the population and fill the void created after the Iraqi government institutions collapsed in the wake of the ISIS occupation. ISIS followed its brutal practice of forcing the occupied population to adopt its extremist Islamic code of behavior and severely punished anyone who violated it. However, in some instances, Islamic law (the sharia) was enforced on the local population gradually to prevent excessive alienation.

29. **ISIS's propaganda machine tries to show that it successfully filled the governmental void created.** Its information bureau in Mosul issued videos sending the message that daily life and commerce were conducted without disturbance. The ISIS information bureau in Kirkuk province issued pictures showing ISIS operatives cleaning and renovating streets, and doing maintenance work on electric lines and irrigation ditches (Al-Minbar Al-'Alami Al-Jihadi, October 26, 2014). However, the videos and pictures were clearly propaganda and did not give an objective picture of the situation on the ground in the areas occupied by ISIS.

30. After taking over Mosul, the ISIS office of information issued a document detailing the rules of behavior demanded of the residents of Nineveh province, most of whom welcomed the organization. The document was entitled "**the city charter**" (*wathiqat al-madinah*). It explained the vision of the Islamic Caliphate and called on the Caliphate residents to enjoy the pleasures of Islam. **It also demanded that they behave according to extremist Islamic codes.** For example, women had to dress modestly (i.e., wear the *niqab*, a garment that covers the entire body, leaving only a slit for the eyes), and **smoking was forbidden, as were alcohol and drugs.** In addition, **the shrines and graves of "polytheistic pagans" were to be destroyed,** and all five daily prayers had to be performed.<sup>31</sup>

31. The "city charter" (similar to a "charter" issued in Al-Raqqah in Syria) also **noted the release of prisoners from Iraqi government prisons** and allegedly enabled

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<sup>31</sup> For a full discussion of the "city charter" see "The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Has a Consumer Protection Office" by Aaron Zelin at

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/the-isis-guide-to-building-an-islamic-state/372769/>, June 13, 2014.

security and other personnel affiliated with the Iraqi administration to "repent."<sup>32</sup> The charter instructed people to return money belonging to the Iraqi regime to the **Muslim Imam (i.e., Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi)**, who was responsible for funds. It warned against looting money and promised to bring to trial and punish "gangs of looters." It also made it clear that **ISIS would not stand for the existence of rival organizations and that it would not allow civilians to carry weapons or wave any flag other than the ISIS flag.** Anyone who broke the law would be severely punished either with **death or corporal punishment (i.e., thieves would have their hands cut off).**



The Mosul "city charter" issued by ISIS after the occupation of Nineveh province (Baqiya.blogspot.fr, June 12, 2014)

<sup>32</sup> In reality, after the occupation of Mosul ISIS executed hundreds of captives without allowing them "to repent."





The title page of the Mosul "city charter"

## The establishment of an educational system in Iraq

32. As in Syria, in Iraq ISIS established **educational institutions that taught its curriculum**, which replaced the national Iraqi governmental curriculum. It was presented to the residents of Mosul in a two-page bulletin posted in the mosques, markets and electricity poles. Dated September 5, 2014, it reported "good news of the establishment of the Islamic State Education Diwan by the caliph who seeks to eliminate ignorance, to spread religious sciences and to fight the decayed curriculum" (AP.org, September 15, 2014).<sup>33</sup>

33. **Many residents of Mosul have reservations about the new curriculum because of its Salafist-jihadi nature.** According to the Associated Press, many pupils have not shown up for class because of their parents' concern for their safety. The AP's sources said families were keeping their children home out of mixed feelings of fear, resistance and uncertainty. A Mosul resident identified as "Abu Hassan" told the AP that "What's important to us now is that the children continue receiving knowledge correctly, even if they lose a whole academic year and an official certification." He and his wife, he said, opted for home schooling (AP.org, September 15, 2014).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/islamic-state-group-issues-new-curriculum-iraq>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

## The establishment of judicial and enforcement systems in Iraq

34. ISIS has established **judicial and enforcement networks** in areas under its control in Iraq. After the occupation of Mosul it set up **eight Islamic courts** to try former Iraqi government officials (Almayadeen.net, June 20, 2014).

