Narrative & Conflict Monograph Series

The Story of the Caliphate:
Understanding the Islamic State through Narrative Analysis.

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Abstract

In the summer of 2014, the Islamic State catapulted into the international spotlight with its gruesome execution videos and savvy use of social media. Ever since, the United States and its allies have struggled to clearly articulate both the nature of the threat posed by the Islamic State and a coherent strategy for managing it. The author argues that the United States can do neither effectively without first understanding the Islamic State's strategic narrative. First, this paper describes the evolution of the Islamic State. Second, it defines strategic narrative in the context of doctrine, literary narrative, and propaganda, along with methods of interpretation. Third, this paper presents a theme-based content analysis of the Islamic State's official magazine, *Dabiq*, arguing that it advances the Islamic State's strategic narrative by promoting the following five themes: Islamic legitimacy, statehood, belonging, righteousness, and engagement. Finally, this paper concludes by summarizing the Islamic State's strategic narrative and offering insights as to how an understanding of it could influence US policy and strategy.

Key Words

Recommended Citation

Contents

Preface

> I could enjoy their company, as a guilty intellectual exercise, up to a point. In reviewing Mein Kampf in March 1940, George Orwell confessed that he had 'never been able to dislike Hitler'; something about the man projected an underdog quality, even when his goals were cowardly or loathsome.
>
> —Graeme Wood
> *"What ISIS Really Wants"*

In February 2015, I read Graeme Wood's article in *The Atlantic*, titled "What ISIS Really Wants." That article led me down the path of exploring *Dabiq* magazine and trying to understand the story that the Islamic State was trying to tell. There is something disturbingly compelling about the Islamic State's narrative. It commands a level of respect that makes one feel uncomfortable…a guilty intellectual exercise, as Wood puts it.

Inspired by Wood's work, this monograph emerged from a two-fold belief that the threat posed by Islamic State would get worse before it got better and that the nature of that threat was misunderstood and oversimplified. This monograph represents almost a year spent developing a deeper understanding of the Islamic State from their perspective, a process that will continue long after this monograph is complete. Thus far, this understanding has helped make sense of years of confusion in Iraq since Operation Iraqi Freedom began in 2003, and it has led to multiple conclusions beyond the scope of this monograph. First, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the 2011 withdrawal of US forces were both well-intentioned strategic errors that greatly facilitated the rise of the Islamic State. Second, the surge of 2007 was a strategic success that temporarily defeated the Islamic State in its nascent form. Third, the Islamic State will continue to constitute a threat into the foreseeable future.

In order to respond to that threat successfully, we must first understand it. And in order to understand the Islamic State, we must understand its story.

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
AQAP	Al-Qaʿida in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	Al-Qaʿida in Iraq
AQIM	Al-Qaʿida in the Islamic Maghreb
Daesh	Ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fiʾl-ʿIraq wa-sh-Sham (transliteration of acronym for "Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham" in Arabic)
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (or Syria)
VBIED	Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device

Figures

Introduction

> While it is useful to hate the enemy you must kill, it is counterproductive to sail into a war armed with hatred but no understanding of your foe's worthiness, skill, or appeal.
>
> —Michael Scheuer
> *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden,*
> *Radical Islam, and the Future of America*

On February 3, 2015, the world learned the fate of Lieutenant Muath al-Kasasbeh.[1] The Islamic State had captured the Royal Jordanian Air Force pilot after shooting down his F-16 fighter jet in Syria on December 24, 2014.[2] Six weeks after his capture, the Islamic State circulated online a characteristically graphic video of al-Kasasbeh's execution. Despite the organization's reputation for gruesome execution videos, this one was particularly shocking. The video showed al-Kasasbeh trapped in a steel cage wearing an orange jumpsuit reminiscent of a Guantanamo Bay detainee. He is covered in liquid. Nearby a soldier lights a torch and touches the flame to a line of a sand-like substance leading to the cage. Intercut with special effects and Arabic chants (nasheed), the video then shows al-Kasasbeh burning alive in the cage. After another cut, when he appears dead, a front end loader crushes the cage and its prisoner under a pile of concrete and rubble.[3]

This was not the first graphic execution video released by the Islamic State, but it was the first in which fire was the method of execution. As news outlets reported on the video and its contents, a narrative emerged. According to reporters, commentators, and guests who were experts in Islam, this video proved that the Islamic State was not truly Islamic but a deviant terrorist organization. They cited Islamic scripture that declares only God may punish with fire.[4] By killing a fellow Muslim with fire, the Islamic State was proving its own illegitimacy.

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[1] Arabic names and words are spelled and/or transliterated in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style and International Journal of Middle East Studies Style Guide, with the exceptions of direct quotations and titles.

[2] Ben Hubbard, "ISIS Militants Capture Jordanian Fighter Pilot in Syria," *New York Times*, December 25, 2014.

[3] *Shepard Smith Reporting*, aired February 3, 2015, on Fox News Channel, accessed August 12, 2015, http://video.foxnews.com/v/4030138930001/shepard-smith-describes-video-of-murder-of-jordanian-pilot/?#sp=show-clips.

[4] Terrence McCoy and Adam Taylor, "Islamic State says immolation was justified; experts on Islam say no," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2015.

The Islamic State responded. Nine days after releasing the video of al-Kasasbeh's execution, the Islamic State released the seventh issue of its glossy propaganda magazine *Dabiq*, titled "From Hypocrisy to Apostasy." The issue included a four-page article devoted to al-Kasasbeh's execution, titled "The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot."[5] In the article, the uncredited author laments that so much of the media coverage focused on the manner in which he was executed. Labeling those arguments ignorant partisan rhetoric, the article then cites Islamic theology in a detailed defense of the organization's use of fire. Specifically, the article maintains that the Islamic State appropriately set al-Kasasbeh on fire and buried him in rubble because, they argue, that is exactly how he killed innocent Muslims through air strikes.

Why does this matter? It matters because the story of al-Kasasbeh illustrates the commitment of the Islamic State to its own strategic narrative and the extent to which it will engage others to defend and promote it. It matters because the fight against the Islamic State has so often been framed, in part, as a war of ideas, and in such a war, understanding one's own strategic narrative and the strategic narrative of one's enemy is important. The Islamic State seized the initiative in establishing and promoting a clear and consistent strategic narrative. It has not left its actions open to interpretation but has instead provided detailed, articulate explanations for everything it has done. Furthermore, it has provided those explanations in accessible ways via social media and publications available in multiple languages. It has made an aggressive argument for its own existence and agenda. If degrading and destroying the Islamic State depends upon winning a war of ideas, measured by strength of strategic narrative, then the Islamic State represents a formidable enemy.

As the Islamic State has grown and evolved in terms of physical size, membership, and the threat it poses, the debate within the United States over its nature has evolved as well. One school of thought has labeled the Islamic State a terrorist organization that is neither Islamic nor a state. This is a core tenet of the United States' counter-narrative.[6] Other schools of thought emphasize the conventional threat posed by the Islamic State and caution against downplaying the role of religion and the group's quasi-statehood. This view is more common among academics not functioning in official government capacities. Its

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[5] "The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot," *Dabiq* no. 7 (February, 2015): 5-8, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#. *Dabiq* issue dates have been converted from the Hijri calendar to Gregorian for clarity.

[6] Barrack Obama, "Statement by the President on ISIL" (State Floor, Washington, DC, September 10, 2014), accessed February 15, 2016, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1

proponents include national security scholars such as Audrey Cronin, who has repeatedly argued that the Islamic State is not a terrorist organization at all, but a pseudo-state complete with defined territory and a conventional military.[7] The choice of names also conveys a contrast between what appears to be a disjointed Western strategic narrative versus a coherent enemy strategic narrative. Whereas the self-named Islamic State consistently refers to itself as either that or the caliphate, Western organizations vary widely in using the names Islamic State (IS), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (also ISIS), and Daesh.[8] One could argue that using ISIL or Daesh instead of Islamic State represents a pointed rejection of the group's claim to be either Islamic or a state. However, this inconsistency in branding risks perpetuating a strategic narrative of confusion and disjointedness that contrasts sharply with the organization being branded.[9]

The Islamic State has existed in its current form since June 2014. It was then, on the first day of Ramadan and shortly after ISIS seized control of Mosul, that the group released an official statement in Arabic, English, Russian, French, and German.[10] The statement argued that Islamic law dictated the establishment of a caliphate given that ISIS had met the necessary requirements. As such, according to the statement, ISIS was the new caliphate, stretching from Aleppo, Syria to Diyala, Iraq. Its official name henceforth would be the Islamic State. Its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was now the caliph, to whom all Muslims must declare allegiance.

Shortly thereafter, the Islamic State expanded its media apparatus and began the regular publication of an aesthetically impressive and modern propaganda magazine titled *Dabiq*. Issues of *Dabiq* feature several different genres of articles, from those describing the ideology of the Islamic State and how it came into being to political editorials, interviews, and even humanitarian reports. Since the Islamic State's current inception, *Dabiq* has been the primary medium through which the organization conveys its strategic narrative. The fact that the Islamic

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[7] Audrey Kurth Cronin, "ISIS is Not a Terrorist Group: Why Counterterrorism Won't Stop the Latest Jihadist Threat," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (March/April 2015): 87-98; "ISIS Is More Than a Terrorist Group: The Case for Treating It Like a State Sponsor," *Foreign Affairs*, March 23, 2016, accessed March 24, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-23/isis-more-terrorist-group.

[8] Daesh is an acronym for the Arabic translation of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. It is used as a pejorative name because of its similarity to the derogatory Arabic word "das."

[9] This monograph will use the name Islamic State because that is what the organization has named itself.

[10] Abu-Muhammad Al-Adnani, "This is the Promise of Allah" (Al-Hayat Media Center, June 29, 2014), accessed February 15, 2016, https://www.opensource.gov.

State publishes *Dabiq* in multiple non-Arab languages, especially English, reveals that Western readers constitute its intended audience. This monograph does not aim to analyze the accuracy of *Dabiq*'s content. Regardless of truthfulness, the strategic narrative in and of itself provides useful insight into the mindset of the Islamic State as an organization in addition to its intentions and potential vulnerabilities. Understanding the strategic narrative of the Islamic State, represented in this monograph by *Dabiq* magazine, will dispel persistent myths about the organization and inform strategies to defeat it.

This monograph begins with an extensive overview of the Islamic State's evolution, followed by an introduction to *Dabiq* magazine. Next is an explanation of strategic narrative and its relationship to both narrative and propaganda, including the use of these concepts in military doctrine and methods for interpreting them. The focus of the monograph is the application of a theme-based analysis of all current issues of *Dabiq* to interpret the strategic narrative of the Islamic State. Finally, the monograph concludes by 1) summarizing the strategic narrative, 2) arguing that the strategic narrative illustrates common misperceptions of the Islamic State, and 3) suggesting the implications for each. The theme-based analysis of *Dabiq* will help develop a robust, shared understanding of the nature of the Islamic State, its ultimate goals, the threat it poses, and its appeal to Western recruits. With this understanding, and in combination with insights from other primary and secondary sources, strategists may better identify potential vulnerabilities within the Islamic State and other Salafi-jihadist groups and thus develop effective strategies to target those vulnerabilities.

The Islamic State

> If jihadism were to be placed on a political spectrum, al-Qaeda would be its left and the Islamic State its right.
>
> —Cole Bunzel
> *"From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State"*

The Islamic State is a transnational Salafi-jihadist insurgency and pseudo-state located primarily in Iraq and Syria that employs conventional military operations, guerrilla tactics, and terrorism to both defend current territory ("remain") and add territory to its self-declared caliphate ("expand").[11] As a self-declared caliphate,

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[11] This definition is the author's and represents a synthesis of multiple analyses, heavily influenced by Atwan, Cronin, McCants, and the Institute for the Study of War.

which it has been since June 2014, it considers itself the sole spiritual and political authority of the *umma*, the global community of Muslims. The leader of the Islamic State and self-declared caliph is the former Ibrahim bin Awwad bin Ibrahim al-Badri al-Qurayshi, now known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi or Caliph Ibrahim.[12] The so-called caliphate is divided into over thirty provinces (*wilayah*, singular *wilayat*) throughout Africa and Eurasia, concentrated primarily in Iraq and Syria. The headquarters of the Islamic State is in the Syrian city of Raqqa (*Wilayat ar-Raqqah*). The Islamic State officially declares the creation of each *wilayat* after a somewhat formal process. The group desiring to become part of the Islamic State pledge allegiance (i.e., give *bayʾah*) to the caliphate.[13] Pledging *bayʾah* is not sufficient to join the Islamic State. Al-Baghdadi must officially accept the *bayʾah*, typically after acknowledging a local leader to serve as provincial governor and establishing lines of communication.[14]

Arguably the most accurate way to describe the ideology of the Islamic State is Salafi-jihadist, a phrase that is gradually becoming more common in use. Salafism refers to a puritanical movement within Sunni Islam that revolves around strict adherence to the Qurʾan and *sunna* (path of Muhammad).[15] There is disagreement as to the exact tenets of Salafism, and multiple opinions exist as to the nature of its relationship to the similar Sunni movement of Wahhabism, which is associated more with Saudi Arabia. The most specific definitions of Salafism divide the movement into three factions based upon disagreements as to strategy, specifically the role of politics and violence.[16] Purist Salafis eschew both; they are apolitical and non-violent. Politico Salafis actively engage in politics but not violence.[17] The third and most well-known faction of Salafism is the jihadist faction, which embraces a strategy of violence and revolution. This faction includes al-Qaʿida and the Islamic State, among others.

"Remaining and expanding" is a phrase often used by the Islamic State to describe its strategy and is the title of *Dabiq* no. 5.

[12] Abdel-Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: the Digital Caliphate*, New ed. (London: Saqi Books, 2015), 111.

[13] Examples include Boko Haram in Nigeria and defectors of the Pakistan Taliban in Afghanistan.

[14] Daniel Milton and Muhammad al-`Ubaydi, "Pledging Bay`a: A Benefit or Burden to the Islamic State?," *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 3 (March 2015): 4, accessed February 23, 2016, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/isil-resources.

[15] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 no. 3 (August 19, 2006): 207, accessed March 24, 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/ 10576100500497004.

[16] Wiktorowicz, 208.

[17] Purist and politico Salafis are also described, respectively, as quietist and activist. An example of activist Salafism is the Muslim Brotherhood.

The term Salafi-jihadism provides a more useful contrast to the phrases more commonly used to describe non-state enemies of the United States since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (hereafter referred to as 9/11).[18] These include various combinations of the words Islamic, radical, extremist, fundamentalist, terrorist, thugs, killers, etc. Aside from semantic debates over potential prejudice, political correctness, or strategic messaging (i.e., conceding legitimacy), these terms are generally unhelpful in identifying and sharing understanding of the threat. "Islamic," for instance, is too broad to describe a group that comprises so small a percentage of the world's Muslims. As an analogy, consider a group that only includes Protestant Canadians or Chinese Catholics and labeling it only as "Christian." Accurate? Yes. Helpful? No. Terms like radical and extremist are too vague and subjective. The word terrorist, by contrast, is too specific given the Islamic State's "pseudo-stateness" and conventional military capabilities. Skewing the nature of the threat towards either too broad (Islam) or too narrow (terrorism) a focus inevitably skews strategies to defeat it.

Evolution

Where did the Islamic State come from? Most Americans had never heard of ISIS until after ISIS officially ceased to exist as an entity. To them, the Islamic State seemed to come out of nowhere during a summer of ice bucket challenge videos, interrupting the levity of social media with a series of gruesome beheading videos.[19] Since then, the common explanation among (public) official circles and in the media is that the Islamic State grew from al-Qaʿida in Iraq (AQI) and the Syrian civil war. This explanation, however, oversimplifies the group's origins and muddles the complicated relationship it has had with al-Qaʿida throughout all its manifestations. A closer analysis of the Islamic State's history reveals a well-defined evolution that arguably began as a vision of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi prior to 9/11. Since then, multiple milestones trace its development, including every major US policy decision in the post-9/11 war against terrorism. Understanding the nuances of this evolution, including the formative years of its founder al-

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[18] There is no consensus as to the term for the jihadist faction of Salafism. The terms Salafi-jihadism, jihadi-Salafism, Salafist Jihadism, etc. are synonymous and vary based upon the preference of individual authors. This monograph uses Salafi-jihadism throughout.

[19] The ice-bucket challenge was a viral social media phenomenon that took place in July and August of 2014. Individuals posted videos of themselves nominating three people to either donate money to the ALS Association or agree to have buckets of ice water poured on their heads. The release of ISIS beheading videos coincided and contrasted sharply with the viral spread of the light-hearted ice-bucket videos.

Zarqawi and current leader al-Baghdadi, provide context for the Islamic State's current strategic narrative and the strategy that *Dabiq* magazine underscores.

The Islamic State considers al-Zarqawi its founding father. Before the emergence of the Islamic State, al-Zarqawi was best known as the leader of AQI, who was killed in a US airstrike in 2006. An understanding of al-Zarqawi's early years tells a story of the so-called "zeal of the convert" and helps explain what distinguished the earliest manifestation of the Islamic State (i.e., AQI) from al-Qaʿida in addition to providing context for some of the Islamic State's most controversial arguments in *Dabiq*.[20] Al-Zarqawi reportedly discovered Salafism in the mid to late eighties in his native Jordan when his mother enrolled him in religious courses in Amman.[21] Before then, he had dropped out of school in the wake of his father's death and was described as a bully and street thug who was not especially religious. In 1989 he traveled to Afghanistan to participate in the jihad against the Soviets, only to arrive too late.[22] There he was introduced to al-Qaʿida and studied under its top Salafi-jihadist scholar.[23] After multiple years of establishing connections and training under al-Qaʿida, al-Zarqawi returned to Jordan with the ambition of overthrowing the government and establishing an Islamic state there. He failed, earning a fifteen year prison sentence with his al-Qaʿida mentor for illegal weapons possession and belonging to a terrorist organization.[24] During his time in prison, al-Zarqawi actively recruited other prisoners, memorized the Qurʾan, and became more severe in his strict embrace of Salafi-jihadism.[25] In 1999, he was released early under a general grant of amnesty by newly crowned King Abdullah II.[26] Upon his release, al-Zarqawi returned to Afghanistan to meet Osama bin Laden for the first time.[27]

The conflict that existed from the very beginning between al-Zarqawi on the one hand and bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, on the other underscores

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[20] *The "Zeal of the Convert": Is It the Real Deal?* (Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2009), accessed March 29, 2016, http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/28/ the-zeal-of-the-convert-is-it-the-real-deal/#. Pew Research Center released a study in 2009 finding that converts to a religion are generally more fervent in that religion than those who have held the same ideology throughout their lives.

[21] Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), 2.

[22] Ibid., 5.

[23] Mary Anne Weaver, "Inventing al-Zarqawi: How a video-store clerk and small-time crook became America's nemesis in Iraq," *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2006): 91.

[24] Weiss and Hassan, 8.

[25] Weaver, 93.

[26] Weiss and Hassan, 11.

[27] Weaver, 95.

the distinctions between the Islamic State and al-Qaʿida to this day. Within the context of Salafi-jihadism, bin Laden was more of a moderate in that he was more pragmatic. Al-Zarqawi, by contrast, had the aforementioned zeal of a recent convert. Both agreed that the ultimate goal of jihadism was the establishment of an Islamic state and eventually a caliphate. They diverged widely, however, in timeline and strategy. To bin Laden, the caliphate was a distant goal. His strategy was to unite the Muslim community by focusing on the "far enemy" of Westerners, specifically Israel and the United States. Al-Zarqawi wanted to focus on the "near enemy" of un-Islamic (apostate) Muslim regimes and the Shiʿa, all of whom he felt should be executed. The two men reportedly neither liked nor respected one another from the beginning. Bin Laden did not ask for a pledge of allegiance, nor did al-Zarqawi offer one. However, after much debate within al-Qaʿida's leadership, al-Zarqawi was given a loan to establish a training camp for foreign fighters near the Iranian border in Herat, Afghanistan. Al-Zarqawi wanted to build an army that could travel anywhere, and specifically to his home region of al-Sham/the Levant. By the time the United State began Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in October 2001, al-Zarqawi had grown his army from dozens of fighters to thousands.[28] Impressed, bin Laden began repeatedly asking for al-Zarqawi's pledge of allegiance and was repeatedly refused.[29]

The United States' Global War on Terrorism caused al-Qaʿida and al-Zarqawi to reframe their approaches twice. First, the war in Afghanistan caused hundreds of al-Qaʿida fighters to flee Afghanistan, many of whom traveled to northern Iraq.[30] al-Zarqawi reportedly spent the next year traveling the region throughout Iran, Iraq, and Syria before establishing his insurgent group Tawhid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad) in northern Iraq.[31] Ironically, as the United States mistakenly used al-Zarqawi to connect Saddam Hussein to al-Qaʿida to help justify the invasion of Iraq, al-Zarqawi was changing his strategy to capitalize on the anticipated invasion to establish his Islamic state there instead. Al-Zarqawi put his plan into operation five months after the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In August 2003, his group bombed the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, the United Nations Assistance Mission, and the Shiʿi Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf,

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[28] Weaver, 95.

[29] Weiss and Hassan, 14.

[30] Atwan, 40.

[31] Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," (Washington, DC: Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World, Analysis Paper 19, 2015), 14.

essentially advertising his three major categories of enemy: regional Muslim regimes, non-Muslim foreigners, and Shiʿi Muslims.[32]

In early 2004, al-Zarqawi finally offered to pledge allegiance to bin Laden if the latter would support al-Zarqawi's strategy of provoking the Shiʿa in Iraq to instigate a civil war.[33] Bin Laden, wanting to co-opt the growing insurgency in Iraq, accepted al-Zarqawi's pledge in October. Tawhid wal-Jihad became AQI, marking the first official affiliation between al-Qaʿida and the nascent concept of the Islamic State.[34] The same divergent strategies that divided bin Laden and al-Zarqawi from the beginning caused tension between the two organizations from AQI's founding in October 2004 to al-Zarqawi's death in June 2006. Throughout 2005, al-Qaʿida leaders repeatedly wrote to al-Zarqawi, warning that his tactics of targeting other Muslims and releasing videos of graphic violence threatened to undermine strategic objectives. One al-Qaʿida leader even paraphrased Clausewitz to remind al-Zarqawi that militarism was subservient to policy.[35] Notably, al-Zawahiri argued that while al-Zarqawi's theological justifications for his actions were sound, he risked alienating a greater Muslim community that did not understand those justifications.[36] Unfazed, al-Zarqawi established an umbrella organization to unite the jihadist groups in Iraq, including AQI.[37] He cited this organization, the "Mujahidin Shura Council," as the starting point for an Islamic state.[38] Despite al-Zarqawi's death a few months later, and against the wishes of al-Qaʿida, the council declared an Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in October 2006 and named the relatively unknown Abu Omar al-Baghdadi "commander of the faithful," the same title bestowed to then-Taliban leader Mullah Omar.[39] This was not just a new name; the declaration of an Islamic state conveyed specific meaning regarding control of territory and progress towards an eventual caliphate. Whether it was al-Zarqawi's intent all along or not, the establishment of the council and declaration of ISI created an insurgency apparatus in Iraq free of

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[32] Charles Lister, *Profiling the Islamic State* (Doha, Qatar: Brookings Doha Center, 2014): 7, accessed August 11, 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2014/12/ profiling-islamic-state-lister Lister.

[33] William McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015): 14.

[34] Bunzel, 15.

[35] Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, letter to Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi (December 2005): 3, accessed March 24, 2016, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/atiyahs-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2.

[36] Ayman al-Zawahiri, letter to Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi (July 9, 2005): 3-10, accessed March 24, 2016, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2.

[37] McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 76.

[38] Bunzel, 16.

[39] McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 15.

AQI's pledge to al-Qaʿida. If the creation of AQI in October 2004 was the beginning of a marriage, the creation of ISI in October 2006 was the beginning of a divorce. Also of note, because a pledge of allegiance is between individuals and not organizations, al-Zarqawi's death freed the subsequent leader of AQI, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, to pledge allegiance to Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as leader of ISI.[40]

Thus ended what most analysts consider to be the first phase of the Islamic State, the al-Zarqawi years leading to the creation of ISI. The legacy of this phase is al-Zarqawi's strict implementation of Salafi-jihadism, the establishment of the caliphate as a near-term goal, the deliberate targeting of Shiʿa and all other Muslims deemed apostates, and the use of graphic imagery for propaganda. Al-Zarqawi's legacy as founding father is evident in every issue of *Dabiq*, all of which begin by quoting al-Zarqawi on the first page. These early years also present theories as to the utility of *Dabiq*'s very existence as a magazine and the nature of its content. In al-Zawahiri's correspondence with al-Zarqawi in 2005, the former repeatedly acknowledges that al-Zarqawi's methods are theologically sound but ill-conceived given a Muslim audience that does not understand those justifications. *Dabiq* is an answer to that argument. As this paper will later argue, two of the most prominent themes throughout *Dabiq* convey the Islamic legitimacy of the Islamic State and the righteousness of its actions. In essence, *Dabiq* seeks to educate the very Muslims al-Zawahiri feared alienating to facilitate al-Zarqawi's (and now al-Baghdadi's) preferred military strategies.

The subsequent four to five years following al-Zarqawi's death and the establishment of ISI marked the dark ages of the Islamic State. The former left the insurgent movement in Iraq without its visionary, and the latter created confusion within the jihadist community. Was Mullah Omar commander of the faithful, or was Abu Omar al-Baghdadi? Did al-Qaʿida sanction ISI? What was their relationship? To whom should they pledge allegiance? Neither organization was willing to accept the ramifications of publicly denouncing the other, and so both continued a confusing façade of mutual support that continued to devolve in substance. Intentionally or not, the establishment of ISI immediately followed the beginning of the "Sunni Awakening" in Anbar province, in which local tribal leaders pledged support to President Maliki and the Iraqi government in fighting insurgents. The US troop surge of over twenty thousand additional soldiers and its accompanying change in strategy soon followed. By the end of 2008, ISI and AQI were shadows of their former selves.

In 2010, multiple dynamics converged resulting in the resurgence of ISI, still observed as AQI by the West. At the beginning of the year, jihadists began

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[40] Lister, 8.

circulating a think tank-like report titled "Strategic Plan for Reinforcing the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq," whose recommendations included the need for a symbolic political figure around whom to rally and the co-opting of Sunni leaders using the same strategies as US forces during the surge.[41] Their unifying leader emerged a few months later, after the leaders of ISI and AQI were killed together in a joint raid.[42] The ISI's governing council elected Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as their new leader.[43] Though al-Zarqawi possessed a clear strategic vision, his leadership lacked pedigree and Islamic legitimacy. By contrast, al-Baghdadi traced his lineage to the first imam and son-in-law of Muhammad and boasted academic credentials rare within the jihadist community.[44] While al-Zarqawi was being released from prison, al-Baghdadi was earning his master's degree in Islamic Studies from Saddam University and enrolling in its doctoral program.[45] Shortly after earning his PhD in Qurʾanic studies, al-Baghdadi was appointed supervisor of ISI's Shariʿa Committee, essentially the organization's quality control officer on religious matters.[46] If the late al-Zarqawi's methods required theological justification to win over a supposedly uneducated Muslim audience, al-Baghdadi was exactly the leader to provide that education. His academic credentials are evident with every theological footnote and citation in *Dabiq*, of which there are many.

The year 2011 witnessed two final dynamics that facilitated the emergence of the Islamic State in its current form. The first was the Syrian civil war. Syrians already made up the majority of foreign jihadists in Iraq, and the growing revolt next door against Syrian president Bashar al-Assad gave them an opportunity to return home. Ironically, Assad deliberately aided the insurgency when he released several Salafi-jihadists from Syrian prisons in May 2011 under a declaration of amnesty.[47] At the behest of al-Zawahiri, al-Baghdadi sent Syrian Abu Muhammad al-Jolani to establish an insurgent group in Syria in August 2011.[48] This became Jabhat al-Nusra (the Nusra Front). The situation in Syria facilitated the growth of ISI and Nusra Front in that regional regimes who were antagonistic toward Assad

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[41] McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 79.

[42] Ibid., 45.

[43] Ibid., 77-78.

[44] Atwan, 74.

[45] William McCants, The Believer: How an Introvert with a Passion for Religion and Soccer Became Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Leader of the Islamic State, Kindle ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015): loc 72.

[46] Ibid., loc 148.

[47] Weiss and Hassan, 144. The amnesty was announced as being for political prisoners to appease protesters. In reality, the chaos created by the released jihadists would present Assad with a pretext for retaliating against a violent opposition.

[48] Ibid., 85.

offered money, weapons, and equipment to militias willing to fight by-proxy. The fighting, in turn, provided jihadists with combat experience on a greater level, in addition to opportunities to seize territory within Syria. Soon, however, the historical tension between al-Qaʿida and ISI emerged again, as al-Jolani's Nusra Front followed al-Zawahiri's example of uniting jihadists against a common enemy and winning the hearts and minds of the local population. The second issue of *Dabiq* illustrates this fracture in its feature article.

The second dynamic impacting ISI in 2011 was the withdrawal of the last remaining US forces from Iraq in December. In 2005, a major component of AQI's strategy included establishing authority over as much territory as possible immediately upon the departure of US forces with the goal of expanding enough to be able to declare a caliphate.[49] The unexpected events of 2006 and 2007 thwarted that strategy then, but ISI put it into operation in 2012. Throughout 2012 and 2013, ISI embarked on two major campaigns, named Breaking the Walls and Soldier's Harvest, designed to free jihadists from Iraqi prisons and render Iraqi Security Forces ineffective through intimidation and attacks.[50]

In the spring of 2013, al-Baghdadi declared that ISI and the Nusra Front would form the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).[51] Al-Jolani rebutted al-Baghdadi's proclamation, declaring the Nusra Front loyal to al-Qaʿida and al-Zawahiri.[52] Al-Zawahiri admonished both, refusing to acknowledge ISIS and declaring that the two groups were separate entities to remain in their respective countries. In an unprecedented public rebuke of al-Qaʿida leadership, al-Baghdadi defied al-Zawahiri, declaring, "I have to choose between the rule of God and the rule of al-Zawahiri, and I choose the rule of God."[53] In February 2014, al-Qaʿida renounced all ties to ISIS, who replied that one could not renounce ties that never existed.[54] The divorce was final. A few months later, after capturing Mosul and at the onset of Ramadan, ISIS became the Islamic State, the Islamic State became the caliphate, and al-Baghdadi became the caliph.

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[49] Zawahiri, 3.

[50] Jessica D. Lewis, *Middle East Security Report 14: Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, The Breaking the Walls Campaign Part I* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2013): 10, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/AQI-Resurgent-10Sept_0.pdf; Lister, 12.

[51] Lister, 91.

[52] Lewis, 19.

[53] McCants, The ISIS Apocalypse, 91.

[54] Ibid., 53.

Dabiq Magazine

Dabiq magazine is a product of the Islamic State's al-Hayat media organization. The name refers to a Syrian town north of Aleppo that is referenced in Islamic eschatology.[55] The magazine explains its name in the introduction of the inaugural issue:

> As for the name of the magazine, then it is taken from the area named Dabiq in the northern countryside of Halab (Aleppo) in Sham. This place was mentioned in a hadith describing some of the events of the Malahim (what is sometimes referred to as Armageddon in English). One of the greatest battles between the Muslims and the crusaders will take place near Dabiq.[56]

Published online roughly once per month, it includes an amalgamation of topics. Natural comparisons exist between *Dabiq* and *Inspire*, the magazine of al-Qaʿida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Whereas *Inspire* is primarily tactical in nature, *Dabiq* is more akin to a scholarly international relations journal for Salafi-jihadists. Feature articles typically describe and justify Islamic State actions and strategy, frequently incorporating history and Islamic theology. Articles often directly cite and rebut Western commentary, including speeches from political leaders and articles from Western news outlets. *Dabiq* is rife with common elements of modern-day periodicals, such as full-size advertisements filled with hashtags and links to online videos. Interactive features include interviews and pieces answering "questions from our readers." *Dabiq* also attempts to present an image of normal life within the Islamic State by emphasizing governance, law enforcement, health care, education, etc.

Thus far, the Islamic State has published thirteen issues of *Dabiq*. Each is arranged in a fairly similar manner. "DABIQ" appears in large black or white font across the top of the cover, followed by issue number and Hijri month and year.[57] Each cover features a single image, usually a photograph, along with the title of the issue, corresponding to its feature story. The first five issues differ slightly in

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[55] Eschatology is the theological study of events that will supposedly take place when the world ends, such as Armageddon.

[56] "The Return of Khilafah" in *Dabiq* no. 1 (July, 2014): 4, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

[57] The Hijri calendar, also known as the Islamic calendar, is a lunar-based calendar consisting of twelve months of no more than thirty days each. It is roughly eleven days shorter than the solar-based Gregorian calendar. There are multiple methods of conversion between the Gregorian and Hijri calendars, which differ by approximately one day. Year one of the Hijri calendar corresponds to the year Muhammad migrated to Medina (known as the Hijra, hence its name). The Islamic State declared the Hijri calendar to be its official calendar via Twitter in October 2014. Atwan, 143.

two ways. First, they also feature the title of a second article. Second, the word "DABIQ" appears not only in white font but in front of a black banner, evoking the flag of the Islamic State.[58]

In every issue, the table of contents on the first page is prefaced by the following epigraph, "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq. – Abu Musʹab az-Zarqawi." This reinforces the symbolism of the magazine's name, the inevitability of war with the West, and the legacy of al-Zarqawi as founding father. Following the contents page is a foreword that sets the tone of the issue. As with the cover layout, the foreword is slightly different in the first five issues in that it begins with the following common Islamic introduction, "All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. May blessings and peace be upon His Messenger Muhammad, and his family and companions." Strangely, this passage reappears in the foreword to issue eleven but is absent again for issue twelve. Every issue ends with an eschatological passage from a hadith, usually foretelling the conquering of a specific territory or people.[59]

There are roughly thirteen sections, in addition to the foreword and closing hadith passage, that reoccur throughout the thirteen issues thus far.[60] Other than the feature story for each issue, the only section that appears in every issue is "In the Words of the Enemy." Featured "enemies" have included President Obama, US Senator John McCain, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and contributors to Western think tanks such as the CATO Institute and RAND. In addition to the "In the Words of the Enemy" series, eight issues of *Dabiq* feature articles supposedly written by hostages, almost always placed at the end. The third issue, for example, ends with a two-page "letter" attributed to hostage James Foley, the victim in the Islamic State's first beheading video. The letter credits the Islamic State with trying to negotiate for his release and blames the US government for sealing his fate with continued airstrikes.[61] A similar "letter" attributed to Steven Sotloff, the victim in the Islamic State's second beheading

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[58] McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 20-21. The flag of the Islamic State is a black banner with "No god but God" in ragged white Arabic across the top and "Muhammad is the Messenger of God" in black Arabic within a white circle in the center.

[59] The hadith (Arabic for report or account) chronicle the verbal teachings and actions of Muhammad. The hadith are second only to the Qurʾan in providing guidance in Islam. Some hadith are considered more authentic than others, and some are only recognized as authentic by either Sunni or Shiʿa, but not both. Many orthodox punishments in Islam, such as stoning, originate in a hadith rather than the Qurʾan.

[60] See Appendix A for a comprehensive list of contents for each issue of *Dabiq*.

[61] "The Complete Message from James Foley," *Dabiq* no. 3 (September, 2014): 39-40, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

video, appears in the next issue.[62] British journalist John Cantlie, who was kidnapped with James Foley in November 2012, is portrayed as a recurring author for *Dabiq*, which rarely names the writers of any of its articles. The articles attributed to Cantlie provide the most scathing arguments against the West, the United States, and President Obama and the most coherent arguments for the Islamic State's existence and actions.

The cover of *Dabiq* is not the only aspect of the magazine to undergo subtle changes after the first few issues. Beginning with the seventh issue, which was the first one published in 2015, the numbers of sections per issue increased, as did the number of recurring segments. For instance, the first six issues have an average of seven sections each, while issues seven through thirteen average thirteen sections each. Four new segments premiered in the seventh issue that recur in each issue thereafter. The first is "From the Pages of History." Half of the historical segments reference topics from the earliest days of Islam, while others address more recent history. The ninth issue provides a history of Mark Sykes of the Sykes-Picot Agreement that created the modern nation-states of the Middle East, while the twelfth issue describes the modern history of the Islamic State by explaining how the Islamic State of Iraq came about in 2006.[63] In *Dabiq*'s most recent issue, which focuses on Shiʿi Muslims as apostates and enemies of the Islamic State, the historical segment recounts the origins of the Safavid dynasty, which made Shiʿi Islam the official religion of Persia.[64]

Two of the four new segments that premiere with the seventh issue are gender-specific. "Among the Believers are Men," named after a passage in the Qurʾan, features an interview with, or biography of, a different Islamic State fighter in each issue.[65] "To our Sisters" (and sometimes "From our Sisters") addresses the women of the Islamic State. The first of these is an interview with the widow of Amedy Coulibaly.[66] Coulibaly, referred to in the article as Abu Basir al-Ifriqi, was the assailant in the Kosher grocery store attack in Paris one week after the Charlie Hebdo attack. The next five are credited to Umm Sumayyah al-

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[62] "A Message from Sotloff to his Mother Days Before his Execution," *Dabiq* no. 4 (October, 2014): 47-48, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

[63] "From the Pages of History: The Flags of Jahiliyyah," *Dabiq* no. 9 (May, 2015): 20-23, accessed July 30, 2015; "Baqiyah (It Will Remain)," *Dabiq* no. 12 (November, 2015): 17-18, accessed November 19, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

[64] "Know Your Enemy: Who Were the Safawiyyah?," *Dabiq* no. 13 (January, 2016): 10-12, accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

[65] Qurʾan 33:24.

[66] "A Brief Interview with Umm Basir al-Muhajirah," *Dabiq* no. 7, 49-51.

Muhajirah, an apparent Western woman who emigrated to the Islamic State, a "jihadi bride" in current vernacular. Her articles present an image of the Islamic State as welcoming towards Western women, a veritable sisterhood. She stresses the importance of women within the Islamic State, who wage a different kind of jihad by being wives to the mujahidin and mothers to the "lion cubs."[67] She even actively defends the enslavement of Yazidi girls, outraged that Islamic State men are being accused of rape.[68]

The fourth recurring segment that begins with the seventh issue consists of interviews with leaders throughout the caliphate. The subjects in this series include the mastermind of the Paris attacks of November 2015 (Abdelhamid Abaaoud), the assassin of a secular political leader in Tunisia, the leaders of the Libyan and Afghan (*Khurasan*) provinces, and a leader who defected from the Nusra Front. Significantly, the interview with Abaaoud, in which he discusses his safe house in Belgium and being wanted by French and Belgian intelligence, was published in February 2015, nine months before he led the attacks in Paris.[69]

In addition to the strategic narrative analysis that follows, this overview of *Dabiq* presents interesting observations in itself. First, something about the Islamic State's media strategy changed during the end of 2014 or beginning of 2015, as shown by the dramatic change in content starting with the seventh issue, released February 12, 2015. Did this change signify a new format of little significance or perhaps a change in leadership within al-Hayat? Second, with very few exceptions, *Dabiq* only credits writers when that writer is of Western origin and thus possesses considerable propaganda value. This includes the "In the Words of the Enemy" series, letters supposedly written by the late James Foley and Steven Sotloff, John Cantlie's series of supposed op-eds, and the "jihadi bride" who pens the "To/From our Sisters" articles. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the variety of content in *Dabiq* appears to address the concerns that al-Zawahiri expressed to al-Zarqawi in 2005. Al-Zawahiri conceded in his letter that al-Zarqawi's actions, such as killing fellow Muslims and distributing graphic videos, were theologically justified, but he worried that al-Zarqawi would alienate a Muslim community who did not understand those justifications. Through this lens, *Dabiq* acts to educate those very Muslims whom the Islamic State risks alienating by explaining why it is supposedly just, for instance, to burn someone alive or enslave an entire community of women. Rather than responding to the

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[67] Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, "A Jihad without Fighting," *Dabiq* no. 11, (Dhul Qa'dah, 1436): 40-45, accessed September 11, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

[68] Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah, "Slave-Girls or Prostitutes?," *Dabiq* no. 9, 44-49.

[69] "Interview with Abu Umar al-Baljiki," *Dabiq* no. 7, 72-75.

objections of al-Qaʿida by moderating its actions, the Islamic State uses *Dabiq* as an active defense of its unique audacity. Part of that defense is conveying the Islamic State's strategic narrative; telling its story.

Strategic Narrative

> The narrative is a story, or compilation of partial stories, that constructs a crisis in such a way as to demonstrate the desirability and feasibility of using military force to achieve a political objective.
>
> —Jeffrey Kubiak
> *War Narratives and the American National Will in War*

> We see in propaganda a formidable instrument. To its skillful use we attribute many of the startling successes of the mass movements of our time, and we have come to fear the word as much as the sword.
>
> —Eric Hoffer
> *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*

Before one can analyze the strategic narrative of the Islamic State, one must understand the meaning of strategic narrative. Strategy is commonly understood using the US Army War College language of ends, ways, and means, namely the application of resources (means) in ways that achieve a desired goal (ends). The desired goal of strategic narrative is a change in behavior or opinion. For the United States, that could include other countries joining the coalition to fight the Islamic State or the American people supporting the financial cost and human risk of military operations. For the Islamic State, that could include Muslims either traveling to the Middle East to become jihadists or staying home and conducting attacks where they live. Narrative is the means of achieving these behavioral ends, and propaganda is the way in which narrative is used to influence behavior. "Strategic narrative" conveys the storytelling nature of the content and the propagandist utility of influencing behavior. Given this understanding, it is useful to explore each component.
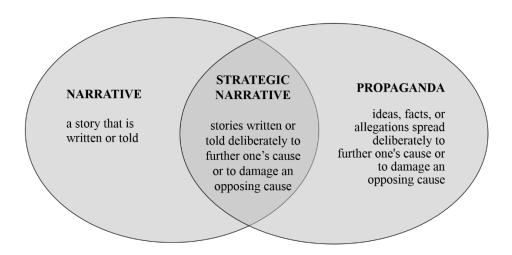
Figure 1. Relationship of Strategic Narrative to Narrative and Propaganda
Source: Author created. Definitions for narrative and propaganda per Merriam Webster.

Narrative, a traditionally literary term, has become a buzzword within political science.[70] Narrative is the way in which one tells a story, a story being as simple as a series of events or actions.[71] If narrative is a story, or the way in which a story is told, what does it mean to speak of an organization's narrative, such as the Islamic State? The idea of narrative or strategic narrative as it applies to the social sciences in general and political and military science in particular is largely a product of the twenty-first century. Prior to that, the word narrative outside of a literary context primarily signified any kind of writing, such as a paragraph or more versus graphics or bullet points. In a military context, the idea of a story, especially one used to influence opinion, existed in terms such as psychological

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[70] "Top Political Buzzwords: Negative Narrative Entangles President and His Party," Global Language Monitor, September 24, 2010, accessed March 17, 2016, http://www .languagemonitor.com/obama/top-political-buzzwords-negative-narrative-entangles-president-and-his-party/. "Narrative" was literally the top political buzzword of the 2010 midterm election.

[71] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13. To understand the idea of narrative as story, think of a narrator who moves the story along from outside it, describing thoughts and actions of characters in ways they cannot. Some iconic narrators include Boris Karloff in "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," director Cecil B. DeMille in The Ten Commandments, or the character Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird. Narratives give life and specificity to stories. For example, there exists the idea of a Cinderella story. The story itself is ambiguous: someone comes from humble origins to overcome odds and achieve a happy ending. It is the narrative that distinguishes whether that story manifests as an animated Disney classic, a movie about an underrated Philadelphia boxer, or a low seed college basketball team that "busts brackets" during March Madness.

warfare, information operations, hearts and minds, pacification, or propaganda.[72] It was not until 2006 that the US military officially added the word to its lexicon, when Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency, defined narrative as "the central mechanism, expressed in story form, through which ideologies are expressed and absorbed."[73]

Doctrinal Narrative

What might seem to be doctrinal trivia in fact directly links the Islamic State to the official concept of narrative in US military operations. The 2006 counterinsurgency manual is a story unto itself within the military community and part of the story of the 2007 "Surge." As the story goes, President Bush, concerned that the United States was losing the war in Iraq in 2006, decided to change strategy against the advice of Congress and the military by doubling-down and "surging" more than twenty thousand additional troops to Iraq. He had his eye on then-Lieutenant General David Petraeus, who the president knew to be rewriting the army's counterinsurgency manual at Fort Leavenworth after having successfully commanded troops in Iraq.[74]

Petraeus's assignment as commander of the United States Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas came after two back-to-back tours in Iraq, first as commander of the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul, from the 2003 invasion to early 2004, and then as head of the Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq and the NATO Training Mission—Iraq, from May 2004 to October 2005.[75] He used his time at Leavenworth to rewrite army doctrine in response to his experience in Iraq, gathering together a small cabal of counterinsurgency experts, including PhDs and fellow divergent-thinking officers with recent experience in Iraq.[76] At the time, the threat in Iraq was alternatingly described as a resistance, insurgency, sectarian conflict, or civil war. In hindsight, the violence that inspired Petraeus and his team to rewrite army doctrine and insert "narrative" as a new doctrinal term was the product of the Islamic State's original transition from al-Zarqawi's strategic vision to operational reality.[77]

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[72] Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 24.

[73] Gittipong Paruchabutr, "Understanding and Communicating through Narratives" (monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2012), 1.

[74] George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), 364-377.

[75] Fred Kaplan, The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2013),126.

[76] Kaplan., 136.

[77] Atwan, 41.

Keeping in mind the counterinsurgency manual's description of narrative as a means of representing identity and developing legitimating ideologies, consider the contemporary application of narrative to the introductory story of al-Kasasbeh.[78] Opposing narratives created wildly disparate meanings by weaving the same series of events into different stories. Consider the Jordanian narrative, represented by remarks by Jordan's King Abdullah II following al-Kasasbeh's execution.

> We have received with all sorrow, grief and anger, the news of the martyrdom of the brave pilot Muath Kasasbeh, may Allah bless his soul, at the hand of the terrorist and cowardly Daesh organisation, this criminal, stray gang that has nothing to do with our true religion. The brave pilot Muath died in defence of his faith, homeland and nation, and joined other martyrs who fell for the sake of the country, sacrificing their lives for dear Jordan.[79]

This is in contrast to the Islamic State's narrative.

> In burning the crusader pilot alive and burying him under a pile of debris, the Islamic State carried out a just form of retaliation for his involvement in the crusader bombing campaign which continues to result in the killing of countless Muslims who, as a result of these airstrikes, are burned alive and buried under mountains of debris. This is not to even mention those Muslims – men, women, and children – who survive the airstrikes and are left injured and disabled, and in many cases suffering from severe burns that cause them pain and anguish every minute of every day.[80]

As shown above, narrative both describes events that have occurred (i.e., tells a story) and does so in a way designed to influence opinion and gain support. Each tells the story of al-Kasasbeh's execution in a way that gives meaning to his death and legitimizes the use of military force. In the first narrative, that meaning is martyrdom in defense of country and religion, and the legitimized military force is continued airstrikes against the Islamic State. In the second narrative, the meaning is theologically sanctioned capital punishment, and the legitimized military force is the continued execution of those representing countries conducting airstrikes.

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[78] Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1-14.

[79] "It will only strengthen us — King," *The Jordan Times*, February 3, 2015, accessed March 17, 2016, http://jordantimes.com/news/local/it-will-only-strengthen-us-%E2%80%94-king.

[80] "The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot," *Dabiq* no. 7, 6-7.

Propaganda

The more one examines the nature and role of narrative within conflict studies, the more narrative begins to resemble the controversial term of propaganda. While the United States is quick to label *Dabiq* propaganda, it would never describe its own counter-narrative as such. Why? What is the difference between narrative and propaganda in non-literary, social science fields? The answer is that there is very little objective difference, as Figure 1 illustrates. The former has become a socially-acceptable word for strategic messaging, whereas the latter became so politically-charged throughout the twentieth century as to become applicable only to one's enemy. Today, propaganda is an autological word; the very use of the word serves a propaganda purpose. For instance, labeling *Dabiq* "ISIS propaganda" may be descriptive, but it also aims to influence public opinion against the Islamic State.

Both the meaning and connotation of propaganda have evolved considerably over time.[81] Only in the twenty-first century has propaganda taken on a pejorative connotation. The word likely suffered guilt by association, given that the most self-admitted and successful practitioners of propaganda in the twentieth century were Nazis and communists. Because propaganda is associated with the historical enemies of the United States, and because those enemies were often guilty of deception and misinformation, the colloquial definition of propaganda has come to include that it is false and deceptive.[82] Propaganda, however, is distinguished more by its intent to influence than by its truthfulness, and in this sense, it overlaps considerably with the modern definition of narrative. A study of US Army doctrine shows the gradual evolution of both propaganda and narrative. Propaganda has transitioned from a legitimate tactic to something only the enemy

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[81] Erwin W. Fellows, "'Propaganda:' History of a Word," *American Speech* 34, no. 3 (Oct., 1959): 182-185. Both the meaning and connotation of propaganda have evolved considerably over time. The etymological origins of propaganda are in the word propagate, which means to spread, extend, shoot forth. As with the word propagate today, the original use of propaganda was in the context of biology, referencing plant and animal reproduction. In the sixteenth century, propaganda took on a religious context that it would keep until the modern era. A formal term within the Catholic church, propaganda described missionary teams sent to spread Catholic doctrine in foreign lands. The modern definition arose from the First and Second World Wars after gradually taking on a more political connotation during the preceding century.

[82] As an analogy to propaganda as a word, the word socialism has also fallen victim to guilt by association. American social welfare programs in place since the Roosevelt era are by definition socialist programs. However, the majority of Americans still recoil at the overt use of the word.

uses, while narrative has transitioned from non-bulletized writing to include the stories through which one expresses ideology.[83]

Nazi Germany arguably represents the gold standard of using propaganda effectively, which does much to explain the word's falling out of favor. While the United States used propaganda extensively through the Office of War Information, German Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels took a more scholarly approach to understanding the theory of the phenomenon of propaganda. He then developed theories of action to formally educate Nazi propagandists in its production and dissemination. In many ways, *Dabiq* is reminiscent of the Nazi magazine *Signal*. It too was impressive at the time for its aesthetics and glossiness. It too was published in multiple languages to target enemy audiences and it too conveyed a narrative of happy life.[84] In exploring both *Signal* and *Dabiq*, one can clearly distinguish the principles of propaganda that Goebbels advocated to his apparatus, notably the need for an "attention-getting communications medium," the use of repetitive themes, and specifying "targets of hatred."[85] Given the evidence that many Salafi-jihadists are well-versed in military history, it would not be surprising to discover one day that the leaders of the Islamic State's al-Hayat Media Center studied Goebbels.[86]

Interpreting Strategic Narrative

Thus far, this monograph has defined and described narrative, propaganda, and the union of the two in strategic narrative. With that established, how does one understand an enemy's strategic narrative? To quote a junior officer struggling to grasp the emerging doctrine of counterinsurgency in 2006, "I get what we're supposed to *achieve*, but what are we supposed to *do*?"[87] Interpreting strategic narrative in the context of political science is not so different from interpreting narrative in the classical sense. In the case of *Dabiq*, the first step is the same. One has to read it first. As with other forms of analysis in political science, there are both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. Both are used here, with

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[83] Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), 55-56. Per FM 100-5, *Operations*, published in 1986, "Propaganda…provide[s] the commander with his primary means of communication with opposing military forces and civilian groups." By the 1993 revision, the word is only mentioned in the context of "military operations other than war" as something drug dealers may resort to.

[84] S. L. Mayer, ed., *Signal, Years of Triumph, 1940-42: Hitler's Wartime Picture Magazine* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1978). In the case of *Signal,* the primary enemy audience was Russia.

[85] See Appendix D for Goebbels' nineteen principles of propaganda.

[86] In their aforementioned letters to Zarqawi, al-Zawahiri and Rahman reference the Vietnam War and Clausewitz, respectively.

[87] Kaplan, 174.

greater emphasis on the latter. A common method of quantitative narrative analysis, also known as content analysis, consists of techniques such as counting word occurrence to uncover certain terms used most frequently. A content analysis of *Dabiq* (Appendix B) supports the conclusions of the qualitative theme-based analysis that follows.

To borrow from the field of literature, there are six general concepts with which to qualitatively interpret narrative. They are the implied author, underreading, overreading, gaps, cruxes, and repetition in the form of themes and motifs.[88] The implied author is not necessarily the literal author of the narrative but the overall sensibility behind it that gives the narrative meaning. For example, President Obama is both the implied and official author of the 2015 National Security Strategy, despite National Security Council staffers having literally written it. Likewise, Petraeus is the implied author of the 2006 counterinsurgency manual, despite the US Army being its official author and his group of chosen experts being the literal authors. In both instances, the implied author informs a deeper interpretation of the given narrative.

In the case of *Dabiq*, the implied author is even more important since its editors and authors are almost entirely uncredited, minus the aforementioned notable exceptions. A reading of *Dabiq* suggests two categories of implied authors, one devoted to message and one devoted to medium. In terms of message, *Dabiq* appears to reflect the sensibilities of Islamic State leader and self-declared caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Al-Baghdadi is best known for his *lack* of public appearance (the Islamic State is by no means a cult of personality) and his piety. Whether true or not, he boasts a holy bloodline, a doctorate in Qurʾanic studies, and a supposed sonorous ability to recite scripture from memory.[89] *Dabiq* reflects al-Baghdadi as an implied author with its aggressive inclusion of multiple parenthetical citations and footnotes citing Islamic theology in almost every article, a point that also supports the recurring themes of Islamic legitimacy and righteousness discussed later. In terms of messaging, an analysis of *Dabiq*'s implied author may provide clues as to the unknown identity of its editors. The high quality of *Dabiq* as an English language product supports suspicion that the Islamic State's propaganda apparatus may be run by Westerners, possibly including Americans.[90]

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[88] Abbott, 84-95.

[89] McCants, *The Believer*, loc 16, 72.

[90] Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, "Inside the surreal world of the Islamic State's propaganda machine," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2015, accessed November 23, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html.

The second and third concepts of interpreting narrative, underreading and overreading, refer to the audience's ability to manipulate a narrative by overlooking important aspects of it (underreading) or inserting things that are not there to begin with (overreading).[91] Portraying the Islamic State as being at war with Christianity and Western values could constitute an underreading of the Islamic State narrative in that it overlooks the significance of the Islamic State's view towards Muslims it considers apostates and its policy of targeting their entire communities. Likewise, those who label every member of the Islamic State as an ideological purist seeking an apocalyptic battle or every suicide bomber as being determined to seek martyrdom no matter what are guilty of overreading.

It is often difficult to avoid overreading because narratives so often include gaps. Gaps, the fourth interpretive concept, refer to the inevitable need for the audience to draw inferences from the narrative, leading to multiple interpretations.[92] For instance, news reports that contradict the messages of *Dabiq* create narrative gaps in claiming the Islamic State is losing territory and being degraded. Interestingly, one could argue that *Dabiq* exists to fill the wide gaps between the Islamic State narrative and its actions. The most obvious gaps are the discrepancies between the Islamic State's brutality and the mainstream interpretations of Islam, such as al-Kasasbeh's execution. These are the very gaps that al-Zawahiri cautioned against. Rather than exposing gaps, *Dabiq* seeks to fill them. Another example is an article in the tenth issue of *Dabiq* presented as a question from a reader. The extensive article, published shortly after Taliban leader Mullah Omar's death was revealed, addresses the confusion for those who had previously pledged allegiance to Omar and argues that Muslims are now obligated to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi regardless of whether Omar is dead or alive.[93] These gaps likewise constitute cruxes, the fifth interpretive concept. Cruxes are types of gaps that, depending on how the audience interprets them, alters the interpretation of the work as a whole.[94]

The sixth and final interpretative concept is repetition, which further divides into motifs and themes. Though both can be ambiguous, the former is generally concrete, while the latter is more abstract.[95] For instance, the flag of the Islamic State is the most evident motif repeated throughout *Dabiq*. Its use as a motif implies the importance of consistent and aggressive branding to the Islamic State and subconsciously reinforces the idea of the Islamic State as a governing entity

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[91] Abbott, 86.

[92] Ibid., 90-92.

[93] "A Fatwa for Khurasan," *Dabiq* no. 10 (July, 2015): 18-24, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

[94] Abbott, 93-95.

[95] Ibid., 95-97.

versus a terrorist organization. Another motif, referenced in the following section, is the repeated use of certain transliterated Arabic words, which constitute a subliminal total immersion course in the language of the Islamic State. The second form of narrative repetition, themes, gives the narrative its greatest propaganda value and constitutes this monograph's primary means of analyzing *Dabiq*.

Recurring Themes of *Dabiq* Magazine

> History proves that the greatest world movements have always developed when their leaders knew how to unify their followers under a short, clear theme.
>
> —Joseph Goebbels, *"Knowledge and Propaganda"*

The strategic narrative conveyed by *Dabiq* magazine consists of five major themes. The first theme is legitimacy, namely that the Islamic State is a legitimate caliphate and therefore the only authority within Islam. The second theme is statehood, conveying that the Islamic State is a fully functioning state, supported by arguments depicting control of territory, a robust economy, and provision of essential services to supposedly faithful citizens. The third theme is belonging, conveying that the Islamic State is an open, non-discriminatory organization welcoming Muslims from all groups throughout the world. The fourth theme is righteousness, in that the Islamic State justifies all of its actions and portrays enemies as hypocrites and irrational actors, especially the United Sates. The fifth and final theme is engagement, conveying that the Islamic State is a well-informed, modern organization actively engaged with the rest of the world. None of these five themes are unique to the Islamic State. Instead, as shown via repeated references to US doctrine, these themes resonate equally well with Western audiences, illustrating their utility as components of a strategic narrative aimed largely at that audience.

Islamic Legitimacy

> And upon them is to understand that The Islamic State – on account of what Allah has blessed it with of victory, consolidation and establishing the religion – is regarded as an unquestionable imamah [leader]. As such, anyone who rebels against its authority inside its territory is considered a renegade.
>
> —*Dabiq* issue 1

> Because the populace perceives that the government has genuine authority
> to govern and uses proper agencies for valid purposes, they consider that
> government as legitimate.
>
> —Joint Publication 3-0 *Joint Operations*

Unsurprisingly, the two primary themes of both the Islamic State's strategic
narrative and the West's counter-narrative concern the accuracy of the
organization's name. The first themes argue whether the Islamic State is in fact
"Islamic," and the second themes argue whether it is a state, a terrorist
organization, or some hybrid of the two. Even a cursory reading of *Dabiq*
immediately conveys the theme that not only is the Islamic State very much
Islamic, but that it is the only true incarnation of Islam in the world (relating to
*Dabiq'*s fourth theme of righteousness). Analyzing the validity of what makes a
group or individual Islamic or not is best left to theologians and clerics and is well
beyond the scope of this paper. However, what the Islamic State wants an
audience to believe, and how it conveys that through *Dabiq,* is very much within
that scope.

Legitimacy is "the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to
be obeyed."[96] It is dependent upon perception. Legitimacy does not exist unless it
is acknowledged—like gravity in the classic cartoon gags where a character walks
off a cliff and keeps walking. Along with fear and self-interest, legitimacy is one
of the three reasons that an actor (i.e., individual or organization) obeys an
authority figure.[97] The Islamic State controls its domestic populations through
fear. It controls many of its fighters through self-interest, offering higher wages or
a better quality of life than they could find elsewhere. A third group consists of
those outside the Islamic State's sphere of control, who would have to make great
personal sacrifice to support the Islamic State. In order to exert authority over this
group, potential foreign fighters and lone wolves, the Islamic State must appeal to
a sense of legitimacy.

Dabiq conveys the theme of Islamic legitimacy through the editors' choice of
language (including the title itself), style, content, and ubiquitous citation of
Islamic texts, most often the Qurʾan or the hadith. As previously stated, the
magazine's title refers to a Syrian town referenced in an eschatological hadith. A
Christian analogy might be a magazine titled *Megiddo*, after the Palestinian city
from which the word Armageddon is supposedly derived.[98] Contrast this message

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[96] Ian Hurd, "Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics," *International
Organization* 53, no. 2 (1999): 381.
[97] Ibid., 379.
[98] Jean Marie Hiesberger, ed., *The Catholic Bible: Personal Study Edition* (New York:
Oxford University Press, 2007), 1753.

with AQAP's *Inspire* magazine. Though taken from a Qurʾanic verse, the title complements the organization's more tactical focus on inspiring Muslims to fight; for instance, via homemade bombs.[99] *Dabiq's* title immediately conveys that the Islamic State will not be content with any political solution such as removal of Western military forces from the Middle East. Instead, the end game for the Islamic State is literally to fight until the end of days. Regardless of the validity of Islamic apocrypha, or the Islamic State's interpretation of it, the decision to title their magazine after an Armageddon-like battle between Islam and Rome from an obscure hadith conveys an obvious attention to religious detail.

In terms of language, *Dabiq* presents an interesting dynamic between making the content accessible to an English-speaking audience while also forcing that audience into something of a total immersion course in Islam. The post-9/11 era has added several Islamic terms to the lexicon of the average non-Muslim Westerner to the point of bordering on stereotype including *jihad*, *fatwa*, and *infidel*. *Dabiq* adds to that list considerably. Approximately one quarter of the most frequently used words in *Dabiq* merit an Islamic dictionary, or at least a Google search. For instance, the Islamic State is not only the caliphate but the *Khilafah*. Al-Baghdadi is not the caliph but the *Khalifah*. One of the steps towards becoming fluent in a language is the transition from having to mentally translate words to being able to think in the new language. After reading *Dabiq*, one begins to think about the Islamic State in literally different terms, such as *apostasy* (the rejection of Islam) or "true" (i.e., Sunni, specifically Salafist) Muslims versus *Rafidah* (literally repudiators, a derogatory term for Shiʿi Muslims). When local terrorist organizations give *bayʾah* (pledge allegiance) to the Islamic State, they are not thought of as off-shoots but new *wilayats* (provinces). The consistent use of select Islamic words in an otherwise English product is borderline subliminal and conveys to the audience a subconscious sense of authenticity.

The most well-known definitions of political legitimacy originate with German sociologist Max Weber, who classified the sources of political legitimacy into three categories: traditional, charismatic, and legal.[100] Traditional political legitimacy normally stems from custom and history, as with monarchies. Charismatic legitimacy explains history's military heroes, prophets, founders of religion, or personality cults. Though one might immediately associate al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State with the type of legitimacy tied to religion, their

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[99] "Letter from the editor," in *Inspire* no. 1 (Summer 1431/2010): 2, accessed January 28, 2016, https://www.opensource.gov.
[100] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 79.

strategic narrative actually attempts to convey the third type, which is coincidentally the one most associated with Western politics and democracies. The Islamic State, and by extension *Dabiq*, ties everything it does back to Islamic law, usually the Qurʾan or the hadith. Every single article in *Dabiq*, minus those attributed to hostages, contains multiples citations of Islamic scripture. Going back to the narrative idea of implied author, this reflects al-Baghdadi's academic credentials in Qurʾanic recitation and studies, and his role as legal authority rather than charismatic leader. Whether the citations are accurate or represent respected sources is irrelevant. The burden is on the audience to fact check, and more often than not, the mere appearance of scriptural citation is likely enough. An additional benefit of al-Baghdadi's appeal to legal legitimacy is its function as strategic insurance. A charismatic leader could represent a single point of failure for an organization such as the Islamic State and thus an easy military target. By using *Dabiq* to consistently convey legal Islamic legitimacy without frequent references to himself specifically, al-Baghdadi increases the chance of the Islamic State surviving his death.

Statehood

> One doesn't expect a mere 'organization' to lay siege to cities or have their own police force. You certainly don't expect a mere 'organization' to have tanks and artillery pieces, an army of soldiers tens of thousands strong, and their own spy drones. And one certainly doesn't expect a mere 'organization' to have a mint with plans to produce their own currency, primary schools for the young, and a functioning court system. These, surely, are all hallmarks of (whisper it if you dare) a country.
>
> —*Dabiq* issue 8

The concept of statehood is complicated. As with so many terms in political science (war, terrorism, genocide), there is no universally-recognized definition of what constitutes a state. The most widely-recognized formal definition is the Montevideo Convention requirement for a permanent population, defined territory, government, and ability to enter relations with other states.[101] There are

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[101] Convention on Rights and Duties of States, inter-American, December 26, 1933, *TS* 881, pt. 1, accessed December 17, 2015, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/intam03.asp. This originates from the Convention on Rights and Duties of States held in Montevideo, Uruguay on December 26, 1934 (known as the Montevideo Convention). According to Article I, in its entirety, "The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states." Article III further clarifies, "The political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states." Even if the Islamic State

several political bodies in the world that are recognized as fellow states by some states but not others. For instance, the United States recognizes the Republic of Kosovo and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), though the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), respectively, do not. Conversely, the United States does not recognize the State of Palestine or the Republic of China (Taiwan), though several other members of the United Nations do. The United States recognizes the Holy See as a state, and while the Holy See has a permanent population of all the world's Roman Catholics, it possesses no defined territory beyond that of its capital, the Vatican City State.[102] Unlike the United States, the Holy See officially recognizes both the State of Palestine and the Republic of China. The United States' recognition of North Korea's statehood but not Taiwan's, despite considering the former an enemy and having friendly relations with the latter, illustrates that recognition of statehood does not equate to approval of regime and vice versa.

Given the lack of an international definition of statehood and the question as to whether the Islamic State meets the US-approved Montevideo criteria, how else does one define a state, specifically a functioning one? After the post-9/11 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the US military has had to refine and expound upon its criteria for what constitutes a functioning state. These criteria guide the planning of stability operations, measures success, and informs exit criteria for the US military from a given country. The US Army in particular outlines five "end state conditions" for overseas stability operations. These conditions distinguish a legitimate, functioning government from a failed or fragile state. In theory, when a state has transitioned from failed or fragile to a legitimate, functioning government, US military forces can cease operations and return home. The first end state condition is a safe and secure environment. The second is established rule of law. The third is social well-being. The fourth is stable governance. The fifth and final is a sustainable economy.[103] As an intellectual exercise, this monograph crafts an argument for the legitimacy of the Islamic State using articles from *Dabiq* and the stability framework of the US Army.

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unequivocally met all four criteria outlined in Article I, one could still argue against Islamic State statehood by invoking Article XI, which denies recognition of territory acquired by the use of force.

[102] US Department of State, "Fact Sheet: Independent States in the World," Washington, DC: Bureau of Intelligence and Research, July 21, 2015, http://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/4250.htm.

[103] Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-07, *Stability* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 6.

A Safe and Secure Environment

> A safe and secure environment is one in which the population has the freedom to pursue daily activities without fear of politically motivated, persistent, or large-scale violence.

> —ADP 3-07 *Stability*

US Army doctrine cites safety and security of the local populace as the military's most immediate concern post-conflict. Likewise, *Dabiq* emphasizes local safety and security in its first issues. The first and second issue each end with a section detailing "Islamic State News." Both highlight the Islamic State's "Islamic Police" in its service to IS citizens as part of a visual news montage. In one photo, titled "Highway Robbers Executed," two men kneel in the street with their backs to two men holding handguns.[104] The caption explains that the men were executed near Raqqa as punishment for armed robbery. Another news montage features a photo titled "Jarablus Crime" that shows weapons, cash, and cigarette cartons neatly organized on the floor, all supposedly from a drug trafficking cell broken up by the Islamic Police.[105] Two more alleged drug traffickers from another province are shown kneeling by their car in another news photo, as a supposed IS police officer removes several bags of drugs from the car.[106] In the "Islamic State Reports" section of the fourth issue, *Dabiq* celebrates the creation of two new provinces, showing photographs of the Islamic Police patrolling neighborhoods and manning checkpoints to protect local Muslims.[107]

This early focus on local security is logical no only within the context of American military doctrine, but also given the strategy with which the Islamic State rose to power and currently operates. In the feature article for the inaugural issue, *Dabiq* describes in impressive detail the five phase strategy for re-establishing the caliphate.[108] Step one was to find a suitable location for a base of operations from which to form the organization, recruit, and train. Most importantly, this location must have weak central authority and poor security. According to the article, this is why al-Zarqawi chose Afghanistan and later Kurdistan as ideal locations from which to realize his vision.[109] Disturbingly, the article specifically cites other suitable locations that have developed since,

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[104] "Islamic State News," *Dabiq* no. 1, 45.
[105] "Islamic State News," *Dabiq* no. 2 (July, 2014): 33, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#. Jarablus is a border town in Syria.
[106] Ibid., 41.
[107] "Islamic State Reports," *Dabiq* no. 4, 19.
[108] "From Hijrah to Khilafah," *Dabiq* no. 1, 34-40.
[109] Ibid., 36.

including Yemen, Mali, Somalia, the Sinai Peninsula, Waziristan, Libya, Chechnya, and Nigeria, as well as parts of Tunis, Algeria, Indonesia, and the Philippines.[110] Since the article was published in July 2014, the Islamic State has expanded to several of these locations. Given this philosophy, it makes sense that upon establishing the caliphate, the Islamic State would want to emphasize local security and a strong active police force to discourage the very environment in which it was able to grow. Furthermore, the Islamic State repeatedly emphasizes the obligation of every Muslim to emigrate to the caliphate. By emphasizing local safety and security within the caliphate, the Islamic State may better persuade Muslims hesitant to put themselves or their families in danger while maintaining a strategic narrative that includes extreme violence to intimidate enemies.

Established Rule of Law

> Established rule of law refers to the condition in which all individuals and institutions, public and private, and the state itself are accountable to the law.
>
> —ADP 3-07 *Stability*

The Islamic State and *Dabiq* emphasize the concept of established rule of law more than any other metric used to assess a state's level of legitimacy. The Islamic State's interpretation of shariʿa law ties directly into the first identified theme of Islamic legitimacy and is so integral to the Islamic State's ideology and strategic narrative that it permeates each of the five themes. Inseparable from the Islamic State's argument of its own Islamic legitimacy is its argument that it is currently the only organization that observes and enforces shariʿa, the Islamic rule of law. To the Islamic State, all other Islamic states and organizations that claim to follow shariʿa are hypocrites, whether Saudi Arabia or factions of al-Qaʿida. Shariʿa is referenced an average of twenty times per issue (269 times throughout the thirteen issues published thus far). As with the first end-state condition of establishing a safe and secure environment, *Dabiq* promotes a strategic narrative of the Islamic State respecting the rule of law from its very first issues.

References to rule of law throughout *Dabiq* primarily focus on the teaching of, adherence to, and punishment according to shariʿa law. The inaugural issue of *Dabiq* begins with the announcement of the caliphate, immediately followed by a section on breaking news calling all Muslims of various specialties to emigrate to the Islamic State.[111] Among the requested specialists are experts in Islamic jurisprudence and judges. *Dabiq* repeats this call in the third issue's feature

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[110] Ibid.

[111] "The World Has Divided Into Two Camps," in *Dabiq* no. 1, 11.

article, "Hijrah from Hypocrisy to Sincerity," warning Muslim professionals not to use further study as an excuse to postpone emigration.[112] Another section in the third issue is a report on the Islamic State's massacre of an estimated 700 members of the Syrian al-Sheitat tribe the previous month.[113] Whereas most news outlets reported the murder of hundreds of civilians, *Dabiq* offers a theological justification of what it describes as executions based upon shariʿa law. The article begins with an explanation of why Muslims living in "modern" societies may struggle to understand such things.[114] According to the article, such Muslims lack a basic understanding of tribal societies because they live in a world that misguidedly values individualism. Reading *Dabiq*, the tribe acted as one in violation of shariʿa; their offenses including the torture of Islamic State soldiers, drinking, drug use, and possession of too many wives. After rejecting multiple opportunities to turn over individual violators and evacuate the innocent, Islamic State soldiers punished those who remained according to shariʿa. As with the execution of al-Kasasbeh, the Islamic State portrays itself, not as perpetrators of horrific violence, but as unbiased followers of divine law.

In addition to individual articles and sidebars that reference rule of law, two issues specifically highlight the rule of law in their cover stories. The first is the eighth issue, the cover of which reads, "Shariʿa Alone Will Rule Africa." The second is the tenth issue with the headline, "The Laws of Allah or the Laws of Men."

Social Well-Being

> Social well-being is the condition in which the population believes its basic human needs are met and people coexist peacefully.
>
> —ADP 3-07 *Stability*

In US Army doctrine for stability operations, social well-being refers to the government's ability to meet the basic human needs of the population and create an environment in which members of that population exist peacefully with one another.[115] One of the primary tasks for stability operations, restoring essential services, promotes social well-being. The phrase "essential services" typically refers to basic human needs such as food, water, shelter, or emergency medical care.[116] Social well-being also includes access to education and greater

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[112] "Hijrah from Hypocrisy to Sincerity," in *Dabiq* no. 3, 26.

[113] Oliver Holmes and Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Islamic State Executed 700 People from Syrian Tribe: Monitoring Group," *Reuters*, August 16, 2014, accessed January 23, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-execution-idUSKBN0GG0H120140817.

[114] "The Punishing of Shu'aytāt for Treachery," *Dabiq* no. 3, 12.

[115] ADP 3-07, 7.

[116] Ibid., 10.

preventative medical care. Just as conveying a sense of belonging is the most counter-intuitive of *Dabiq*'s five recurring themes, ensuring social well-being is the most counter-intuitive way in which the Islamic State tries to convey the image of a fully-functioning state.

Throughout *Dabiq*, the Islamic State cites the need for, and role of, professionals, usually phrased specifically as doctors, scholars, and engineers, in varying order. The first issue of *Dabiq* begins with a breaking news section. A sidebar headline reads, "A call to all Muslim doctors, engineers, scholars, and specialists."[117] It quotes al-Baghdadi's call for professionals to emigrate to the caliphate to meet the needs of their fellow Muslims. Those needs are met to some degree shortly thereafter, as the second issue boasts in its Islamic State Reports section.[118] In it, the magazine brags that the Islamic State "captured a large quantity of drugs and medical supplies…[that] will go a long way towards fulfilling the medical needs of the Muslims." A photo shows the Islamic State flag flying atop the sign in front of the newly "liberated" State Company for Drug Industries and Medical Appliances. *Dabiq* emphasizes the caliphate provides for all of its provinces as well. In the eleventh issue, the magazine interviews the head of the Islamic State's Libyan province, inquiring into its state of governance and asking if the province requires assistance with issues such as medical care and education.[119] In the next issue, British hostage and frequent (supposed) guest author John Cantlie quotes a British article that describes how well the Islamic State pays its doctors.[120]

None of these examples, however, showcases the Islamic State's desire to convey its ability to care for its so-called citizens as well as the ninth issue's three-page report "Healthcare in the Khilafah."[121] The first page is a full-page photo of a doctor at work. He has a full beard beneath his surgical cap and mask and is wearing scrubs with a stethoscope around his neck. The following two pages read and look like they could belong in a brochure for the Affordable Care Act. A chart advertises the services provided in one month at one province's two hospitals. It includes statistics on emergency room patients, kidney dialysis, general surgeries, births, ultrasounds, and so on, and so forth. Photographs advertise pediatric, imaging, and physical therapy services. The bulk of the article describes two new Islamic State medical schools recently opened in Raqqa and Mosul offering a "3-year/6-semester curriculum" open to both men and women. After admonishing any Muslims in Western countries ("lands of *kufr*") who use medical school as an

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[117] "The World Has Divided Into Two Camps," *Dabiq* no. 1, 11.
[118] "Islamic State News," *Dabiq* no. 2, 40.
[119] "Interview with Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani," *Dabiq* no. 11, 62.
[120] John Cantlie, "Paradigm Shift Part II," *Dabiq* no. 12, 48.
[121] "Healthcare in the Khilafah," *Dabiq* no. 9, 24-26.

excuse not to emigrate, the article concludes with, "The Islamic State offers everything that you need to live and work here, so what are you waiting for?"[122]

The first issue of *Dabiq* tries to present a strong relationship between the Islamic State and local tribal authorities. In addition to providing the security and stability referenced earlier in this section, *Dabiq* claims the Islamic State ensures "the availability of food products and commodities in the market, particularly bread" and prepares "lists with the names of orphans, widows and the needy so that [charity] can be distributed to them." The next issue then shows photographs of a man with a group of children under the headline "Caring for the Orphans." The sub-headline explains that the Islamic State is distributing the spoils of war that have been designated as charity for orphans in Raqqa.

Stable Governance

> Governance is the state's ability to serve the citizens through the rules, processes, and behavior by which interests are articulated, resources are managed, and power is exercised in a society.
>
> —ADP 3-07 *Stability*

The fourth end state condition in US Army stability doctrine is stable governance. Stable governance describes the manner in which a government effectively exercises power and includes organizational infrastructure and processes that facilitate the exchange of services and discourse between the government and the population. This is one of the most significant areas in which the Western strategic narrative, deliberately or not, mischaracterizes the Islamic State as a terrorist organization. The Islamic State has distinguished itself among jihadist organizations in its considerable attempt to both control and govern territory, a characteristic that *Dabiq* goes to great lengths to emphasize. Remember that control of territory was a necessary precursor to the first declaration of an Islamic state, the Islamic State of Iraq in 2006. Later, the official declaration of the Islamic State in the summer of 2014 cited the stable governance over controlled territory as a factor necessitating the declaration of a caliphate.[123] Specifically, the declaration describes defended borders, the ability of the population to travel safely and pursue their livelihoods, the appointment of governors and judges, the establishment of courts, and the enforcement and collection of taxes. Regardless of whether the Islamic State's strategic narrative of stable governance is accurate, the very fact that it is part of that narrative is significant and suggests that an anti-

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[122] "Healthcare in the Khilafah," *Dabiq* no. 9, 26.
[123] Al-Adnani, 5.

Islamic State strategy should differ from counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism strategies of the past.

The most obvious way in which *Dabiq* conveys a theme of stable governance in through its consistent emphasis on the provinces of the Islamic State. As previously mentioned, there is a formal, bureaucratic relationship between the central leadership of the Islamic State and its various provinces, both within Iraq and Syria and outside the immediate region. The Islamic State strategic narrative conveys that its provinces are part of the greater caliphate as much as Hawaii or Alaska is part of the United States, rather than offshoots or affiliates like al-Qaʿida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) or Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) are to al-Qaʿida central. *Dabiq* advertises the establishment of new provinces, interviews its various governors, and announces when new organizations seek to join the Islamic State but are not yet ready to become a province. In the aforementioned interview with the governor of the Libyan province, *Dabiq* inquires as to the state of governance there.[124] In the eighth issue, *Dabiq* announces two new provinces in Iraq (*Wilayat al-Jazirah* and *Wilayat Dijlah*, respectively west and south of Mosul).[125] The article specifies that restructuring was necessary to facilitate better governance and allow the Islamic State to better tend to administrative and military matters. When *Dabiq* does provide updates on military operations, it divides them according to province.[126]

In addition to emphasizing the way in which the Islamic State structures itself as a state through provinces, *Dabiq* conveys a sense of active participation in governance through articles involving tribal assemblies and seeking questions from readers to pass to the Islamic State's Shura Council. This is a part of the strategic narrative that does not appear consistently throughout *Dabiq* but is instead frontloaded in early issues. If intentional, it makes sense that the Islamic State would make a point of respecting tribal assemblies from the very beginning, when they were arguably more vulnerable to opposition. As referenced previously, the inaugural issue of *Dabiq* begins with an introduction to the magazine, the declaration of the caliphate, and a call for all Muslims to emigrate to the Islamic State. The very next article, a four-page spread, emphasizes the

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[124] "Interview with Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani," *Dabiq* no. 11, 62.
[125] "The Announcement of Two New Wilayat in Iraq," *Dabiq* no. 8 (March, 2015): 27, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.
[126] "A Selection of Military Operations Conducted by the Islamic State," *Dabiq* no. 13, 14-19.

importance of tribal assemblies and shows a relationship of mutual respect between local authorities and the Islamic State.[127]

A Sustainable Economy

> A sustainable economy is one in which the population can pursue opportunities for livelihoods within a predictable system of economic governance bound by law.
>
> —ADP 3-07 Stability

Economics is the aspect of statehood that *Dabiq* addresses least. References to a sustainable economy within the Islamic State are almost exclusively confined to reinstating the gold dinar as the official currency of the Islamic State and the collection and distribution of the *zakah* (a tax based on the pillar of Islam devoted to almsgiving). Four issues of *Dabiq* address the issue of currency, but in an interesting way. The fifth issue of *Dabiq*, released in November 2014, devotes a two-page article to returning to precious metal-based currency.[128] The first page shows photos of original gold dinar coins, details the history of the coins, and explains al-Baghdadi's initiative to reinstate them "in an effort to disentangle the *Ummah* from the corrupt, interest-based global financial system."[129] The next page shows designs of the various coinage denominations in gold, silver, and copper.

The interesting aspect of this is the context of the other three articles in which *Dabiq* references the precious metal-currency initiative. They are all articles attributed to British hostage John Cantlie. In an article titled "Meltdown" in the subsequent issue, Cantlie (allegedly) provides a historical lesson on the gold standard and gives an overview of the current global economy, explaining the supposed wisdom of the Islamic State's decision to return to precious metal currency, even quoting Congressman Ron Paul.[130] Relating to the theme of righteousness in the following pages, the article goes on to accuse the United States of starting wars in the Middle East to protect the dollar and the oil market.

The next two Cantlie articles actually make the entire argument for the statehood of the Islamic State, including its minting of currency. Borrowing the language of

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[127] "Halab Tribal Assemblies," *Dabiq* no. 1, 12-15.

[128] "The Currency of the Khilafah," *Dabiq* no. 5 (November, 2014): 18-19, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

[129] Ibid.

[130] John Cantlie, "Meltdown," *Dabiq* no. 6 (December, 2014): 58-62, accessed July 30, 2015. http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq#.

Thomas Kuhn, Cantlie (again, allegedly) writes that a paradigm shift has occurred in that the West is gradually beginning to think of the Islamic State as more than a terrorist organization.[131] The first of the two articles provides the quote that precedes this section, echoing Audrey Cronin in suggesting that the Islamic State is in fact more akin to a country than a terrorist organization.[132]

Belonging

> It is a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers.
>
> —*Dabiq* issue 1

> Camaraderie, in a supportive and cohesive team of brothers and sisters, develops our shared identity by focusing on the team ('we') and not the individual ('me').
>
> —Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1 *The Army Profession*

The third theme that *Dabiq* conveys is the most surprising and counter-intuitive, given the Western strategic narrative of the Islamic State. This is the theme of belonging. The Western strategic narrative of the Islamic State paints the group as intolerant and violently hateful towards any individual or group who does not share its arguably warped interpretation of Islam. That is very true. However, what the Western narrative fails to address, and what the Islamic State strategic narrative so explicitly communicates, is the group's active embrace of diversity among those who do agree to follow its brand of Salafi-jihadism. The decision in 2014 to change the name of the organization from ISIS to the Islamic State, coinciding with the declaration of the caliphate, was a very deliberate choice that represented the global vision of its founder (al-Zarqawi) and current leader (al-Baghdadi). This is not an organization confined to two countries or even a region. Like Islam, it is intended to be universal. Thus, as an example, viewers were taken aback to discover the British accent of the Islamic State's infamous beheading videos in 2014. *Dabiq* conveys this sense of diversity and belonging through both overt language and more subtle visual cues. Furthermore, along with the fourth

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[131] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Thomas Kuhn coined the phrase "paradigm shift" in the context of science to describe a change in the way experts understand an environment, such as the change in science that occurred with Newtonian physics. Anomalies occur in the era of "normal science" until they amount to crisis level, which changes the institutional way of thinking and creates a paradigm shift to "new science." In this case, the paradigm shift is from thinking of the Islamic State as a terrorist organization to thinking of them as a country.

[132] John Cantlie, "Paradigm Shift," *Dabiq* no. 8, 64-67; "Paradigm Shift: Part II," *Dabiq* no. 12, 47-50.

theme of righteousness, the theme of belonging distinguishes the Islamic State from its greatest rivals, al-Qaʿida and the Taliban.

Dabiq makes it clear that the Islamic State is not a group for Iraqis, Syrians, Arabs, or Middle Easterners. It is a global caliphate for all Muslims. The word brother appears 379 times in *Dabiq's* thirteen issues. In the first issue of *Dabiq*, released shortly after the June 2014 declaration of the caliphate, the first section is an introduction to the magazine and an explanation of the significance of the title. The next section covers the breaking news of the caliphate declaration. The first sidebar of the article is an excerpt from al-Baghdadi's speech. In addition to the quote that begins this section, the excerpt reads,

> It is a Khilafah that gathered the Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Shami, Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian, Maghribi (North African), American, French, German, and Australian. Allah brought their hearts together, and thus, they became brothers by His grace, loving each other for the sake of Allah, standing in a single trench, defending and guarding each other, and sacrificing themselves for one another. Their blood mixed and became one, under a single flag and goal, in one pavilion, enjoying this blessing, the blessing of faithful brotherhood.[133]

The era of violent Islamist extremism has more often than not been framed in the language of jihad against infidel crusaders. Given that, there is something surreal about the first issue of an Islamic State magazine instead invoking the aura of Shakespeare's St. Crispin's Day speech in *Henry V* or Stephen Ambrose's *Band of Brothers*. *Dabiq* carries this theme throughout its various advertisements as well. Several issues feature full-page advertisements for al-Hayat Media Center, featuring new videos posted online. Many of these target specific countries and nationalities, while the ones that do not still feature photos depicting ethnic and racial diversity.

The next most overt instance of conveying a sense of belonging occurs in the eleventh issue. Titled "Wala and Bara Versus American Racism," the article contrasts the fellowship among Muslims (*wala* and *bara*, translated as loyalty and disavowal for the cause of Allah) with America's argued preoccupation with skin color.[134] Perhaps coincidentally, the issue premiered during a time of increased race-related protests and marches in the United States, following the one-year anniversary of the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The introduction to the article is a full-page photo featuring two fighters of different races, arm-in-arm, smiling at each other. The article reads, "A Muslim's

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[133] "Glad Tidings for the Muslim Ummah," *Dabiq* no. 1, 7.
[134] "Wala and Bara Versus American Racism," *Dabiq* no. 11, 18-20.

loyalty is determined, not by his skin color, his tribal affiliation, or his last name, but by his faith." It is worth noting that this emphasis on belonging and a lack of racism or prejudice goes both ways. Not only does the Islamic State refuse to discriminate among brothers based on race, it also refuses to discriminate among enemies.

> Thus, the correct way to approach the issue of racism from an Islamic perspective is to reassert the importance and significance of walā' and barā', and to state in clear and unequivocal terms that those who wage war against Islam and the Muslims will not be spared on account of their skin color or ethnicity. The fate of a kāfir waging war against the Muslims is one and the same across the entire racial spectrum – slaughter.[135]

Perhaps the most counterintuitive aspect of *Dabiq*'s theme of belonging is its appeal towards women, specifically Western women. This is evident with the "To [or From] our Sisters" segment that appears regularly beginning with the seventh issue in February 2015, specifically the aforementioned articles attributed to apparent "jihadi bride" Umm Sumayyah al-Muhajirah. Muhajirah repeatedly encourages Western women to travel to and join the Islamic State, conveying a sense of sisterhood and familiar life. Thinking back to narrative interpretation and the concepts of gaps, the Islamic State's treatment of women creates a potentially significant gap that Muhajirah's writings aim to fill. She presents a life in which women are treated properly according to Islamic law and fill vital roles in the community as wives of mujahidin and mothers to elementary school-age lion cubs being trained to be future Salafi-jihadists.

Righteousness

> O Americans, and O Europeans, the Islamic State did not initiate a war against you, as your governments and media try to make you believe. It is you who started the transgression against us, and thus you deserve blame and you will pay a great price.
>
> —*Dabiq* issue 4

> The moral justification for the Army mission is the basis for taking the lives of others and courageously placing our own lives at risk.
>
> — Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1 *The Army Profession*

The fourth narrative theme that *Dabiq* conveys is the theme of righteousness. The Islamic State has crafted a strategic narrative portraying all of its own actions as

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[135] Ibid., 19.

justifiable in contrast to its enemies, who are portrayed as hypocritical, irrational, and malevolent. The first component of this theme is more surprising than the second. Strategic narratives tend to define the other actor(s) more often than their own authors. Allied propaganda during World War II focused more on portraying the Nazis and Japanese causes as evil than their own as righteous. Likewise, Cold War strategic narratives generally focused more on defining one's enemy rather than defining oneself or defending one's cause. In recent history, al-Qaʿida's strategic narrative focused more on Westerners as crusaders and infidels in the Holy Land than jihadists and mujahidin fighting for a just cause. By contrast, the Islamic State devotes more publishing real estate to telling its own story than that of its enemy. Rather than shying away from its most disturbing actions, the Islamic State actively defends them. This aspect of the fourth theme of righteousness is intertwined with the first theme of Islamic legitimacy. Regarding the second aspect of conveying righteousness (i.e., in relation to the enemy), the Islamic State also distinguishes its strategic narrative when it directly references the enemy. As an example, "In the Words of the Enemy" is the only recurring segment to appear in every single issue of *Dabiq*.

Perhaps the best example of the Islamic State defending horrifying acts as righteous is the aforementioned story of al-Kasasbeh, the Jordanian pilot who the Islamic State infamously captured and burned alive. At the time of its release, the video of al-Kasasbeh's execution was arguably the most damning piece of self-inflicted propaganda against the Islamic State. Only a few days later, however, the Islamic State issued a new issue of *Dabiq* with a four-page article titled "The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot."[136] Notably, the article features some of the most graphic images that have appeared in *Dabiq*. Perhaps surprisingly, given the Islamic State's reputation for execution videos, *Dabiq* does not offer a gratuitous display of gore. Though it certainly contains images of graphic violence, such as dead bodies, that would never appear in a Western equivalent, it does so almost sparingly. Anyone downloading issues of *Dabiq* out of a morbid curiosity to see severed heads or stoned bodies will be disappointed. With that said, however, the article detailing al-Kasasbeh's execution is a notable exception. The article features horrific images of al-Kasasbeh during and after his death. The unnamed author does not shy away from the manner of the execution but displays it righteously. That righteousness is explained somewhat by the article's inclusion of two other images of charred bodies with the caption, "the murtadd pilot was killed in retaliation for airstrikes against Muslims such as those pictured above." At least one of the bodies appears to be that of a child.[137]

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[136] "The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot," in *Dabiq* no. 7, 5-8.
[137] Ibid., 6.

The title of the article itself conveys righteousness. Al-Kasasbeh is labeled "murtadd." Murtadd is the Islamic form of apostasy, the rejection of one's own religion. Too often the Western strategic narrative of the Islamic State focuses on the group's view of Christians as infidels and crusaders. What that narrative misses, however, and what distinguishes the Islamic State from other Salafi-jihadist organizations, is that the Islamic State's primary enemy is other Muslims, specifically those seen as guilty of apostasy. This includes the Shiʿa in their entirety and all Muslim governments who oppose the Islamic State. Al-Kasasbeh fell into the category of the latter as a pilot in the Royal Jordanian Air Force. Tying into the first theme of Islamic legitimacy, the article quotes multiple hadiths and the Qurʾanic equivalent of an eye for an eye to justify killing Kasasbeh in arguably the same manner that victims of airstrikes die; in fire and rubble. The article then goes on to list five historical examples in which fire was used as a form of punishment during the time of the first four caliphs (i.e., the rightly guided Caliphs). These historical examples are even footnoted, directing the reader to learn more via a historical section found in the same issue. Along with a prayer that Allah will avenge Muslims by raining fire down upon their enemies, the article concludes by summarizing the justification for what was arguably the group's most heinous act yet.

> Thus, the Islamic State not only followed the footsteps of Allah's Messenger…in his harshness towards the disbelievers, but also emulated the example of his righteous [companions]…by punishing with fire in retaliation, and for the purpose of terrorizing the murtaddīn and making examples out of them.[138]

The Islamic State has earned the most international condemnation for its brutal methods of execution and disturbingly skilled practice of distributing execution videos via social media. In addition to these practices, it has received the most condemnation over its formalized enslavement and sanctioned rape of women, especially the Yazidis of northern Iraq. As with the execution of al-Kasasbeh, the Islamic State not only acknowledges its use of slavery and rape but actively defends it in yet another four-page article, titled "The Return of Slavery Before the Hour."[139] Parts of the article read almost like a Supreme Court opinion, weighing opposing sides of an argument before handing down a decision. The unnamed author describes how, prior to the Islamic State's attack of Sinjar in August 2014, "shariʿa students" within the Islamic State were tasked, like law students interning at a firm, to research how Yazidi prisoners should be treated afterwards.

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[138] Ibid., 8.
[139] "The Return of Slavery Before the Hour," *Dabiq* no. 4, 14-17.

As previously noted, Islamic law historically has different rules for different groups of people. For instance, while only Muslims enjoyed full legal status, Christians and Jews living in an Islamic state were historically free to practice their own religions and could pay a tax in exchange for protection. These groups (known as Ahl al-Kitab, for "People of the Book," or Scriptuaries) enjoyed a higher status among non-Muslims due to their shared belief in the same God and their status as having scripture revealed to them.[140] Muslims guilty of apostasy (or *murtadd*, the rejection of Islam) faced capital punishment. Another category included polytheists, atheists, and idolaters, known as *mushrikin*. *Mushrikin* were guilty of *shirk* (literally "association"), meaning they associated other things with God.[141]

According to *Dabiq*, the Islamic State was unsure whether to treat the Yazidis of Sinjar as *mushrikin* (in which case the women and children could be distributed as slaves) or as apostates (in which case they could not be enslaved, and the women could either repent or be executed). The shariʿa students supposedly examined the Yazidi faith and culture and determined them to be *mushrikin* rather than lapsed Muslims. As such, *Dabiq* recounts how the Islamic State sold the women and children as slaves in accordance with Islamic law. As with the article justifying al-Kasasbeh's execution by burning, the slavery article cites multiple sources in scripture and historical examples to justify the enslavement of Yazidi women and children as a righteous act in accordance with Islam rather than internationally condemned genocide.

In addition to defending its own actions, the Islamic State uses *Dabiq* to portray its enemies as hypocritical, irrational, malevolent actors. The word hypocrisy (or some variant thereof) appears 250 times in *Dabiq*'s current thirteen issues, which includes one issue that addresses hypocrisy as its feature story. Most references to hypocrisy involve accusations of apostasy, such as references to Shia, Muslim governments, or the Sunni Awakening. Accusations of hypocrisy directed at the United States are typically in reference to airstrikes, which *Dabiq* mentions in all but two issues. The earliest example of this was in the third issue, in which *Dabiq* blames James Foley's execution on President Obama's refusal to stop airstrikes.[142] In the same article, in addition to others, *Dabiq* accuses the United States of pursuing an irrational foreign policy in the Middle East that goes against its own interests by indirectly empowering traditional American enemies such as

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[140] Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955): 176.

[141] Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001): 332.

[142] "Foley's Blood is on Obama's Hands," *Dabiq* no. 3, 38.

Russia and Iran. The relationship between the United States and Israel is also invoked multiple times as an example of the United States pursuing policy in contrast to its interests, even accusing the United States of ignoring earthquakes in California and protests in Missouri to intervene in the Middle East.[143]

Another notable example of the righteousness theme seeks to fill yet another potential narrative gap created by the contradictory narratives of those who leave the Islamic State and live to tell about it. On September 2, 2015, three-year-old Aylan Kurdi drowned in the Mediterranean Sea as his family attempted to flee Syria. A photograph of the boy's body washed up on the Turkish shore quickly became a symbol of the flood of refugees escaping the Syrian civil war and Islamic State.[144] Only nine days after the boy drowned, *Dabiq* used the same photograph to shame Muslims fleeing the Middle East for Europe. The article argues that Muslims are obligated to emigrate to the caliphate, and that abandoning the caliphate is a grave sin that risks the lives of families and children:

Sadly, some Syrians and Libyans are willing to risk the lives and souls of those whom they are responsible to raise upon the Sharī'ah – their children – sacrificing many of them during the dangerous trip to the lands of the war-waging crusaders ruled by laws of atheism and indecency.[145]

Engagement

> The *Dabiq* team would like to hear back from its readers, and for this reason, we are providing email addresses to submit your opinions, suggestions, and questions.
>
> —*Dabiq* issue 3

> Soldiers and leaders balance their engagement efforts between the inclination to achieve the desired effect and the requirement to actively listen and understand another's point of view.
>
> —Field Manual 3-13 *Inform and Influence Activities*

The fifth and final narrative theme conveyed by *Dabiq* is that the Islamic State is a well-informed organization actively engaged with the rest of the world. This is a distinct contrast from al-Qaʿida and reflects the generation gap that divides the

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[143] Ibid., 38.

[144] Holly Williams, "The little Syrian boy who's become the face of Europe's migrant crisis," *CBS News*, September 3, 2015, accessed April 6, 2016, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-little-syrian-boy-whos-become-the-face-of-europes-migrant-crisis/.

[145] "The Danger of Abandoning Darul-Islam," *Dabiq* no. 11, 22-23.

two organizations. To a Western audience, al-Qaʿida conjures the iconic image of Osama bin Laden, with his long beard and white turban, sitting in the remote mountain hideaways of Afghanistan with an AK-47 by his side. The Western strategic narrative of al-Qaʿida was of an organization hiding in the shadows, something foreign and far away. The Islamic State is none of those things. It is close, overt, audacious. It is on the 24-hour news cycle, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and a host of other digital platforms outside the mainstream. Al-Qaʿida may have embodied the threat of the Global War on Terror, but the Islamic State is the millennial threat. It conveys a strategic narrative of intimacy. It is not far away but living in your smartphone, listening, paying attention.

The first way in which the Islamic State conveys engagement is through its sheer glossiness and digital savvy. The actions of the Islamic State are violent, brutal, and horrifyingly intimate, but they are not unique. History provides several examples of mankind's ability to inflict unspeakable cruelty on other human beings, many within the past century alone. One need only study the Holocaust, the Rape of Nanking, Japan's infamous Unit 731, or the Rwandan genocide. What distinguishes the Islamic State among brutal movements is the way in which it harnesses modern technology and social media to project visual evidence of its brutality globally.

The very existence of *Dabiq* as an online magazine is part of the theme of engagement. It is professionally made, engrossing, and aesthetically pleasing in its formatting and layout. Even more importantly, it is widely accessible to a global audience both in terms of its online availability and its publication in multiple languages. *Dabiq* is not the first English-language Salafi-jihadist online magazine. That distinction goes to al-Qaʿida in the Arabian Peninsula's *Inspire* magazine, which premiered in 2010. *Dabiq*, however, is generally considered the higher quality product. One RAND analyst made the analogy that the Islamic State is like Google to al-Qaʿida's AOL.[146] *Inspire* tends to read more like a tactical guide, with infamous articles from its recurring OSJ (Open Source Jihad) section teaching readers how to build bombs in their mothers' kitchens or use their cars to attack pedestrians. Though *Dabiq* has encouraged "lone wolf" attacks by those unable to emigrate to Islamic State-controlled territory, it does not delve into tactical details. Instead, *Dabiq* focuses much more on strategic-level messaging and branding. It is the medium through which the Islamic State itself engages with the reader. This sense of engagement begins with the very first

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[146] Josh Kovensky, "ISIS's New Mag Looks Like a New York Glossy—With Pictures of Mutilated Bodies," *New Republic* (August 24, 2014), accessed March 9, 2016, https://newrepublic.com/article/119203/isiss-dabiq-vs-al-qaedas-inspire-comparing-two-extremist-magazines.

issue, in which the magazine explains the significance of the declaration of a caliphate and details the deliberate strategy that made al-Zarqawi's founding vision a reality.

As previously mentioned, social media is the primary medium through which the Islamic State engages with the rest of the world. However, in addition to conveying engagement through social media, the Islamic State conveys engagement by advertising its use of social media through *Dabiq*. *Dabiq*'s first direct reference to social media occurs on the next to last page of the second issue, titled "The Flood."[147] It is a full-page ad for the Islamic State's al-Hayat Media Center, which publishes *Dabiq*. Beneath photos of al-Hayat's major publications (*Dabiq* and its predecessor, *Islamic State Report*) is its mission statement:

> The mission of AlHayat [sic] Media Center is to convey the message of the Islamic State in different languages with the aim of unifying the Muslims under one flag. AlHayat produces visual, audio, and written material, in numerous languages, focusing on tawhid [oneness with God], hijrah [emigration], bay'ah [allegiance], and jihad [war].[148]

At the bottom of the page are eight screenshots from videos superimposed with the letters "mt" followed by "mujatweets." The videos (or "Mujatweets episodes") were distributed via Twitter using the hashtag #mujatweets and portrayed life in the Islamic State, including interviews with fighters from multiple countries, including Indonesia, Chile, and Britain. In addition to providing a means through which the Islamic State could engage its targeted recruiting audience, these episodes reinforce the preceding themes of legitimacy, statehood, and belonging.

On multiple instances, *Dabiq* has commented on current events with impressive speed, conveying a strong sense of real-time engagement with the world. In the foreword to the ninth issue, "They Plot and Allah Plots," the unnamed editors honor the gunmen who attacked the Mohammad cartoon event in Garland, Texas in May 2015, shortly before the issue was released.[149] It includes photos of both gunmen. One of the photos, of Nadir Soofi, includes a screenshot of a tweet he sent prior to the attack. In it, he tweeted allegiance (*bay'ah*) to al-Baghdadi (using the honorific "Amirul Mu'mineen," or commander of the faithful) while asking to be accepted as mujahideen. Soofi ended his tweet with #texasattack. Twitter references continue on the next page with another full-page ad by al-Hayat Media Center, this time advertising *nasheed* (chant) videos promoting jihad in four

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[147] *Dabiq* no. 2, 43.
[148] Ibid.
[149] "Foreword," *Dabiq* no. 9, 4.

different countries (Germany, Britain, France, and Australia).[150] The ad features a confusingly literal #hashtag next to the Arabic translation of #caliphate_news. In addition to the Garland, Texas attack, the aforementioned reference to three-year-old Kurdi's drowning only days after the images went viral were another instance of *Dabiq*'s ability to reference recent news. The most infamous example has been the cover of the twelfth issue, "Just Terror." Released only five days after the attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, the cover photo is of first responders on the night of the attacks. More photos from the attacks appear in the issue's Foreword section and again as part of a section providing updates on military operations.[151]

Articles such as the those devoted to the Garland, Texas and Paris attacks not only convey the theme of engagement in terms of *Dabiq*'s ability to quickly react to the news cycle, but also in terms of command and control. Part of the Western counter-narrative is that the Islamic State opportunistically takes credit for lone wolf attacks. Articles such as these present the Islamic State as proficient in the military concept of mission command, providing clear intent and empowering subordinates (i.e., lone wolves or small groups) to seize the initiative and act in accordance with the overall vision of the organization. Other articles that feature interviews with provincial leaders convey the same message, namely that the Islamic State controls an organized political and military infrastructure. This is in direct contrast to the existing paradigm of terrorist organizations as offshoots or affiliates rather than engaged subordinates.

Conclusion

> He who knows the enemy and himself will never in a hundred battles be at risk; He who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes win and sometimes lose; He who knows neither the enemy nor himself will be at risk in every battle.
>
> —Sun Tzu
> *The Art of War*

This monograph has argued that the Islamic State uses *Dabiq* magazine to convey its strategic narrative to a Western audience of potential supporters. The strategic narrative tells a story of the Islamic State that attempts to influence the opinions of its targeted audience by aggressively defending the actions of the Islamic State, directly attacking the policies of its enemies, and presenting the declared caliphate

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[150] Ibid., 5.
[151] "A Selection of Military Operations by the Islamic State," *Dabiq* no. 12, 28.

as a desirable place to live and work. The story that *Dabiq* tells is one of an ideologically pure organization fighting to correctly implement the world's universal religion, which has fallen victim to hypocrisy, ignorance, and the lure of a secular world. It tells this story using an attention-getting medium, as prescribed by Goebbels, and the narrative concept of repetition. It repeats motifs such as the Islamic State flag and key Islamic words and phrases to immerse readers in the specific language of the story. Finally, it repeats five themes to reinforce the above goals of the strategic narrative: (1) the legitimacy of the Islamic State within Islam, (2) its status as a functioning state, (3) the sense of belonging it communicates to followers regardless of origin, (4) the righteousness of its actions, and (5) its level of engagement with its citizens, enemies, and the world at large.

The Islamic State's strategic narrative, as conveyed through *Dabiq*, calls into question multiple Western perceptions of the organization. First, the characterization of the Islamic State as a terrorist organization becomes increasingly problematic, even if such a characterization represents a deliberate component of the Western counter-narrative. Second, the characterization of the Islamic State as a product of al-Qaʿida or the Syrian civil war appears oversimplified if not outright inaccurate. In reality, its evolution and relationship to other groups (specifically al-Qaʿida and the Nusra Front) are more nuanced. Likewise, the characterization of the Islamic State as a relatively new phenomenon is a third possible misperception, as *Dabiq* presents a historical argument that the vision and strategy for reestablishing the caliphate predates 9/11 and became operational with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Fourth, the characterization of the Islamic State representing a war against Christianity discounts the group's more important goal of eliminating entire populations of other Muslims, most notably the Shiʿa. Fifth, the strategic narrative suggests that the Islamic State maintains greater control over, and closer relationships with, affiliated organizations outside its immediate boundaries than the West has publicly acknowledged. Similarly, a sixth misperception pinpoints the Islamic State threat as mostly in Iraq and Syria.

These narrative themes, and the assumptions they call into question, illustrate the utility of understanding the Islamic State's strategic narrative specifically and enemy narratives in principle. The idea that it is essential to understand one's enemy is as old as Sun Tzu and as modern as current US military doctrine, such as the US Army's University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies, in which officers learn to play devil's advocate (or "red team") during the military planning process. In order to develop effective theories of action (i.e., national policy or military strategy) to respond to a threat, one must first develop theories of the

underlying phenomenon. Political scientist James Rosenau outlined principles for understanding world politics by thinking in terms of theory. Two of these principles are especially helpful in this instance. First, "One must be predisposed to ask about every event, every situation, or every observed phenomenon, "Of what is it an instance?"[152] Second, "One must be genuinely puzzled by international phenomena."[153]

Consuming the strategic narrative of the Islamic State through the lens of these principles mitigates the risks of falling victim to strategic hubris or under or overreading the narrative. Analyzing the Islamic State with this mindset can significantly influence policy and strategy, for instance, by cautioning against grouping all Salafi-jihadist organizations into one category or overreliance on counter-terrorism strategies that have worked in the past. Understanding the phenomenon of the Islamic State informs whether a counter-narrative is necessary, and if so, what the source and content of that narrative should be. For instance, the current administration has already changed its counter-narrative strategy in recognition of the importance of source legitimacy. Rather than directly countering the Islamic State narrative through media such as State Department-sponsored Twitter feeds, the new Center for Global Engagement will seek to empower the strategic messaging of more legitimate actors using theme-based campaigns focused on issues such as poor governance, treatment of women, or defectors.[154]

Likewise, recognizing the underlying phenomenon could also inform non-narrative strategies involving information and intelligence sharing. The "caliphate" currently spans five US combatant commands, but the current strategy to fight it is largely contained within a single temporary subordinate organization within only one of those commands. Imagine if the various theaters of the Second World War had been fought as separate entities with no over-arching strategy or command and control. Instead of viewing the war against the Islamic State as a carry-over of the Global War on Terrorism, one might look to the strategy of World War II, fought against an international but non-contiguous threat. Establishing a single entity to facilitate global situational awareness and information sharing across combatant commands, government agencies, and coalition partners could degrade the Islamic State's ability to fight a whack-a-mole-style war in which they lose territory in the Middle East only to pop up in Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan, etc.

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[152] James N. Rosenau, "Thinking Theory Thoroughly," *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy*, ed. James N. Rosenau (London: Frances Pinter, 1980): 33.

[153] Ibid., 36.

[154] Department of State Press Release, "A New Center for Global Engagement," January 8, 2016, accessed March 18, 2016, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/01/251066.htm.

Appendix A

Dabiq Magazine Index of Issues and Articles

The table below lists each issue by number (with page count), title, Hijri date, Gregorian release date, and its articles.

Issue 1 (50) — The Return of Khilafah — Ramadan 1435 — 5-Jul-14
- Dabiq Magazine [Foreword]
- Khilafah Declared
- Islamic State Reports
- Imamah is from the Millah of Ibrahim
- The Islamic State In the Words of the Enemy
- Feature: From Hijrah to Khilafah
- Islamic State News

Issue 2 (44) — The Flood — Ramadan 1435 — 27-Jul-14
- It's Either the Islamic State or the Flood [Foreword]
- Islamic State Reports
- Feature: the Flood of the Mubahalah
- The Islamic State In the Words of the Enemy
- Islamic State News

Issue 3 (42) — A Call to Hijrah — Shawwal 1435 — 10-Sep-14
- The Islamic State Before al-Malhamah [Foreword]
- Islamic State Reports
- Hijrah from Hypocrisy to Sincerity
- The Islamic State in the Words of the Enemy
- Foley's Blood is on Obama's Hands
- The Complete Message from Foley

Issue 4 (56) — The Failed Crusade — Dhul-Hijjah 1435 — 11-Oct-14
- Indeed Your Lord is Ever Watchful [Foreword]
- My Provision was Placed for Me in the Shade of my Spear
- The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour
- Islamic State Reports
- Reflections on the Final Crusade
- In the Words of the Enemy
- A Message from Sotloff
- Hard Talk: the Real Story Behind my Videos

Issue 5 (40) — Remaining and Expanding — Muharram 1436 — 21-Nov-14
- Yahya: Lessons From a Shahid [Foreword]
- Hikmah
- Remaining and Expanding
- In the Words of the Enemy
- If Cantlie were the US President Today

Issue 6 (63) — Al Qa'idah of Waziristan — Rabi' al-Awwal 1436 — 29-Dec-14
- Advice for the Soldiers of the Islamic State [Foreword]
- The Qa'idah of Adh-Dhawahiri, Al-Harari, and An-Nadhari, and the Absent Yemeni Wisdom
- Islamic State Reports
- Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan - A Testimony From Within
- In the Words of the Enemy
- Meltdown – John Cantlie

Issue 7 (83) — From Hypocrisy to Apostasy — Rabi' Al-Akhir 1436 — 12-Feb-15
- The Burning of the Murtadd Pilot [Foreword]
- Advice for the Leaders of the Islamic State
- From the Pages of History
- Islam is the Religion of the Sword Not Pacifism
- Responding To the Doubts
- Among the Believers are Men
- To Our Sisters
- In the Words of the Enemy
- The Extinction of the Grayzone
- The Good Example of Abu Basir al-Ifriqi
- Interview with Abu Umar Al-Baljiki
- The Anger Factory - John Cantlie

Issue 8 (68) — Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa — Jumada al-Akhirah 1436 — 30-Mar-15
- The Allies of Al-Qa'idah in Sham [Foreword]
- From the Pages of History
- Islamic State Reports
- Hikmah
- Among the Believers are Men
- To our Sisters
- Irja the Most Dangerous Bid'ah
- In the Words of the Enemy
- Interview with Abu Muqatil At-Tunisi
- Paradigm Shift - John Cantlie

Issue 9 (79) — They Plot and Allah Plots — Sha'ban 1436 — 21-May-15
- The Allies of Al-Qa'idah in Sham: Part II [Foreword]
- The Virtues of Ribat for the Cause of Allah
- Conspiracy theory Shirk
- From the Pages of History
- Islamic State Reports
- Hikmah
- Among the Believers are Men
- From our Sisters
- And Allah is the Best of Plotters
- In the Words of the Enemy
- Interview with the Amir of the Yarmuk Camp Region
- The Perfect Storm - John Cantlie

Issue 10 (79) — The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men — Ramadan 1436 — 13-Jul-15
- The Allies of Al-Qa'idah in Sham: Part III [Foreword]
- Tawhid and our Duty to our Parents
- A Fatwa for Khurasan
- From the Pages of History
- American Kurdistan
- the Qawqazi Caravan Gains Pace
- Hikmah
- Among the Believers are Men
- From our Sisters
- The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men
- In the Words of the Enemy
- Interview with Abu Samir al-Urduni

Issue 11 (66) — From the Battle of al-Ahzab to the War of Coalitions — Dhul Qidah 1436 — 9-Sep-15
- The Allies of Al-Qa'idah in Sham: Part 4 [Foreword]
- The Evil of Division and Taqlid
- The Mahdi of the Rafidah: the Dajjal
- Wala and Bara Versus American Racism
- the Danger of Abandoning Darul-Islam
- From the Pages of History
- Islamic State Reports
- Hikmah
- Among the Believers are Men
- To our Sisters: A Jihad Without Fighting
- From the Battle of al-Ahzab to the War of Coalitions
- In the Words of the Enemy
- Interview with Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani

Issue 12 (66) — Just Terror — Safar 1437 — 18-Nov-15
- Advice to the Mujahidin: Listen and Obey [Foreword]
- The Allies of Al-Qa'idah In Sham: the End
- From the Pages of History: Baqiyah
- To our Sisters: Two, Three, or Four
- Hikmah
- Military Operations By the Islamic State
- And as for the Blessing of your Lord, then Mention It
- O You who have Believed, Protect Yourselves and your Families from Fire
- The Revival of Jihad In Bengal
- You Think they are Together, but their Hearts are Divided
- Paradigm Shirt Part II - By John Cantlie
- In the Words of the Enemy
- Among the Believers are Men
- Interview with Abu Muharib As-Sumali Special

Issue 13 (56) — The Rafidah — Rabi' al-Akhir 1437 — 19-Jan-16
- Kill the Imams of Kufr [Foreword]
- From the Pages of History: the Safawiyyah
- Military Reports
- Hikmah
- Among the Believers are Men
- To Our Sisters: Advice On Ihdad
- Do they Not then Reflect on the Qur'an
- The Rafidah: From Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal
- In the Words of the Enemy
- Interview with the Wali of Khurasan

Key (bottom of table):
- Issue # (# of pages)
- Issue Title
- Issue Date (Hijri Calendar)
- Release Date (Gregorian Calendar)

Appendix B

Content Analysis of *Dabiq* Magazine

The author used WordStat 7.1 to conduct a content analysis of thirteen issues of *Dabiq* to identify frequently used words. This was followed by a manual quality control review to identify inconsistencies due to lemmatization of transliterated Arabic words that contained apostrophes or single quotation marks (such as Qurʾan, al-Qaʾidah, shariʿa, etc.). Words marked with an asterisk are defined in the glossary. The third column displays the number of times each word appeared (minimum of 200) in the thirteen issues of *Dabiq* published as of this writing.

	WORD	OCCURS		WORD	OCCURS		WORD	OCCURS
1	ALLAH	2594	28	ENEMY	337	55	FORCE	237
2	STATE	1583	29	SALLAM*	336	56	GOOD	236
3	ISLAMIC	1405	30	DAY	333	57	BATTLE	232
4	MUSLIM	1070	31	TIME	333	58	SAHWAH*	230
5	PEOPLE	835	32	IRAQ	331	59	YEAR	230
6	FIGHT	645	33	MAN	329	60	LEAD	228
7	CRUSADER	591	34	APOSTATE*	328	61	CONTINUE	224
8	ISLAM	558	35	ALAYHI*	326	62	SYRIAN	223
9	JIHAD	551	36	PROPHET*	320	63	AMERICAN	222
10	WAR	504	37	SALLALLAHU*	318	64	FEAR	219
11	KHILAFAH*	490	38	KUFR*	316	65	HIJRAH*	217
12	KILL	480	39	FRONT	312	66	IMAM*	217
13	DABIQ*	469	40	GROUP	311	67	ASH	216
14	RELIGION	445	41	RAFIDAH*	298	68	SCHOLAR	216
15	MUJAHIDIN*	437	42	CLAIM	296	69	KUFFAR*	215
16	LAND	420	43	REGION	282	70	MUHAMMAD*	215
17	SHAM*	403	44	ARMY	280	71	UMAR*	212
18	ALLY	396	45	MATTER	270	72	WORLD	212
19	REPORT	396	46	WORD	261	73	OPERATION	211
20	SOLDIER	382	47	SHARIAH*	252	74	CITY	209
21	BROTHER	379	48	LEAVE	250	75	HEART	207
22	LEADER	372	49	ORDER	245	76	SUNNAH*	206
23	CALL	372	50	STATEMENT	244	77	HAND	204
24	FACTION	364	51	REGIME	241	78	REMAIN	202
25	SUPPORT	362	52	GREAT	240	79	LAW	202
26	MESSENGER	358	53	INCLUDE	240	80	NUMBER	202
27	MAKE	346	54	WILAYAT*	239	81	JAWLANI*	202

Appendix C

Chronology of Significant Events Leading to Declaration of the Caliphate

1966	Abu Musab al-Zarqawi born in Zarqa, Jordan as Ahmad Fadil Nazzal al-Khalayila (Bunzel 2015, 13).
1971	Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi born in Samarra, Iraq as Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim al-Badri (McCants, *The Believer*, 2015, loc 17).
1984	Al-Zarqawi drops out of school after his father dies and ends up in and out of prison. His mother enrolls him in religious courses at a mosque in Amman, Jordan. There, al-Zarqawi first discovers Salafism (Weiss and Hassan 2015, 2).
1989	Al-Zarqawi travels to Afghanistan for the first time to fight the Soviets, only to arrive too late. He remains in Afghanistan for several years though, establishing connections and attending training camps (Ibid., 5).
Mar 1994	After attempting terrorist attacks in his native Jordan, al-Zarqawi is convicted for illegal weapons possession and belonging to a proscribed terrorist organization. He is sentenced to fifteen years in a maximum security prison, where he starts a jihadist missionary group with his long-time mentor, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (Ibid., 8).
1996	Al-Baghdadi graduates from the University of Baghdad. He enrolls in Saddam University for Islamic Studies and pursue a master's degree in Qurʾanic recitation (McCants, *The Believer*, 2015, loc 71).
Mar 1999	Newly crowned King Abdullah II of Jordan grants mass amnesty to thousands of prisoners, releasing al-Zarqawi ten years early (Ibid., 11).
Dec 1999	Al-Zarqawi returns to Afghanistan and meets al-Qaʿida leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri for the first time in Kandahar. Bin Laden is suspicious of al-Zarqawi and, offended by his arrogance and rigid views, does not invite him to join al-Qaʿida. Al-Zarqawi, likewise, does not offer his allegiance. Eventually, bin Laden loans al-Zarqawi money to establish a training camp for foreign fighters near

the Iranian border in Herat (Weaver 2006, 95).

1999	Al-Baghdadi earns his master's degree from Saddam University for Islamic Studies and enrolls in its doctoral program in Qur'anic studies. During this time he joins the Muslim Brotherhood and begins gravitating towards Salafi-jihadism (McCants, *The Believer*, 2015, loc 76).
2000	Bin Laden, impressed by al-Zarqawi's efforts in Herat, repeatedly asks him to return to Kandahar and pledge his allegiance. Al-Zarqawi repeatedly refuses (Weiss and Hassan 2015, 14).
Sep 11, 2001	Al-Qaʻida hijacks four commercial US passenger jets and attacks the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon outside Washington, DC. The fourth plane crashes in Shanksville, Pennsylvania after passengers revolt.
Oct 7, 2001	US invasion of Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) begins.
Dec 2001	US bombing of Tora Bora prompts hundreds of al-Qaʻida fighters to flee Afghanistan. Many go to Iraq (Atwan 2015, 40); Al-Zarqawi flees to Iran and spends the next year traveling throughout Iran, northern Iraq, and Syria (Weiss and Hassan 2015, 16).
2002	Al-Zarqawi forms the insurgent group Tawhid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad) in northern Iraq (Bunzel 2015, 14).
Feb 5, 2003	US Secretary of State Colin Powell addresses the UN Security Council, citing al-Zarqawi's presence in Iraq as proof that Saddam Hussein has ties to al-Qaʻida.
Mar 20, 2003	US invasion of Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom) begins.
Aug 7, 2003	Tawhid wal-Jihad detonates the first post-invasion vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) outside the Jordanian embassy, killing seventeen (Lister 2014, 7).
Aug 19, 2003	A Tawhid wal-Jihad suicide bomber explodes a VBIED outside the UN Assistance Mission in Baghdad, killing twenty-two, including the UN Special Representative (Ibid.).
Aug 29, 2003	Tawhid wal-Jihad explodes a VBIED into the Shiʻi Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, killing ninety-five people (Ibid.).

Feb 2004	Al-Zarqawi offers to pledge allegiance to al-Qaʿida if it will support his strategy of provoking Iraqi Shiʿa (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 11).
	Al-Baghdadi is arrested in Fallujah while visiting a friend on the US wanted list. He is transferred to Camp Bucca prison for ten months as a "civilian detainee" (versus jihadist). He spends his time teaching classes, preaching sermons, and becoming a quiet leader, mediating between fellow prisoners and guards. The prison is known by inmates as "The Academy" for, ironically, allowing large groups of jihadists and former Baathists to safely gather. Many will go on to become leaders within the Islamic State (Ibid., 75).
Mar 2004	Al-Zarqawi instigates Ashura attacks against Shiʿa pilgrims in Baghdad and Karbala, killing 185 (Atwan 2015, 49).
2004	The Management of Savagery is released. It explains how to seize territory and establish a temporary state that can later become a caliphate. It goes on to become the unofficial capstone doctrine of Salafi-jihadists (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 82).
May 7, 2004	Al-Zarqawi beheads American Nicholas Berg. Days later, a video of the execution appears online (Atwan 2015, 49).
Oct 2004	Bin Laden accepts al-Zarqawi's pledge; Tawhid al Jihad becomes al-Qaʿida in Iraq (Bunzel 2015, 15).
Dec 8, 2004	Al-Baghdadi is released from Camp Bucca (McCants, *The Believer*, 2015, loc 123).
Jul 9, 2005	Al-Zawahiri writes al-Zarqawi to establish an Islamic emirate after US forces have been expelled and then consolidate as much territory in Iraq as possible until a caliphate can be declared. He discourages al-Zarqawi's tactics of killing other Muslims and releasing graphic media, arguing he will alienate many Muslims who will not understand the theological justifications for his actions.[155]
Nov 2005	Al-Zawahiri admonishes al-Zarqawi for suicide bombings in Amman, Jordan, killing sixty, including mostly Jordanian and

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[155] Zawahiri, 3-10.

Palestinian wedding guests (Atwan 2015, 50).

Dec 12, 2005 — Al-Qaʻida leader Atiya Abd al-Rahman writes to al-Zarqawi, warning that his military tactics risk undermining their strategic objectives, paraphrasing Clausewitz that "military action is a servant to policy."[156]

Jan 2006 — Al-Zarqawi forms the Mujahidin Shura Council as an umbrella organization, uniting AQI with other local jihadist organizations, including the militia to which al-Baghdadi belongs (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 76).

Apr 2006 — Al-Zarqawi hails the Mujahidin Shura Council as "the starting point for establishing an Islamic State" (Bunzel 2015, 16). He proclaims that an Islamic state will be declared in three months (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 15).

Jun 7, 2006 — Al-Zarqawi dies in a US airstrike in Iraq. Abu Hamza al-Muhajir (Abu Ayyub al-Masri) succeeds him as leader of AQI (Atwan 2015, 63).

Oct 2006 — Tribal leaders in Iraq's Anbar Province meet with Iraqi President Maliki and pledge to fight al-Qaʻida insurgents. This begins the Anbar (or Sunni) Awakening (Hamilton 2008, 3).

Oct 15, 2006 — Against the wishes of al-Qaʻida leadership, the Mujahidin Shura Council announces the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which includes AQI as a subordinate organization, and calls upon Muslims to pledge allegiance to Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (an unknown among jihadists) as commander of the faithful (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 15).

Nov 10, 2006 — Al-Masri pledges allegiance to ISI leader Abu Omar al-Baghdadi (Lister 2014, 8).

Jan 2007 — The Islamic State flag is designed and appears for the first time (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 20).

Jan 10, 2007 — US President George W. Bush announces his decision to surge over twenty thousand additional troops to Iraq.

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[156] Rahman, 3.

Mar 13, 2007	Al-Baghdadi defends his dissertation in Baghdad and earns his PhD in Qurʾanic studies. He is appointed supervisor of the Shariʿa Committee and thus ISI's religious enforcer (McCants, *The Believer*, 2015, loc 148).
Aug 2007	Foreshadowing the Islamic State's attack on Sinjar in August, 2014, ISI attacks Yazidi communities in Kurdistan, killing 796 (Atwan 2015, 52).
Apr 8-9, 2008	Gen. David Petraeus testifies before the US Congress. He credits the surge of US and Iraqi troops, increased counterinsurgency operations, and the Sunni Awakening with dealing serious blows to AQI.
Dec 2009	Iraqi jihadists circulate a think tank-like report, titled "Strategic Plan for Reinforcing the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq." Recommendations include copying the successful strategies of the US "Surge" in co-opting Sunni tribes and embracing a symbolic political figure to instill confidence via good governance (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 79).
Apr 2010	ISI leader Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and AQI leader Masri are killed in a joint US/Iraqi raid (Ibid., 45).
May 2010	Unbeknownst to al-Qaʿida leadership, the ISI Shura Council elects al-Baghdadi the new leader of ISI by a 9-2 vote. Al-Baghdadi assumes his current name, having been known as Ibrahim thus far (Ibid., 77-78).
Jan 2011	Protests begin in Syria, eventually leading to Syrian civil war.
May 2, 2011	Osama bin Laden is killed in a US raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan.
May 31, 2011	Syrian president Bashar al-Assad declares a general amnesty, releasing many Salafi-jihadists from prison under the guise of releasing political prisoners (Weiss and Hassan 2015, 144).
Aug 2011	Al-Zawahiri tells al-Baghdadi to form a group to fight in Syria. Al-Baghdadi sends Syrian Abu Muhammad al-Jolani (Ibid., 85).

Dec 2011	The last remaining US troops in Iraq withdraw (Atwan 2015, 55).
Jan 23, 2012	Al-Jolani's group in Syria declares itself the Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 85).
Jul 21, 2012	Al-Baghdadi announces ISI's "Breaking the Walls" campaign. Its objectives are 1) to free prisoners and 2) regain the territory held in 2006 (Lewis 2013, 10).
Sep 2012	ISI attacks Tasfirat Prison in Taji, Iraq, freeing forty-seven ISI prisoners on death row (Lister 2014, 11).
Mar 4, 2013	Raqqa, Syria falls to Syrian opposition groups, including Nusra Front. (Lewis 2013, 18)
Mar 2013	Al-Baghdadi travels to Syria to discuss disputes between ISI and the Nusra Front with al-Jolani (Ibid.).
Apr 8, 2013	Al-Baghdadi unilaterally declares the Nusra Front to be a branch of ISI and that together they will become the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) (Ibid.).
Apr 9, 2013	Al-Jolani rebuts al-Baghdadi, declaring the Nusra Front independent from ISI and pledging allegiance to al-Qaʻida (Ibid.).
Jun 9, 2013	Al-Zawahiri rebuts al-Baghdadi's declaration, issuing guidance that the Nusra Front and ISI are separate organizations to remain in Syria and Iraq, respectively (Lewis 2013, 19).
Jun 14, 2013	Al-Baghdadi refuses al-Zawahiri, stating, "I have to choose between the rule of God and the rule of al-Zawahiri, and I choose the rule of God" (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 91).
Jul 29, 2013	ISIS launches a twelve month-long campaign "Operation Soldier's Harvest" to undermine security forces through assassinations, bombing homes of commanders and soldiers, and drive-by attacks at checkpoints (Lister 2014, 12).
Jul 21, 2013	ISIS assaults Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq, enabling over 500 prisoners to escape. This ends the "Breaking the Walls" campaign exactly one year after it began (Lewis 2013, 7).

Feb 2014   Al-Qaʿida publicly renounces ties to ISIS. ISIS responds that it has not answered to al-Qaʿida since the declaration of ISI in 2006. For the first time, the two groups publicly air their longstanding disagreements as to the nature of their relationship (McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse*, 2015, 93).

Jun 2014   ISIS captures Mosul, Iraq (Ibid., 121).

Jun 29, 2014   ISIS renames itself the Islamic State and declares itself a caliphate with al-Baghdadi as caliph (Adnani 2014, 5).

Appendix D

Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda

The following principles were presented by Yale Professor of Psychology Leonard Doob in 1950. Doob, who also served as Policy Coordinator of the Overseas Branch of the US Office of War Information, based his findings on his extensive analysis of Goebbels' diaries.[157]

1. Propagandists must have access to intelligence concerning events and public opinion.

2. Propaganda must be planned and executed by only one authority.

    a. It must issue all the propaganda directives.

    b. It must explain propaganda directives to important officials and maintain their morale.

    c. It must oversee other agencies' activities which have propaganda consequences.

3. The propaganda consequences of an action must be considered in planning that action.

4. Propaganda must affect the enemy's policy and action.

    a. By suppressing propagandistically desirable material which can provide the enemy with useful intelligence.

    b. By openly disseminating propaganda whose content or tone causes the enemy to draw the desired conclusions.

    c. By goading the enemy into revealing vital information about himself.

    d. By making no reference to a desired enemy activity when any reference would discredit that activity.

5. Declassified, operational information must be available to implement a propaganda campaign.

6. To be perceived, propaganda must evoke the interest of an audience and must be transmitted through an attention-getting communications medium.

7. Credibility alone must determine whether propaganda output should be true or false.

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[157] Leonard W. Doob, "Goebbels' Principles of Propaganda," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1950): 419-442.

8. The purpose, content, and effectiveness of enemy propaganda; the strength and effects of an exposé; and the nature of current propaganda campaigns determine whether enemy propaganda should be ignored or refuted.

9. Credibility, intelligence, and the possible effects of communicating determine whether propaganda materials should be censored.

10. Material from enemy propaganda may be utilized in operations when it helps diminish that enemy's prestige or lends support to the propagandist's own objective.

11. Black rather than white propaganda must be employed when the latter is less credible or produces undesirable effects.

12. Propaganda may be facilitated by leaders with prestige.

13. Propaganda must be carefully timed.

    a. The communication must reach the audience ahead of competing propaganda.

    b. A propaganda campaign must begin at the optimum moment.

    c. A propaganda theme must be repeated, but not beyond some point of diminishing effectiveness.

14. Propaganda must label events and people with distinctive phrases or slogans.

    a. They must evoke desired responses which the audience previously possesses.

    b. They must be capable of being easily learned.

    c. They must be utilized again and again, but only in appropriate situations.

    d. They must be boomerang-proof.

15. Propaganda to the home front must prevent the raising of false hopes which can be blasted by future events.

16. Propaganda to the home front must create an optimum anxiety level.

    a. Propaganda must reinforce anxiety concerning the consequences of defeat.

    b. Propaganda must diminish anxiety (other than that concerning the consequences of defeat) which is too high and which cannot be reduced by people themselves.

17. Propaganda to the home front must diminish the impact of frustration.

   a. Inevitable frustrations must be anticipated.

   b. Inevitable frustrations must be placed in perspective.

18. Propaganda must facilitate the displacement of aggression by specifying the targets for hatred.

19. Propaganda cannot immediately affect strong countertendencies; instead it must offer some form of action or diversion, or both

Glossary

When possible, words are defined by their use in *Dabiq* (connoted by quotation marks followed by the issue number in parentheses). For words not specifically defined by *Dabiq*, unless otherwise specified, the author consulted The Encyclopedia of Islam and The New Encyclopedia of Islam.

ahl al-Kitab	People of the Book or Scriptuaries, such as Christians and Jews, who share the same monotheistic faith in one God as Muslims and to whom scriptures were revealed, granting them a higher status among non-Muslims
apostasy	rejection of one's religion
apostate	one who has rejected one's religion; according to the Islamic State, this includes all Shi'i Muslims ("Rafidah") and all other Muslim governments
bay'ah	"allegiance" (Issue 1)
Dabiq	"area...in the northern countryside of Halab (Aleppo) in [Syria]" where one of the battles of Armageddon will be fought (Issue 1)
fuqaha'	experts in Islamic law
hadd	punishment in accordance with the Qur'an
hijrah	migration or emigration. In *Dabiq*, usually used in the context of emigrating to the caliphate
imam	"leader" (Issue 1)
imamah	"leadership" (Issue 1)
Jawlani	Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, founder of the Nusra Front
kafir	unbeliever, disbeliever infidel; ungrateful
khalifah	caliph

khilafah	caliphate
kuffar	see kafir
kufr	"disbelief" (Issue 1)
Muhammad	historic founder and prophet of Islam
Mujahidin	literally "one who strives in the path of God;" used by the Islamic State in reference to jihadists
murtadd	synonymous with apostate (technically the word apostate does not connote a specific religion, whereas a murtadd is specific to Islam)
qisas	retribution
Rafidah	literally "rejectors;" pejorative term for Shi'i Muslims
sahwah	"awakening;" the Islamic State's pejorative term for participants in the Sunni Awakening
sallallahu alayhi wa sallam	"peace be upon him"
Sham	Arabic term for the greater Syria area; equivalent to the term Levant
shari'a	Islamic law based upon the Qur'an and hadith
sunna	the words and actions of Muhammad, as reported in the hadith
taghut	"tyrant ruling by manmade law" (Issue 1); idolatry; deviating from worship of Allah
takfir	declaration that another Muslim in an unbeliever/Kafir
tawaghit	plural of taghut
tawhid	unity/oneness of God
Umar	popular name, referring to multiple different people in *Dabiq*
umma	global community of Muslims

wala and bara

"loyalty and disavowal for the cause of Allah" (Issue 11)

wilayat

province; the Islamic State organizes itself geopolitically into several wilāyah. The Syrian city of Raqqa, for instance, is located in Wilayat al-Raqqa

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