35. As in Syria, **ISIS set up an enforcement system called "the Islamic police"** (*al-shurta al-islamiyya*). It includes uniformed policemen equipped with cars and light and medium-weight arms allegedly to "protect Muslims" in the various provinces (Vrontatke social media account for ISIS in the Euphrates province, September 12, 2014). It can be assumed that as in Syria, in Iraq the morality police (*al-hisbah*) also operate alongside the regular local police to enforce religious Islamic law on the local residents.



An Islamic court established in Mosul by ISIS (Qanon302.net)





Vehicles of the Islamic police established by ISIS in Nineveh province (Alalam.ir; new.elfagr.org)



Islamic police force policemen in Nineveh province (Alalam.ir)



Left: A beheading, the punishment meted out by a sharia court (Qanon302.net). Right: A public whipping, the punishment meted out by a sharia court (Qanon302.net).

## Symbols of rule: issuing passports and the intention to mint coins

36. As part of the self-declared Islamic Caliphate's administration and rule, **ISIS issued official Islamic Caliphate passports** at the beginning of July 2014. According to reports, **11,000 passports were initially issued to civilians in the Iraqi regions under ISIS control**. To issue them ISIS used the Iraqi administration's identity card and passport center.



An ISIS "Islamic Caliphate" passport. The Arabic at the bottom reads, "The bearer of this passport has behind him our armies, if [any] damage befalls him." In the center, flanked by the wings of an eagle, is a mosque flying a flag emblazoned with the shahada (the Islamic testimony "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet"). Below the symbol is a sword (Sharkiapost.com)

37. On November 13, 2014, the Islamic State (IS) announced that following an order from "the Caliph Ibrahim" [i.e., Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi] IS would mint coins to replace the currency in use in Syria and Iraq. The new coins will be minted from gold, silver and copper. The coin-minting project will be discussed in ISIS's institutions, including the Shura Council Al-Minbar Al-'Ilami Al-Jihadi, November 13, 2014).

38. On November 12, 2014, the London-based Arabic newspaper **Al-Sharq Al-Awsat** reported that ISIS planned to **restore the use of gold and silver dinars**. Its objective is to strengthen its control over the regions of the Caliphate and as part of its struggle against the West. The gold and silver dinars ISIS wants to return to use were used during the early days of Islam. Every coin will be stamped with an Islamic quote on one side and the date of its minting and name of the governor on the other.

39. At the beginning of June 2014 it was reported that ISIS would soon begin issuing ID cards (Yenisafak.com.tr and Assabeel.net, July 5, 2014). So far it has not been ascertained whether ISIS has issued ID cards to civilians living in the areas under its control, but it may do so in the future.

## **Enlisting new operatives into the ranks of ISIS**

40. ISIS's military achievements in Iraq, the self-declaration of the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in the summer of 2014 and the losses sustained by the organization in military campaigns **forced the organization to rapidly enlarge its order of battle and led it to make an effort to enlist and train new operatives in both Iraq and Syria**. Its financial capabilities enabled ISIS to tempt young Iraqis and Syrians to enlist by paying them higher salaries than those usual in their home countries. However, it was also reported that pressure was exerted on the local population to "convince" young men to enlist in its ranks.

41. ISIS recruited local operatives in the various provinces of Iraq. The new recruits underwent training in camps for several months and were integrated into ISIS's military force and administrative institutions. The number of new operatives entering the ranks of ISIS in Iraq and Syria in the summer of 2014 is **estimated at several thousand**. More than 6,300 fighters, most of them Syrian, joined the organization in July 2014 alone (Gulfnews.com, August 30, 2014).

42. ISIS has 11 identified training camps in Iraq **out of 25**. They are located in the provinces Al-Anbar, Salah al-Din and Nineveh, and in the Kirkuk and Mosul areas (Longwarjournal.org, October 24 and November 22, 2014). ISIS occasionally posts

pictures of trainees and graduations exercises held in the training camps. For example, in October 2014 it posted pictures from **the graduation exercises of a training course held at a camp in the Kirkuk region** named for Sheikh Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (who headed ISI and was killed in a targeted American attack). Some of the pictures follow, all posted on the ISIS forum Hanein.info on October 3, 2014:



