Combating Terrorism Center at West Point

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A VIEW FROM THE CT FOXHOLE

General (Ret) John P. Abizaid

A conversation about the future of U.S. involvement in the Middle East

FEATURE ARTICLE

Radicalization in Pakistan's Universities

Huma Yusuf

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FROM THE EDITOR

In our interview, General (Ret) John Abizaid, the longest-serving commander of United States Central Command, warns the United States is losing ground in the fight against Islamist terror and needs, in concert with its international allies but still in a leadership role, to develop a comprehensive strategy to defeat the threat militarily and ideologically by drawing on all aspects of U.S. power. Abizaid argues that stopping the spread of Islamist extremism in "what used to be" Syria and Iraq, and the sectarianism on which it feeds, should be the primary goal of U.S. policy in the region. Our other cover story by Huma Yusuf documents the growing concern about radicalization on university campuses in Pakistan. While Pakistan has made progress in the fight against militants in the border region with Afghanistan, she warns that a growing cohort of educated extremists may have international security implications.

Drawing on never-before analyzed primary sources, Kevin Bell looks back at the Islamic Emirate of Kunar, a short-lived Salafi proto-state founded in eastern Afghanistan in 1990 that he argues provides some pointers on the degree to which the region may be fertile ground in the future for the Islamic State in Khorasan. Mohammed Hafez outlines how tightening security environments are encouraging jihadis to turn increasingly to the family unit for recruits. Barak Barfi examines the military doctrine of the Islamic State and explains how despite the recruitment of a significant number of former officers in Saddam Hussein's army, there are significant differences with the Ba'athist approach. Making use of information revealed in recent terrorism trials, Guido Steinberg sheds new light on Junud al-Sham, a Chechen jihadi group fighting in Syria, and the more than 30 German extremists that trained and fought with it, some of whom may now pose a threat to their home country. Finally, we feature a landmark study by Mia Bloom, John Horgan, and Charlie Winter, which shows that the Islamic State's use of children for military purposes is increasing.

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Cover: A U.S. Army soldier trains an Iraqi recruit at a military base in Taji, Iraq, on April 12, 2015. GETTY

A View from the CT Foxhole: An Interview with General (Ret) John P. Abizaid, former Commander, U.S. Central Command

By Zach Schenk

General (Ret) John P. Abizaid retired after 34 years of service to the Nation as the longest-serving commander of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM). His combat and operational deployments are extensive, including Grenada, Lebanon, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Haiti, and Iraq. As the commander of USCENTCOM, General (Ret) Abizaid's area of responsibility included the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and South Asia. Both a graduate of and later the 66th Commandant at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, General (Ret) Abizaid was also an Olmstead Scholar at the University of Jordan in Amman, and he holds a master's degree in Middle Eastern studies from Harvard University. From 2008-2013, General (Ret) Abizaid served as the Distinguished Chair of the Combating Terrorism Center, and today he currently serves as its Distinguished Chair Emeritus.

CTC: Given your extensive knowledge of the region and your long tenure leading U.S. Central Command during the 2000s, what is your take on where the United States stands today in "the long war?"

Abizaid: Unfortunately, we have lost ground over time. The scope of the ideological movement, the geographic dispersion of Islamic extremism, the number of terror attacks, the number of people swearing allegiance, and the ground they hold have all increased. Groups like the Islamic State have now taken on state-like forms and features that are unlike anything we've seen in the past. So on balance we are in a worse position strategically with regard to the growth of international terrorism, Islamic terrorism in particular, than we were after September 2001.

There are, however, some positive takeaways. We've protected the homeland for the most part and we've succeeded in preventing another major attack. It is, of course, impossible to protect against every kind of attack. As long as the terrorists have the ability to operate from sanctuary and safe havens abroad, they will continue to think about attacking the United States. It is important to understand that this is a global problem and not just an American problem.

Zach Schenk is a graduate of the Raphael Recanti International School at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel, and a current intern at the Combating Terrorism Center. *He wishes to thank Lieutenant Colonel Bryan Price for his support in conducting this interview.*

CTC: What are some of your major concerns about the rise of Islamic extremism, and how do you think the United States can mitigate them?

Abizaid: I am very concerned about the growth of Sunni Islamic extremism in general. In particular, I'm concerned about the growth of the Islamic State, the continued existence of al-Qa`ida, and the growth of Islamic State offshoots and al-Qa`ida offshoots in various other places. We really need to pay attention to it. Somehow we need to come together in a way that just doesn't throw military activity against the problem. We need a strategy that synchronizes international, diplomatic, informational, economic, military, and intelligence activity so that we have better results.

CTC: There is no shortage of opinion on the best ways and means to fight this war, but very little discussion regarding the ends. In your opinion, what should be our strategic end state in this conflict?

Abizaid: It is hard to say what the strategic end state would be because Sunni Islamic extremism is an idea, and it is hard to destroy an idea. It's an ideology. Most agree that it is a perverted form of religious thinking, but many of its adherents believe it is the only way to move the religion forward in the 21st century. That's what makes it so tough to deal with. The center of gravity therefore is how people think and what they accept as being good for them, their families, and their future. While it is very hard for us in the West to see that this is a future that people would want to embrace, there are way too many people embracing it today.

An ideal end state would be where terrorist attacks are decreased, where territory that is held by Islamic extremists is denied, that sanctuary is threatened, and most important of all, where their ideology is discredited. But we also need to understand that it will be very difficult for the United States to discredit someone else's religious ideology. It takes the moderate people in the region to discourage this ideology from moving forward. The first line of resistance has got to be the Sunni political, religious, and military leaders in the region and throughout the Islamic world. There have been many Sunnis who have spoken out against extremism, many that have acted out against it, but I am extremely concerned that the movement continues to grow.

CTC: Your grandparents were from Lebanon. You studied as an Olmstead scholar in Jordan, and you served for almost four years as the commander of U.S. Central Command with a majority of that time spent downrange in Iraq. What role does sectarianism currently play in the Middle East and how will it impact the region's future?

Abizaid: Well, sectarianism is the curse of the Middle East, whether it's Sunni-Shi`a, Arab-Kurd, Turk-Kurd, or Alawites versus Sunnis. These various sectarian issues have dominated politics in the Levant and Mesopotamia in a way that creates fertile ground for

extremism to grow. On one side, you have countries like Iran that espouse a form of Shi`a Islamic extremism, conducting operations and supporting terrorism around the world. On the other side you have Sunni extremists. This creates a dynamic for a broader war and more problems. When Muslims think that their governments cannot provide security and economic opportunities for them, they go inward to their tribes and to their sects. Sectarian problems are accelerating at an alarming rate.

CTC: The post-World War I borders in the Middle East are under obvious stress. Are they worth fighting to protect, or should we start seriously considering how best to reshape them moving forward?

Abizaid: I think we're making a mistake by not acknowledging that the post-World War I, European-imposed borders of the Middle East are falling apart. They're falling apart because of religious extremism and sectarian conflict because these countries lack institutional and bureaucratic structures that can provide security for their people.

I do not think you solve the problem by trying to reinforce the status quo that existed before September 11, 2001. And the status quo in my mind is not going to be restored easily. I think the international community and the leaders in the region have got to decide how best to reshape the Middle East and redraw the boundaries to establish stability and a more peaceful structure. Most people will clutch their heart, and do clutch their heart, every time I say something like that. But the truth of the matter is that we did it in Yugoslavia. It was the only way to move forward out of a spiral of violence that engulfed the Balkans for so long. Such is the case now in the Middle East. Nations that are trying to put the status quo back on the map are only going to prolong the conflict and stoke greater violence.

CTC: During your keynote speech at last year's Senior Conference at the U.S. Military Academy, you emphasized the need to learn the lessons of history. Specifically, you mentioned that the Wehrmacht in World War II was often tactically superior to the Allies but strategically bankrupt in the end. Do you see parallels today in the current fight against the global jihadi movement?

General (ret) John P. Abizaid delivers a keynote address during the United States Military Academy's 51st annual Senior Conference in 2015.

"How have our enemies managed to stand up to the greatest power on Earth? The answer is that our enemies have endured because we don't have our strategy right."

Abizaid: In my opinion, the lessons of history are fairly clear when it comes to being tactically superior yet strategically inferior. We [the United States] are tactically superior. When I look around the battlefield, it is hard to see a single case of American military power being defeated at the tactical level. But that does not seem to stem the flow of the ideological movement of our enemies. They continue to grow and they continue to be dangerous, and we should ask ourselves the hardest question of all—how have our enemies managed to stand up to the greatest power on Earth? And the answer is that our enemies have endured because we don't have our strategy right. And when I say that we don't have our strategy right, I am not just talking about *we* as Americans. I'm talking about *we*, the international community. It is imperative that we apply a strategic framework around our approach to the defeat of this ideology that admits that it is a religious ideology. We need to isolate it, and over time, destroy it.

CTC: There has been much debate about the ways and means to go after the Islamic State. Some are in support of more direct U.S. involvement, to include American boots on the ground and a relaxation of the rules of engagement. Others insist that our regional partners, particularly our Sunni partners, must step up to lead the fight. Where do you stand?

Abizaid: I think everything needs to be on the table. Any strategy that starts from the premise that certain elements of power will not be used—whether they be military, diplomatic, or economic—will not work. We have to determine the most effective means we can employ against this enemy. We have explicitly made the point over and over again that we want minimal amounts of boots on the ground. I don't think that that is the way we should be talking. We should be saying that we will use boots on the ground as necessary in order to achieve desired effects in desired places toward a broader strategic goal. And we haven't been willing to do that.

When you set timelines for yourself that are unrealistic, when you refuse to allow the full range of your powers to be employed for practical purposes, you find yourself at a strategic dead end. All is not lost, however. We have many strategic ways out of this problem. We need to organize the international community, and to do so it will take a lot more effort than we've shown so far.

Look, I understand the concern about boots on the ground. I understand the fact that it often relates to fears of occupying territory in the Middle East. That is not what I'm talking about here. I'm talking about a raiding strategy where we destroy capability over time in a joint force, which is an integrated international air, ground, and naval effort. At the same time, we're applying all the

other elements of international and national power to limit the ability of the Islamic State to metastasize further.

CTC: It sounds like you are rather agnostic when it comes to who has to be in the lead in this fight. It sounds as though you are fine if it is either the United States or Sunni partners, as long as there is an effective strategy at work. Is that correct?
Abizaid: Actually, that's probably not where I am right now. American leadership is essential to this process. Without American leadership, we're not going to move in a direction that's going to produce effective results. That doesn't mean we only employ American assets, but it does mean there has to be American commitment to lead the effort and guarantee our partners that there will be some long lasting measures that take place. In other words, we must signal that we won't just be there and leave after a takedown of Mosul or Raqqa. It doesn't mean we have to occupy those places, but it does mean that we'll have to use a lot more combat power than we have so far to achieve some sort of military result there.

CTC: In addressing the complex and interrelated security problems in Iraq and Syria, would you recommend prioritizing Iraq over Syria or vice versa?
Abizaid: I don't think that this is a very useful way of framing the problem. We have a problem that is larger than just Iraq or Syria. It's a Sunni extremist and Sunni sectarian activity in what *used to be* Iraq and what *used to be* Syria and that has spread across the middle of the Levant and Mesopotamia. As I said earlier, I do not believe we are capable of putting this all back together again. That strategy is bound to fail.

What we have to do is come up with an international way of recognizing that Sunni equities can be stable and safe from the various factions they feel threatened by, while still providing them a viable chance for economic development. We have to create an environment similar to what happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina where Sunnis feel they aren't being persecuted in their own country. It may be necessary to have both of those countries or certain parts of those entities declared autonomous regions of some sort. I'm not smart enough to have the exact answer myself. But I do think the international community has to think outside the box because the box is collapsing.

CTC: At Senior Conference you discussed the need to incorporate all elements of national power to win this fight. What element(s) of national power have we underutilized in "the long war."
Abizaid: Economic power, diplomatic power, and informational and intelligence assets. Our overreliance on military power has created a dynamic that makes everything look like a nail. As a result, we just keep smashing everything with a hammer. This has led to a "whack-a-mole" sort of solution to problems that ultimately can't be achieved solely by military action. Military action can gain time for political activity, but that has not happened yet. We have to figure out how to synchronize our military power and manage it in a way that makes sense for the 21st century and in an international setting.

"The international community has to think outside the box because the box is collapsing."

CTC: Iran and Russia are both trying to assert more influence in the Middle East. What does this mean for U.S. policy, and what would you recommend the United States do to protect its interests in the region?
Abizaid: We need to think in terms of their strategic interests in the region. For example, Russia has had a long-standing interest in warm-water access to the Mediterranean for as long as it has been a great power. When we think of it this way, it is logical that Russia would seek to increase its power at the expense of weaker entities in order to achieve its long-standing goals. So what's important here is to first understand what their objectives are, decide whether these are compatible with our interests, and identify where they may come in conflict. The key then is to try and shape a future that includes Iranian and Russian points of view as well as every other country that has an interest in stability in the region, but at the same time not surrender our own strategic interests for the sake of achieving a quick and feeble peace that is unsustainable.

CTC: What is your take on the Russian government getting more involved in the Syrian civil war?
Abizaid: It has strengthened Bashar al-Assad's government, allowing it to move forward with more offensive action. But ultimately these are sectarian boundaries that will be hotly contested. And our experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the Middle East teaches us that as you encroach upon another sect's particular land boundaries, resistance becomes more intense and sometimes impossible to overcome. So I'm not sure that the movement of Iran and Russia together has changed the status quo completely. But it does show that those two nations have to be taken into account as we move toward a better solution. To me this all comes back to what the region is going to look like. It hasn't been made better with the involvement of the Iranians or the Russians, but if I had to prioritize anything it would be stopping the spread of Sunni Islamic extremism as our first priority. Once we have achieved that, then we can work to satisfy our other interests in the region. CTC

University Radicalization: Pakistan's Next Counterterrorism Challenge

By Huma Yusuf

Militancy on university campuses is quickly becoming Pakistan's next major counterterrorism challenge. Since Pakistan launched its National Action Plan to counter terrorism in December 2014, military and paramilitary operations have resulted in the detention and killing of thousands of suspected militants across the country. But there is no strategy yet to confront what officials fear is growing radicalization among Pakistan's affluent, middle-class population, particularly university students. Although more research is needed before definitive conclusions can be made, Pakistan's campus radicalization is a trend with global security implications. Militants with higher education are better positioned to plan sophisticated attacks, infiltrate elite government and military circles, and facilitate increased connections between Pakistan-based groups and transnational movements.

The 13th issue of *Dabiq*,[1] the propaganda magazine of the Iraq- and Syria-based militant group the Islamic State, praises the courage of Tashfeen Malik, the woman of Pakistani origin who along with her husband, Syed Rizwan Farook, killed 14 people on December 2, 2015, in a mass shooting in San Bernardino, California.[2] Immediately after the attack, Malik's violent actions drew attention to her alma mater, Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), in Multan, Pakistan, where she was a student of pharmacy between 2007 and 2012, and to her enrollment in the local franchise of a network of Islamic schools for women, al-Huda.[3] Multan, in the south of Punjab province, is the base and prime recruiting ground for many militant groups in Pakistan, particularly anti-Shi`a sectarian outfits, and Islamic seminaries in the region are known to be feeders for such groups.

Universities in the area are not immune to militant infiltration. Since the launch of the government's National Action Plan to counter terrorism in December 2014, the BZU campus and its 35,000-strong student body have been under 24-hour surveillance. Intelligence agency officials have also been stationed at the university to monitor militant activities, particularly recruitment, that may be underway.[4] [a]

As of 2010, the last year for which official statistics are available, there were 132 recognized degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan, up from 118 in 2006.[5] These cater to the growing demand for higher education among Pakistan's rapidly expanding middle-class—by some estimates, comprising 70 million people, or 40 percent of the population.[6] The percentage of the population enrolled in tertiary education has increased from 4.94 percent in 2005 to 10.36 percent in 2014, indicating the potential for further growth of the higher education sector.[7] Pakistani officials believe that the number of radicalized students might be increasing as a result of concerted attempts by militant groups to recruit on campus, greater exposure of students to extremist ideas via social media, and the low prioritization of campus militancy among law enforcement officials already stretched thin trying to sustain the pace of counterterrorism operations launched over the past year.[8] According to a senior Karachi-based police official who has been involved in counterterrorism investigations, the growing cohort of educated, middle-class youth is an attractive target for recruitment by militant groups.[9]

Comprehensive statistics on the number of suspected militants apprehended from university campuses in recent years are not available. It is also unclear whether the uptick in arrests of university students in 2015 documented in this article points to a growing trend or is the result of increased vigilance on the part of counterterrorism officials operating under the National Action Plan. However, it is important to understand what is driving radicalization on university campuses, particularly as the number of students at risk of exposure to extremist ideologies grows.

While some recently arrested students have been accused of maintaining links to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or anti-Shi`a militant groups such as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), most students who are detained are accused of having ties to transnational militant groups such as al-Qa`ida or Islamist activist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), both of which have historically targeted more educated recruits. For example, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, the architect of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, had a master's degree in Islamic studies from Pakistan's Punjab University. The anti-Western extremist narratives of transnational groups appeal to university students who are prone to anti-Americanism and mainstream resentment against Western troop presence in Afghanistan

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a It remains unclear whether Malik was radicalized at BZU. She arrived at the university after being raised in Saudi Arabia, where her family converted from the more inclusive sect of Barelvi Islam to the more stringent Deobandi sect. Her university professors believe she was influenced more by her upbringing in Saudi Arabia, but this has not prevented BZU and other universities from coming under greater scrutiny since Malik launched her attack in California. See Declan Walsh, "Tafsheen Malik was a 'Saudi girl' who stood out at a Pakistani university," *New York Times*, December 6, 2015.

that has soared across Pakistan since 2001.

Students can also be easily accessed by militant recruiters via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and video-sharing sites. There are 30 million internet users in Pakistan, and Facebook is the most popular site with 23 million users.[10] The Pakistan government, as of 2012, had blocked more than 15,000 websites, including YouTube, on the grounds of blasphemy and pornography,[11] but the social media feeds of transnational and domestic militant groups have not been censored, driving further recruitment efforts online[12] and exposing new middle-class audiences to extremist rhetoric.[13] More importantly, students offer technical skills—in fields ranging from video editing to engineering—that are increasingly valued by militant groups with sophisticated media strategies and that are planning high-impact attacks.

The potential for domestic militant groups to follow the example of transnational groups and increasingly recruit on university campuses cannot be discounted. A 2013 study on the anti-India group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) found that its recruits tend to be more educated than the average Pakistani. Sixty-three percent have secondary education, and some have enrolled in undergraduate degree programs.[14] Another study found that 17 percent of LeT militants are educated to the intermediate level or higher.[15] As madrassas, the traditional recruiting grounds of militant groups, come under greater government scrutiny under the National Action Plan to counter terrorism, and as urbanization drives the growth of Pakistan's middle class, university students are likely to be increasingly coveted by militant recruiters.

Student Cells

The threats posed by radicalized students—and the extent of their networks and resources in Pakistan—are exemplified by the case of Saad Aziz, a graduate of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), one of Pakistan's top privately owned business schools. In May 2015, Aziz confessed to murdering civil rights activist Sabeen Mahmud, who on April 24, 2015, was shot dead by gunmen in Karachi.[16] Police have also charged him with carrying out or participating in numerous other attacks in Karachi, including a gun attack on April 16, 2015, against Debra Lobo, a U.S. national then working as a professor at a dental college; an attack on May 13, 2015, by eight gunmen against a bus carrying members of the Ismaili community—a sub-sect of Shi`a Islam—during which 46 people were killed; and several small-scale attacks against co-educational schools and security targets.

Aziz's accomplice for Mahmud's assassination, according to police statements, was Allure Rehman, who graduated from the engineering department of the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) in the northern city of Rawalpindi.[17] Other militant suspects arrested along with Aziz, who police believe are part of the same al-Qa`ida-inspired cell that carried out multiple attacks in Karachi, include Azhar Ishrat, an engineer who graduated from Karachi's Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology (SSUET), and Haafiz Nasir, who holds a master's degree in Islamic studies from the University of Karachi, the largest and most prestigious of Pakistan's public sector universities. While investigating this cell of radicalized students, police also detained two other University of Karachi graduates who had been recruited by al-Qa`ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and were involved in maintaining the group's website. The suspected militants would gather at the home of a SSUET sports coach who taught students how to assemble IEDs in a makeshift laboratory.[18]

The entrance to Bahauddin Zakariya University in Pakistan

Aziz's radicalization trajectory echoes that of other students who are recruited by militant groups, according to the Karachi-based police official. While at IBA, Aziz became involved with the university's religious society Iqra and served on the editorial board of its journal.[19] His accomplice Rehman introduced him to the Lahore-based Islamic movement Tanzeem-e-Islami and subsequently to Abu Zar, an al-Qa`ida operative who recruited Aziz in 2010.[20] [b] In 2011, Aziz traveled to North Waziristan, a tribal area along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, to train with a group headed by Ahmad Farooq, then deputy head of AQIS, himself a former student of Punjab University who was killed in a U.S. drone strike in January 2015 in the tribal agency of North Waziristan.[21] Aziz then returned to Karachi where he worked under a militant commander before starting to plan and launch attacks on his own initiative.[22]

While Aziz and his accomplices were charged for having links with al-Qa`ida, militant groups—particularly anti-Shi`a sectarian outfits such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi—are also recruiting on campuses, typically targeting students that have already been wooed by the student wings of religious political parties.[23]

Role of Religious Political Parties

The recruitment of university students by militant groups has also been spurred by the shift in recent years to more hardline positions by religious political parties with significant student wings such as Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam. These parties have rarely performed well at the polls, winning less than 5 percent of parliamentary seats in the 2013 general elections. But they are now in danger of losing even their limited space in Pakistan's political spectrum as traditionally centrist parties such as the ruling Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) and Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) have increasingly adopted conservative positions on issues that have been the hallmark of religious parties. These stances include protests against U.S. drone strikes,[24] refusals to repeal the country's draconian blasphemy laws, and in 2014, support for rec-

b Abu Zar was subsequently arrested on November 30, 2013, at a hostel of Punjab University, the oldest public university in the country and based in Lahore, for harassing academic staff and maintaining links with al-Qa`ida. See "Police arrests many students from Punjab University," *Pakistan Tribe*, November 30, 2013.

onciliation with the TTP.[25] At the same time, militant groups such as the anti-Shi`a SSP have also started to enter electoral politics. (SSP members in the May 2013 general election fielded candidates as part of the religious coalition Muttahida Deeni Mahaz, which won more than 350,000 votes but no seats in parliament).[26] These newcomers to participatory politics threaten to rob religious parties of their most conservative supporters.

To check this trend, religious political parties are becoming more radical in their approach. This is most evident in the growing extremist links of JI's student wing, Islami Jamiat Talaba (IJT). The IJT maintains an active presence on university campuses, recruiting students, circulating party publications, and inviting participation in lectures and protests organized by the JI. But its members also aim to enforce Islamic codes on campuses,[27] harassing female students who behave in what they perceive to be an un-Islamic manner,[28] discouraging co-educational activities, and intimidating—or attacking—university professors with whose views they disagree.[29] Many university students and recent graduates apprehended on terrorism charges are either current or former members of the IJT, though the group repeatedly denies wrongdoing and rejects allegations that it maintains links with violent extremist and militant groups.

Several examples illustrate the growing links between the IJT and militant groups, and indicate a trend whereby religious political parties recruit university students before channeling them toward militant groups. For example, the Karachi faction of the Punjabi Taliban—historically Punjab-based, anti-India militants who have in recent years targeted Pakistani security forces and engaged in the Afghan conflict—comprises students enrolled at the University of Karachi, many of whom were previously affiliated with the IJT.[30]

In 2013, a student affiliated with the IJT accused Junaid Hafeez, a lecturer in English at BZU—the university that San Bernardino shooter Malik attended—of insulting the Prophet in comments on a Facebook page.[31] Hafeez was subsequently accused of blasphemy, which carries the death penalty in Pakistan, and currently awaits trial. Human rights activists monitoring the case believe Hafeez was targeted by IJT-affiliated students because of his liberal views.[32] In May 2014, two men fatally shot Hafeez's lawyer, Rashid Rehman, in a killing perceived to be a warning to the legal community against defending people accused of blasphemy and indicating links between campus-based targeting and Islamist militant activities in Multan.[33]

In September 2013, nine people suspected of links to al-Qa`ida were arrested at a hostel in Punjab University in Lahore, a known stronghold of the IJT.[34] These included six potential suicide bombers, two collaborators with technical expertise in information technology and IED production, as well as the coordinator of the cell.[35] While some of the suspected militants lived across the city of Lahore, the handler was based at the Punjab University hostel and would hold meetings with his accomplices on campus. Intelligence officials involved in the arrest at the time accused JI, through its student arm IJT, of accommodating and protecting al-Qa`ida operatives in Pakistan.[36]

Later that year, on November 29, 2013, Abdul Rahman Shujaat, a recent graduate of the NED University of Engineering and Technology in Karachi, and a former activist of the IJT, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in the tribal agency of North Waziristan, then the main base of the TTP. Shujaat hailed from a family with long-standing connections with JI, and his death raised fresh questions about the ties between the religious political party and militant groups, though party workers at the time denied Shujaat's party affiliation.[37]

"The recruitment of university students by militant groups has been spurred by the shift in recent years to more hardline positions by religious political parties."

A long-running ban against politics and student unions at universities is contributing to the rise of extremist groups on campuses. In 1984, then military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq imposed a ban on student unions and prohibited political parties from maintaining a presence on campuses. Many political parties, including the Karachi-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement and the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), continue to recruit student members, but there are no opportunities for political debate or student elections, and because campus politics are officially prohibited, universities do not have formal means in place to monitor or regulate the campus-based activities of political groups. In this vacuum, religious political parties that have historically had a strong presence on university campuses—particularly the student wing of JI—have consolidated their presence and emerged as the dominant groups on campus. These groups mask some of their activities as religious and cultural interventions; however, the basis of their successful entrenchment on university campuses is the reluctance of university administrators to challenge their religious viewpoints on issues.[38] On coming to power in 2008, then Prime Minister Yousaf Reza Gilani announced that he would lift the ban on student unions, but his directive was not implemented. Bilawal Bhutto, co-chair of the PPP, directed the Sindh provincial government in January 2016 to lift the ban on student politics,[39] though it remains to be seen whether the measure will take effect on this occasion.

Targeted by Hizb ut-Tahrir

HT, a radical international organization with a strong base in the UK, is also increasingly focusing on recruiting university students in Pakistan. In its Pakistan manifesto, the group explains that its goal within the country is to create a new *khalifa* state to be an example for the others and reunify the Islamic world.[40] Estimates of the group's size in Pakistan vary from the low thousands to significantly higher in the tens of thousands; globally it has around one million members.[41] The group, which was banned in Pakistan in 2004, has gained notoriety in recent years for seeking to infiltrate the Pakistan military. For example, in 2011, Brigadier Ali Khan, a senior army officer who opposed Pakistan's alliance with the United States in the global war on terror, was arrested along with four other army officers for recruiting on behalf of HT and was convicted in 2012 by a military court for having links to a banned organization. In 2003, HT had reportedly established links with commandos of the army's Special Services Group, and in 2009 recruited several army officers, including a lieutenant colonel.[42]

There are now growing indications that the group is targeting university students in Pakistan. In an interview with an academic in 2014, an Islamabad-based HT member explained that the group is seeking to indoctrinate students at Pakistan's top universities.[43]

Police arrested Owais Raheel in October 2015 in Karachi for distributing HT pamphlets at mosques in the city's elite residential areas of Defence and Clifton. Raheel, who is a graduate of the business school IBA and the engineering school NED, joined the organization in 2007.[44] Counterterrorism police in December 2015 also arrested three professors and a student from Punjab University suspected of ties to HT.[45] One suspect, Ghalib Ata, a management sciences professor, was arrested after a student complained that Ata tried to "brainwash" him.[46] HT is likely to appeal to students, particularly those with middle- and upper-class backgrounds, because of its global reach, sophisticated online communications strategies, and the fact that its members are primarily educated and English-speaking.[47]

No Plan, No Action

When IBA graduate Aziz and his accomplices killed 46 members of the minority Ismaili community in Karachi, they claimed the attack in the name of the Islamic State, the Iraq- and Syria-based militant group that in 2014 acknowledged a *wilayat*, or province, of its self-styled caliphate in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Aziz's actions indicate the increased potential for attacks in Pakistan's urban areas by educated militants, and for transnational militant groups, including the Islamic State and AQIS, to exploit the rise of small-scale militant cells that are independent from local militant groups such as the TTP.

Pakistan's National Action Plan to counter terrorism—a consensus security policy issued by the government and opposition parties as well as military stakeholders in December 2014 following an attack by the TTP against an army-run school in Peshawar in which 141 people were killed—does not address the threat posed by educated militants. The policy takes a securitized approach to counterterrorism and has focused on the launch of military and paramilitary operations in areas where militant groups, primarily the TTP, maintained safe havens, including the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Balochistan, and Karachi.

The plan calls for registering madrassas and better monitoring their activities, checking hate speech, preventing the circulation of extremist material, and blocking banned groups' access to social media platforms. However, police action in this context has been limited to the arrest or temporary detention of low-profile clerics engaging in hate speech, primarily on sectarian grounds. Militant groups continue to use social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, which have not been blocked despite the government's increasingly aggressive and sophisticated approach toward internet filtering and blocking.[48]

There are no provisions in the plan to counter extremist narratives or develop new competing narratives to help stem the recruitment of Pakistani youth. And there are certainly no clauses specific to preventing extremist groups from operating on university campuses. However, private-sector universities that recognize the challenge posed by campus radicalization have started to launch initiatives to counter extremist rhetoric. For example, in February 2016, students at the Lahore University of Management Sciences won a counter-extremism competition sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for a social media campaign urging Pakistani youth to resist radicalization.[49] But such initiatives are rare at public-sector institutions that are most vulnerable to militant infiltration. Ad hoc paramilitary and police operations against militant cells on such campuses in Karachi and Lahore have not led to campus-specific security interventions or wider calls for counter-radicalization initiatives at university campuses.

Conclusion

In the absence of a holistic approach to checking the radicalization of university students, this demographic will continue to pose a growing threat within Pakistan. Militants with higher education will be better positioned to plan sophisticated attacks and infiltrate elite government and military circles. They will also facilitate increased connections between Pakistan-based groups and transnational movements, increasing the ambition and resilience of the former. Moreover, owing to their skills and greater ability for exposure, educated militants will be well placed to operate internationally and carry out attacks outside Pakistan. As such, the evolution of on-campus militancy is shaping up to be one of Pakistan's major counterterrorism challenges. CTC

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The First Islamic State: A Look Back at the Islamic Emirate of Kunar

By Kevin Bell

The Islamic Emirate of Kunar was a Salafi Islamic state founded by Jamil al-Rahman and his political party in Afghanistan in 1990. This proto-state was an early and short-lived experiment that captured the attention of Salafi leaders and activists throughout the Muslim world. Following his assassination in 1991, al-Rahman was variously eulogized and reviled by Salafi leaders. Although not well known in the United States, this emirate was a modern ideological and political predecessor to today's self-anointed Islamic State. In fact, some of the mujahideen involved with al-Rahman's political organization later influenced the founders of the Islamic State and in at least one case are prominently involved with the group's expansion into Afghanistan. This report analyzes previously unstudied primary sources in Persian and Pashto to illuminate how the Islamic Emirate of Kunar came into being. While this analysis is of historical value, it is also helpful for contextualizing current events in the region.

The Islamic State has captured the world's attention with its battlefield success, its carefully publicized brutality, and its efforts to recreate a caliphate. However, the group's attempts are not the first modern effort to create a Salafi state from war-torn territory in the midst of conflict. That distinction goes to the Islamic Emirate of Kunar, founded by Jamil al-Rahman and his Salafi political party, Jama'at al-Da'wa ila al-Qur'an wal-Sunna (JDQS), following a democratic election in Kunar, Afghanistan, in early 1990.[1 a]

The Islamic Emirate of Kunar is not well known and the Afghan Salafis were a small minority, but al-Rahman's attempt to create an Islamic state has had a profound impact on the development of the global Salafi jihadi movement and how that movement perceives and stylizes itself. This influence was exercised through the direct contact that many major Salafi leaders had with JDQS as well as the symbolic value that numerous Salafi thinkers and activists placed in the creation of an Islamic state supposedly governed on the basis of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. While the historical significance of such links is clear, they also aid in understanding the Islamic State and its current expansion into Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There are numerous examples of jihadi writers drawing lessons for contemporary readers from the creation and dissolution of the Islamic Emirate of Kunar in the early 1990s.[2] Because of language barriers and extreme scarcity, however, the sources that reveal this history are difficult to access for most Western readers. The readily available historiography of the Afghan jihad emphasizes the seven main Sunni mujahideen parties from the Soviet-Afghan War to such a great extent that the Salafis simply disappear in many accounts (although there are some exceptions[3]). This article draws on a group of never-before analyzed primary sources, including books and magazines published by JDQS in Pashto and Persian, to begin to tell how al-Rahman became the leader of the first Salafi Islamic state.[b]

Creation of the Islamic Emirate of Kunar

In October 1989 the various mujahideen factions in Kunar gathered to discuss the future of the newly freed province.[4 c] The commanders, *ulema*, elders, and tribal leaders at the meeting agreed that

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This article was prepared by Kevin Bell in his personal capacity. The views expressed herein are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of the Treasury or the United States Government.

a Al-Rahman's decision to support elections was unpopular among Salafi mujahideen at the time, and such support is still atypical for Salafi groups with the exception of a few modern political parties such as the al-Nour party in Egypt and the Islamic Salafi Alliance in Kuwait.

b All translations from Persian and Pashto are the author's, except where otherwise noted. Thanks to Vahid Brown for help with the Arabic sources. It is worth noting that the Dawlat-e Inqilabi-ye Islami-ye Afghanistan [The Revolutionary Islamic State of Afghanistan] in neighboring Nuristan province probably antedated the Islamic Emirate of Kunar by about 10 years. This government was led by Mawlawi Muhammad Afzal and maintained a foreign ministry, interior ministry, and defense ministry during the Soviet Afghan War. This government divided the administration of Nuristan into four districts, each of which was led by a local governor. Unfortunately, relatively little is known about the ideology of this movement, and it is not clear whether Mawlawi Muhammad Afzal was a Salafi or whether his group acted as a state in more than name. See "A Look at the Statecraft of Mawlawi Afzal: the Founder of the Revolutionary Islamic Government of Afghanistan—an Interview with Yusef Nuristani, Chief of the Office of Mawlawi Muhammad Afzal," Bokhdi News, March 15, 2012.

c Kunar was the first province to be abandoned by the communists after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, leaving a power vacuum in their place.

Jamil al-Rahman

they wanted to establish an Islamic administration, and the group appointed a 15-member commission to explore the issue in detail. This commission included members of all of the major mujahideen parties in Kunar, including JDQS and Hizb-e Islami (HIG), led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who would later play an outsized role in the proto-state's eventual collapse. In an early move, HIG repeatedly insisted that elections be held among the mujahideen parties to create a single unified Islamic administration, and when the commission agreed to this demand, the path was set for the creation of an independent state in Kunar province.[5]

At the time it was almost unheard of for a Salafi leader to advocate for elections. The decision by JDQS to accept a vote as a path toward the creation of an Islamic state was groundbreaking, but it would probably be a mistake to interpret it as a true preference for democracy. Al-Rahman and JDQS were not in a position to declare unilaterally their own government, and their acceptance of the elections was at least partly a flexible response to political and military necessity. JDQS was the largest party in Kunar at the time, but al-Rahman lacked the resources in other provinces that parties such as HIG could draw on. As borne out by later events, JDQS was in a strong position to win an election in Kunar. However, the party was too small and too poorly resourced to fight a long-term battle against a much larger rival like HIG without major support. When HIG demanded elections as a condition for moving forward with the creation of the state, the only other option was probably open fighting. If nothing else, JDQS' acceptance of an election in Kunar demonstrates that a Salafi Islamic state is capable of coming into existence through modern political practices. Elections were likely the best option available to al-Rahman at the time, and on October 17, 1989, a high election commission was created.[d]

Even after planning for the elections started, there was still some reluctance within JDQS to embrace a democratic path to power.[e] One JDQS writer glibly explained that while the party did not endorse "Western-style elections," the group accepted the decision to hold a vote on the basis of proportional representation in order to maintain unity among the mujahideen.[6] Perhaps it was in part because of this ambivalence about the religious and political legitimacy of democracy that JDQS and the other parties placed strict limits on enfranchisement.[f]

The Kunar elections in early 1990 were a resounding success for the Salafis.[g] Al-Rahman's party achieved a decisive victory in the elections, and on May 7, 1990, the Transitional Shura selected al-Rahman as the emir of the newly created Islamic Emirate of Kunar.[7] A group of leaders from Kunar, including some members of HIG, visited al-Rahman in Pakistan and asked him to return to take the helm of the new Islamic state.[8] Commanders from the various mujahideen factions gradually began to pledge their *bay`a* (oath of allegiance) to al-Rahman, but the seeds of the emirate's destruction were already sown by the growing enmity between al-Rahman and HIG's leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.[9]

Struggle for Control in Kunar

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar made a name for himself in the early days of the struggle against leftism in Afghanistan by murdering a Maoist student while at Kabul University in 1972.[10] He quickly took control of the youth wing of the Kabul University Islamist movement when he left prison, and before long he began clashing with more established resistance leaders like Burhanuddin Rabbani.[11] These disputes were a driving force behind the repeated dissolution of the various mujahideen unity parties at the beginning of the Soviet Afghan War.[12] When al-Rahman created his own political party, JDQS, he apparently pulled many of the Kunar-based supporters of Hekmatyar into his camp, likely exacerbating any existing tensions between the two men.[13] Little is known about the interactions between HIG and JDQS in the mid-1980s, but when Kunar province was freed, both parties began to scramble for dominance.

Relations between JDQS and the central leadership of HIG de-

d Al-Rahman was not generally a proponent of democracy. *Da'wat* printed his quotations and various remarks in every publication, and often these remarks urged Muslims to be wary of accepting democracy. For more on this and for information about the creation of the High Election Commission, see "The Declaration of the Islamic Emirate of Kunar," p. 6. It is not entirely clear if this was a separate entity from the 15-member commission described above. Future research is needed to distinguish the different councils and commissions involved in the creation of the Islamic Emirate.

e JDQS' decision to participate in elections was extremely controversial, and some Salafi authors who are otherwise supportive of Jamil al-Rahman make clear their distaste for the elections that led to the creation of the Islamic Emirate. For example, in an otherwise positive biography of al-Rahman, 'Abd al-Rahman Farid al-Jezairi is careful to point out that elections are tyrannical and idolatrous (*taghuti*) and that al-Rahman's group only participated in the elections in order to avoid the shedding of innocent blood that would have resulted from a refusal. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Farid al-Jezairi. "The Biography of Sheikh Jamil al-Rahman." Ajurry.com, an Islamic education website. July 2012. Accessed February 2, 2016.

f There is no discussion of the gender of voters, but it is almost certain that women were not considered eligible. According to the requirements, voters must be at least 15 years of age; have participated in the jihad before March 21, 1987 [the end of that Islamic solar year]; not be accused of having relations with un-Islamic parties; not be accused of having acted against the mujahideen or of conducting any actions or relations in service of the atheist government; and be bound by Islamic law and not be known for any grave sins. "The Policies for the Conduct of the Elections of the United Islamic Commission of Kunar Province," *Da'wat*, JDQS, Issue 9, (November 1989), p. 20.

g Many of the *Da'wat* articles provide date conversions, usually from one of the two main Islamic calendars to the Gregorian calendar. Unfortunately, these internal conversions are often inconsistent. The actual date of the election remains unclear. According to the *Da'wat* texts, the vote likely took place in the months immediately prior to May 1990.

teriorated rapidly throughout 1990. There was a temporary respite on January 18, 1991, when two-thirds of HIG's Kunar provincial shura and a number of HIG commanders gave their *bay`a* to the Islamic Emirate of Kunar.[14] With this, HIG was brought into the emirate's executive shura, and its members were given control of several ministries, including the Foreign Ministry.[15] Tense as things had become, conflict had yet to break out openly between JDQS and HIG, and for a time the emirate was able to set about the basic work of governing.

Soon after its inauguration, the emirate initiated various agricultural development programs, banned the cultivation of poppies, and took steps to speed up the return of refugees.[16] The Salafis began exerting control over religious practice in Kunar through the creation of an office for "commanding right and forbidding wrong" and by destroying the tombs of revered Sufi saints.[17] To the annoyance of the international community, the emirate also hijacked trucks of wheat sent by USAID.[18] In a sign of the importance of the emirate's cross-border community relationships, after an earthquake in Dir and Bajaur in 1990, the emirate sent money and tents to affected communities in Pakistan.[19] Al-Rahman also initiated operations to rid the roads of bandits and thieves.[20] Of course, all of these programs were expensive, and it is unlikely that more than a small proportion of the new state's funds were generated internally.

JDQS was not one of the seven officially recognized Sunni mujahideen political parties to receive funds from Pakistan during the jihad, and al-Rahman had to look further afield for assistance from the very beginning.[21] The key to the financial viability of the Islamic Emirate was al-Rahman's booming support in Saudi Arabia. His fundraising there had already begun to eclipse that of 'Abd al-Rab Rasul Sayyaf, the leader of one of the seven main Afghan mujahideen parties who until then had been among the most successful at attracting wealthy benefactors from Persian Gulf nations.[22] However, with this growing success and financial support came new enemies. Hekmatyar was no longer al-Rahman's only foe, and none of the Afghan mujahideen came to the aid of the Islamic Emirate when HIG began to conduct harassing attacks in Kunar in the spring of 1991.[23] [h]

By summer these attacks had escalated dramatically. In July 1991, HIG launched an attack on the emirate via the Nawa Pass that al-Rahman's forces only beat back with great difficulty.[24] The Saudi ambassador to Pakistan tried to intervene. Al-Rahman offered to put the matter in the hands of a neutral mediating party, but Hekmatyar refused.[25] [i] In late August, Hekmatyar attacked again. On this occasion HIG assaulted Kunar with the support of the Pakistani military.[26] [j] Al-Rahman was forced to flee to his home in Pakistan in the neighboring district of Bajaur, where he convened a peace council including many Arab mujahideen to resolve the dispute between HIG and the Islamic Emirate of Kunar.[27]

"It is naïve to argue that Afghan society is somehow immune to sectarianism, even if it is not as sectarian as Iraq and other areas."

Aftermath of the Death of al-Rahman

On August 30, 1991, a young Egyptian journalist affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood came to al-Rahman's home in Bajaur.[k] His name was 'Abdullah Rumi, and he had worked at *al-Jihad* magazine and other jihadi publications.[l] Al-Rahman's guards, believing he was part of the Arab-led peace council, did not search him.[m] Rumi went to where al-Rahman was seated, speaking with a jihadi commander. The young journalist went to al-Rahman's side, as though to ask him a question. He then drew a pistol and shot him three times. Al-Rahman cried out "God is the greatest!" and fell dead.[28]

Al-Rahman's death "shocked the Saudi royal family, Chief Mufti Bin Baz, and the broader Saudi religious establishment."[29] In spite of his many enemies, al-Rahman's murder reverberated throughout the Salafi mujahideen community, and his death and the subsequent dissolution of the Islamic Emirate of Kunar would be a major topic of discussion in Salafi mujahideen communities for years to

h It is worth noting that at some point HIG probably attacked camps belonging to each of the parties. For a discussion of Yunus Khalis' response to HIG attacks on his own camps in 1995, see Haji Din Muhammad, *The Life, Art, and Thought of Mawlawi Khalis*. (Hayatabad, Peshawar: Pir Chap Khuna, 2007), pp. 88–89.

i *Da'wat* provides a detailed, if roundabout, description of the joint Saudi-Pakistani efforts to mediate between HIG and JDQS. In short, JDQS claims that Hekmatyar sabotaged the negotiations. See "Kunar from the Beginning of the Jihad to Now," *Da'wat*, Issue 15-16 (September 1991), pp. 29-30.

j Pakistan helped eliminate al-Rahman and his emirate partly because it was loath to allow a new Saudi-backed independent state to take form on its border, but also because the ISI, the central Pakistani intelligence service, was backing al-Rahman's principal rival, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, to take over as the leader of a mujahideen government in Kabul.

k There are many different conspiracy theories about al-Rahman's death, but most point to 'Abdullah Rumi as his killer. The most significant dissenting view on this is 'Abd al-Rahim Muslim Dost, who claims that al-Rahman was killed by Haji Ruhalla, one of his associates. Muslim Dost explains that Haji Ruhalla shot both al-Rahman and 'Abdullah Rumi and claimed that he had killed Rumi out of revenge. The facts are still uncertain, but Muslim Dost's account is a minority version. See 'Abd al-Rahim Muslim Dost and Ustad Badr al-Zaman Badr, *The Broken Chains of Guantanamo* (Peshawar, Pakistan: Khilafat Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 18-19.

l Peter Tomsen claims that Rumi also worked on one of Sayyaf's publications, *al-Bunyan*. He also adds that 'Abdullah Rumi was an alias and that his real name was Sharif 'Ali. See Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013), p. 388. The magazine *al-Jihad* was affiliated with 'Abdullah 'Azzam, a well-known mujahideen leader and sometime associate of Usama bin Ladin.

m "The Life, Call and Jihad of the Martyr Sheikh Jamil al-Rahman," p. 20. The author of the article notes that the guards did not normally search Arab guests, so it did not really matter that the guards believed him to be part of the peace council.

come.[n]

Not long after al-Rahman's assassination, the state that he founded disappeared.[o] In other circumstances, al-Rahman and the Islamic Emirate of Kunar might have been quickly forgotten. Instead, he was lionized by such Salafi luminaries as Usama bin Ladin, the Syrian cleric Abu Basir al-Tartusi, Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi'i, and Rabi' Hadi al-Madkhali.[30] It is perhaps telling that after al-Tartusi spent five months working with al-Rahman's mujahideen, he moved to Jordan and became a teacher and advisor to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the eventual leader of the Islamic State's predecessor organization, al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI).[31] In addition to these links to major Salafi mujahideen leaders and the Islamic State's central structure, there are also direct connections between al-Rahman's party and the Islamic State's nascent branch in Afghanistan, the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK).

'Abd al-Rahim Muslim Dost was one of the first Afghans to declare his *bay`a* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi when he was declared caliph of the Islamic State on June 29, 2014.[32] Since then Muslim Dost has been named a deputy leader of ISK.[p] But in the 1980s, long before Muslim Dost was involved in the Islamic State's expansion into Afghanistan, he was an advisor to al-Rahman and JDQS.[33] To be sure, in his 2006 book, *The Broken Chains of Guantanamo*, Muslim Dost makes it clear that he separated from JDQS because he felt that al-Rahman had turned Kunar into a private kingdom and that he had become too close to the Saudi and Pakistani governments in the process.[34] This very public and long-delayed repudiation of al-Rahman's approach to building an Islamic state is indicative of the lasting power that the Islamic Emirate of Kunar has had on the political imagination of Muslim Dost and other Salafi mujahideen leaders.

Conclusion

In a way, the Islamic State's arrival in Afghanistan through the creation of ISK revives the process started by al-Rahman in Kunar. It is too early to tell if the Taliban will be able to succeed in its goal of eliminating ISK, but there are reasons to be doubtful. It is relatively easy for a jihadi group to maintain a presence in rural areas of Afghanistan with even a small amount of local support, and ISK has a large potential constituency in the remaining Kunar Salafis and disgruntled leaders of Taliban affiliates like Tehrik-i-Taliban

n Note that the Islamic Emirate did not dissolve immediately after al-Rahman's death. The former chief financial officer for JDQS, Sami'ullah Najibi, was appointed emir with al-Rahman's departure. Sami'ullah was born in Nangarhar in 1944 and graduated from the Dar al-'Ulum Rawalpindi in 1965. He later studied and taught at the Dar al-'Ulum in Kabul, and following his stint as emir, he served as a minister in the brief mujahideen government of Burhanuddin Rabbani. See "The Jama'at al-Da'wa ila al-Qur'an wal-Sunnah Party," Payam-e Aftab, November 19, 2007.

o Even though the emirate fell apart, JDQS still exists in some form today.

p There have been various claims about his exact role in ISK, and it is not clear what operational position he occupies. In addition, there are reports that Muslim Dost has had a falling out with ISK leadership. See Don Rassler, "Situating the Emergence of the Islamic State of Khorasan," *CTC Sentinel* 8:3 (2015): pp. 7-11; and Carol Anne Grayson, "Afghanistan, Muslim Dost, deputy of Wilayat Khorasan statement allegedly 'disowns' IS head Hafiz Said Khan claiming 'un-Islamic actions,'" Carol Anne Grayson (Radical Sister) blog, October 19, 2015.

Kunar province, Afghanistan

Pakistan.[q] There are no reliable estimates of the number of Salafis living in Afghanistan, but they are concentrated geographically in the east in Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan, and, to some extent, Badakhshan. Even if ISK never grows large enough to challenge the Taliban on a national level, if the group can win the support of any significant percentage of the Salafis living in eastern Afghanistan, it will become exceedingly difficult for government forces or the Taliban to destroy them.

Governments underestimate the resourcefulness of well-run mujahideen groups in long-term conflict zones at their peril. These organizations can be well positioned to seize power and form a new state in the absence of outside control. JDQS had already been performing various quasi-state functions in Kunar for years when they initiated discussions with other groups about creating an Islamic state. These functions included, at a minimum, collecting taxes, managing dozens of schools with thousands of students, funding social programs for orphans and widows, maintaining a court system, and providing some security for the conduct of trade.[35]

Many Salafis are highly skeptical about the permissibility and desirability of elections for Muslims, and the experience of JDQS in Kunar does little to assuage those concerns.[r] As some surely argued at the time, an election was necessary in Kunar to avoid massive bloodshed between HIG and JDQS. But the mere organization of an election did nothing to prevent the violence that ensued when HIG disagreed with the results of the vote and set out to undermine the nascent Islamic state. More than anything else, the destruction of al-Rahman's emirate at the hands of HIG probably highlighted to many mujahideen observers the need to prioritize military strength over political pluralism. The Islamic State has certainly learned this lesson, eschewing the idea of power-sharing and instead aggressively attacking any potential rivals.

With that said, there is nothing inherently anti-modern about Salafism. When it suits them, movements based on Salafi ideology are perfectly capable of seizing political opportunities through internationally recognized modern means, such as democratic elections. This point has been underlined recently with the advent of the al-Nour party in Egypt and the Islamic Salafi Alliance in Kuwait. In short, the form that the Islamic State's caliphate has taken and the way that it came about were not the inevitable consequence of Salafism. Adherence to Salafi doctrine did not prevent al-Rahman from becoming an elected head of state, and neither has it precluded the Islamic State from making use of technology, social media, and anything else that is to its advantage.

It has been suggested that Afghans may reject the Islamic State out of hand because of the brutality and sectarianism that defines the Islamic State's public narrative. It is true that ordinary Afghan civilians are generally uninterested in promoting this kind of violence, but that has hardly stopped any of the extremist political movements in Afghanistan from perpetrating horrific bloodshed in their midst. The main innovation of the Islamic State has not been in the kind of violence the group commits but in its dedication to promoting this violence as a method of controlling the population and attracting recruits and publicity. It is naïve to argue that Afghan society is somehow immune to sectarianism, even if it is not as sectarian as Iraq and other areas. In fact, JDQS was famously sectarian, to the point that al-Rahman and the authors of *Da'wat* had to defend themselves repeatedly against the charge that they called other Muslims atheists and polytheists.[36]

Some analysts argue that there is a limit to ISK's growth in Afghanistan, and that to a large extent this is demarcated by the ideological boundary between Salafis and the many Sunnis who ascribe to Hanafi interpretations of Islamic law.[37] While it is true that it is highly unlikely that ISK will grow to a force with tens of thousands of fighters like the Taliban, this ideological determinism should be taken with a grain of salt. Accounts of the history of the mujahideen movements in Afghanistan are filled with stories of fickle commanders who changed factions in order to receive more support, and many of the first members of JDQS in Afghanistan were drawn from HIG, a party that had a quasi-Muslim Brotherhood creed.[38][s] Salafis in Afghanistan and elsewhere are often disliked by their peers because of their demands that other Muslims refrain from common popular religious practices, especially visiting the tombs of saints and using amulets. However, this does not necessarily mean that non-Salafi mujahideen would refuse to fight for ISK if the incentives were right. At the level of the foot soldier, matters of doctrine are important, but not necessarily or always decisive.

More research is needed to explore further the nature of the historical and personal connections between the Islamic Emirate of Kunar and the Islamic State.[39] But with what is already known, it is clear that the story of the Islamic Emirate of Kunar offers a fascinating glimpse into the ways that mujahideen groups grapple with governing territory. In Kunar's case, the answer was a pragmatic attempt to deal with significant opposition between factions by holding elections to establish a new state. Although this effort was only briefly successful, that it happened at all is noteworthy, and major jihadi leaders from Usama bin Ladin and Abu Basir al-Tartusi to ISK's Muslim Dost seemed to agree. CTC

q For an analysis of the return of al-Qa`ida's leadership to Afghanistan and the ease with which the group survived in a complex environment with a small presence, see Kevin Bell, *Usama bin Ladin's "Father Sheikh": Yunus Khalis and the Return of al-Qa`ida's Leadership to Afghanistan* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2013).

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The Ties that Bind: How Terrorists Exploit Family Bonds

by Mohammed M. Hafez

Tightening security environments are encouraging jihadis to turn increasingly to the family unit for recruits. This phenomenon complicates efforts to detect, monitor, and prevent violent radicalization. Kinship recruitment, which is difficult for security agencies to observe, is facilitated by several psychological mechanisms that bind individuals together on the path to extremism. Importantly, it deters ambivalent recruits from defecting to the authorities for fear of damaging their own valued relationships. The reliance on kinship recruitment is supplemented by greater use of social media and an emphasis on recruiting Islamic converts and women, which suggests that jihadis are adjusting their mobilization patterns to avoid detection based on previous, well-known strategies for radicalization.

The Paris and San Bernardino terrorist attacks at the end of 2015 have brought into focus the threat of homegrown extremism and its linkage to transnational actors, principally the Islamic State. Each episode of mass carnage invariably raises the question of how citizens of Western countries could undertake attacks on their host societies. What explaiƒns their radicalization and leap toward violent extremism? Why do individuals residing in relatively peaceful and affluent Western societies come to embrace extremist ideologies that emanate from distant places? This bewilderment is compounded by the fact that several of the recent episodes of mass casualty terrorism involved family members participating in the attack teams. In the Boston bombings, we had the Tsarnaev brothers; in the Charlie Hebdo massacre, we had the Kouachi brothers; in the Paris attacks, we had the Abdeslam brothers; and in the San Bernardino mass shooting, we had a husband-and-wife team of Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik. In three of these cases, the brotherhood of arms is literal, not just figurative.

Indeed, a New America study of 474 foreign fighters from 25 Western countries found that one-third "have a familial connection to jihad, whether through relatives currently fighting in Syria or Iraq, marriage or some other link to jihadis from prior conflicts or attacks."[1] A German internal intelligence service report shows that 69 out of 378 German foreign fighters traveled with family members, which is a little over 18 percent.[2] These percentages are higher than the one reported by the American scholar Marc Sageman more than a decade ago, when his sample of 172 jihadis yielded 14 percent with kinship ties.[3]

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Kinship Radicalization in Historical Perspective

Media analysts and the public often express shock when terrorists undertake violent attacks alongside their family members. It does seem puzzling that terrorists would entangle family members in their clandestine world. Given the hardships and risks associated with radical activism, one would suspect that jihadis would seek to shield their beloved family members from harm's way. Yet, this is not always the case as jihadis are turning to their spouses and extended families for recruits, either as homegrown terrorists or as foreign fighters.

History, however, suggests that it is not at all surprising for terrorist recruiters to mobilize their own siblings and spouses for violent extremist causes. Donatella della Porta's 1995 study of the Italian Red Brigades during the 1970s and 1980s found that 298 out of 1,214 militants "had at least one relative, usually husband or wife, brother or sister" in the movement, which is a little less than 25 percent.[4] Two of the founders of the Red Brigades, Renato Curcio and Margherita Cagol, were husband and wife.[5] Six of the 19 hijackers on September 11, 2001, were brothers.[6] Abu Musab al-Zarqawi dispatched his father-in-law Yassin Jarrad to carry out a major bombing that killed the Shiite cleric Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim in 2003.[7] The 2005 Amman, Jordan, hotel bombings involved an Iraqi husband-and-wife team of Ali-Hussein al-Shamari and Sajidah al-Rishawi. In that same year, Muriel Degauque traveled to Iraq with her husband, Issam Goris, both with the intent to carry out suicide attacks. She succeeded; he was foiled and killed in the process.[8]

Cementing ties between jihadis and local communities through marriages is an old strategy rooted in tribal traditions. Some Arab Afghans married off their daughters or sisters to fellow jihadis. The Algerian Abdullah Anas married the daughter of his Palestinian mentor Abdullah Azzam. These marriages were not always calculated to produce enduring political relationships among radicals, but their effect was the same. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi married his sister off to Khaled Mustafa al-Aruri (Abu Qassam or Abu Ashraf), who was one of Zarqawi's closest associates from 1989 to 2001. Usama bin Ladin is believed to have arranged his own marriage to Amal al-Sada, a Yemeni from a powerful tribe in the mountain town of Ibb south of Sana`a, to bolster al-Qa`ida's recruitment in Yemen.[9]

Tight-knit kinship and friendship ties offer opportunities for radical socialization that simultaneously satisfy psychological needs such as avoidance of cognitive dissonance, the need for maintaining meaningful relationships, and validation from valued peers. The

close associations may also entrap individuals through dynamics of peer pressure, groupthink, and what terrorism expert della Porta calls affective focusing and cognitive closure. That is, kinship and friendship ties can transpose radical political commitments, and these commitments, in turn, intensify bonds of loyalty among kith and kin.[10] Radical Islamists facing vigilant security services are turning to these psychological dynamics to unleash homegrown terrorism and recruit foreign fighters.

Mechanisms of Kinship Radicalization

Radicalization involves adopting an extremist worldview, one that is rejected by mainstream society and one that legitimizes the use of violence as a method to effect societal or political change. Radicalization usually involves grievances, ideological socialization, social networking, and enabling support structures.[11]

Counterterrorism specialists generally presume that it is rare for individuals to migrate from a state of normalcy to violent extremism without some ideological mediation accompanied by a series of commitments to a radical cause.[12] However, some recent cases of radicalization cast doubt on this assumption. We have seen several instances where individuals with little prior history of radicalism suddenly surface as terrorists. These include Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of the two brothers responsible for the Boston bombing in 2013; Mohammad Abdulazeez, the 2015 Chattanooga shooter; and Mohammad Oda Dakhlalla and Jaelyn Delshaun, the newlywed couple from Mississippi who were arrested for seeking to join the Islamic State in 2015.[13]

Those who do make such a leap without prior activism often do so at the hand of radicalized family members or friends who transfer their radicalism onto others by virtue of having preexisting bonds of trust and personal interdependence. This peer-to-peer radicalization suggests that the search for individual motivations may not always be helpful in explaining why persons get involved with terrorism because the motivation may not reside with the individual actors themselves, but in the small extremist milieu from which they hail. One of the most robust findings in the study of political participation, social activism, gang and cult membership, right-wing and left-wing terrorism, and religious extremism is that preexisting friendship and kinship ties facilitate recruitment into these milieus.[14]

Police photo of Paris attacker Salah Abdeslam (left) and Islamic State photo of his brother Brahim Abdeslam

Radicalization and recruitment are localized and highly personal tasks involving interpersonal ties, bonds of solidarity, and trust. This is especially the case in Western societies (and strong states in general) where vigilant security services are on the lookout for overt political and religious networks seeking to radicalize and recruit others for violent ends. In a highly constricted security environment, radicals must look for recruits within preexisting networks such as educational and faith-based institutions, community centers, bookstores, religious study groups, sports teams, workplaces, professional associations, social movement organizations, local charities, and prisons. As these spaces come under the watchful eyes of the authorities, radicalizers turn to an even more secure source of recruits—the family.

Preexisting networks, including the extended family, can facilitate recruitment into radical groups in several ways. First, they often link individuals who share similar beliefs or a social category, creating an immediate collective identity. It is much easier to recruit people with a shared sense of unity or identity than to struggle to forge a new one. Regular meetings between familiar faces in non-threatening settings facilitate the exchange of ideas between the radicalizer and the recruit. Political ideas are infused with emotional commitments and high degrees of deference.

Second, a group that engages in high-risk activism, including participation in violence, depends on interpersonal ties because trust and commitment are prerequisites for inviting people into the group. The adage "don't talk to strangers" also applies in radicalization. A recent study of 119 "lone wolf" attacks in the West revealed an astonishing statistic: 64 percent of the terrorists discussed with family and friends their intention to undertake an attack.[15] This suggests that they had high enough levels of trust to share such damaging secrets. Recruiters first dip into the pool of family, friends, and likeminded activists because trust is already established and the risk of talking to the "wrong people" is minimized. Moreover, potential recruits are more willing to entertain radical ideas when they have shared experiences and bonds of kinship and friendship with their interlocutors. Narrative fidelity is enhanced by actual brotherly fidelity.

Third, tight-knit groups, of which families are one, present radicalizing agents with the possibility of "bloc recruitment." The latter involves group commitments that are self-reinforcing. Once a few individuals make a commitment to a cause, it is difficult for those around them to stay behind. Bloc recruitment may be facilitated by a number of psychological mechanisms, including peer pressure, concern for reputation, groupthink, a desire to maintain extant friendships or spousal relations, or guilt feelings for staying behind.

Lastly, radicalization involves a continuous effort by recruiters to deepen the commitment of their acolytes, discourage them from heeding countervailing influences, and incentivize them to engage in acts of bridge burning (for example, leaving for training camps abroad, or declaring in front of a camera one's intention to engage in a suicide attack). Extreme interdependency of family members minimizes resistance to these processes while it maximizes cohesion with limited transaction costs. Under such circumstances, the unit of the group becomes bound to shared ideals and heightened emotional camaraderie. Defection from the group entails a double betrayal—betraying the cause and betraying one's family.

Implications for Counter-Radicalization

It is notable that the mastermind of the Paris attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, recruited his younger brother Younes to join him in Syria when he was just 13 years old.[16] Abdelhamid apparently also used his female cousin, Hasna Aitboulahcen, to help him secure the Saint-Denis apartment in which they both died during a police raid following the Paris attacks.[17]

These concerning developments suggest that the fight against homegrown radicalization will become even more complicated as the ties that bind family members under normal circumstances are exploited for nefarious ends by violent extremists. Kinship radicalization seems to be part of a mix of other recruitment strategies, including expanding the proportion of converts to Islam and women in the ranks of radicals as well as increasing reliance on social media. In other words, extremists are going beyond the traditional profile of Muslim males from diaspora communities recruited through the known vectors of radicalization: mosques, prisons, and established militant milieus. The home and extended family is not entirely a new vector of radicalization, but it is becoming more prominent as security agencies are constricting the recruitment environment around radical Islamists.

Another important implication of kinship radicalization is conceptual. As noted earlier, the search for individual motivations for joining the jihad may be missing the point. Kinship recruitment suggests that radicalization is a small-group phenomenon whereby valued peers with extremist ideas transpose their extremism onto apolitical individuals within their orbit through social and psychological mechanisms that are devoid of grievances, ideology, or politics, but instead associated with love, trust, and life-long bonding.

Lastly, it is not entirely clear how counter-radicalization specialists can combat kinship recruitment given its near invisibility to outsiders prior to major acts of terrorism. Therefore, short of specific intelligence on individuals actively engaging in peer-to-peer radicalization, governments may need to design a number of incentives to encourage families to report troubling signs of in-home radicalization and recruitment without fear of prosecution or stigmatization. Such incentives may include the possibility of extending social support to help family members before they have voyaged too far on the arc of radicalization. CTC

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The Military Doctrine of the Islamic State and the Limits of Ba'athist Influence

By Barak Barfi

The Islamic State has seized large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, handily defeating state armies and rebel groups. The conventional wisdom is that its large contingent of former Ba'athist army officers is the key to its military success. Although overlap exists between the Islamic State's techniques and Ba'athist military doctrine and tactical methods, there are also many differences. A hybrid of experiences including lessons learned from the Iraqi insurgency and tactics imported by Chechen jihadis has influenced the Islamic State's military posture and tactics. Three case studies comparing the Islamic State's battles to Ba'athist campaigns sheds light on the organization's military doctrine.

Some attribute the martial success of the Islamic State to the high salaries and perks it provides to its fighters, which dwarf those of other rebel outfits. Others emphasize the Islamic State's unit cohesion and motivation, arguing that while its opponents are motivated by money, the organization fights for Allah's supremacy. The commander of Ajnad al-Sham, a small Salafi brigade fighting in Hama, Syria, told the author, "ISIS [Islamic State] fighters fear nothing. They are completely focused on fighting and nothing else."[1] Indeed, one Islamic State sniper strapped himself to a telephone pole for two days and was fed intravenously before being fatally hit by shrapnel.[2] Still others posit that the Syrian regime colludes with the Islamic State in order to reinforce Damascus' narrative that it is fighting "terrorist gangs."[3] On the domestic front, the Islamic State has made civic inroads by maintaining the Arab social contract whereby the state provides security, subsidized basic staples, and social services in exchange for political quiescence.[4]

The Islamic State's success has certainly benefited from these factors. But beyond coercing hearts and minds and marshalling a large, highly motivated, and well-paid army, the Islamic State must win on the battlefield to hold and extend its caliphate. Military strategy and tactics have rendered it the most skilled fighting force in Iraq and Syria, significantly more effective in most military exchanges than regime and rebel forces there.

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Discussions about the Islamic State's leadership often note that many of its commanders served in the Ba'athist army of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.[5] Mingling in prisons such as Camp Bucca and fighting alongside each other against U.S. troops created bonds between these strange bedfellows.[a] The Ba'athists' absorption into the Islamic State has facilitated a narrative that Hussein loyalists are the driving force behind the organization's military strategy and battlefield triumphs.[6] This article provides a corrective by mapping out the limits of Ba'athist influence on the military doctrine of the Islamic State.

The Ba'athists certainly brought vital experience to their jihadist partners. Their ability to think in military terms and lead large numbers of fighters has facilitated battlefield success. And their understanding of clandestine tradecraft, such as organizational compartmentalization, operational secrecy, and counterintelligence, has also been useful. Indeed, the Islamic State's military campaigns illustrate that in some cases it improved Ba'athist methods while in others the organization adapted these teachings directly to the current conflict. However, sometimes the group abandoned cumbersome and ineffective Ba'athist techniques.[7] One reason why the Islamic State differs from the Ba'athist military is that the organization has benefited from lessons learned during the Iraqi insurgency. In addition, Islamic State members who fought in other conflicts, such as Chechnya, imported their battle knowledge. The Islamic State is thus a hybrid organization. Its members' disparate experiences combined to transform an insurgent force into a formidable army that can shift from acting like a guerilla militia to a conventional army, all while fighting on multiple fronts hundreds of miles away from its logistical bases.

Examining three specific battles, based on eyewitness accounts, sheds light on the military doctrines of the Islamic State. An analysis of these military exchanges, based on interviews with commanders from Free Syrian Army (FSA) units and the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), as well as sources in the Islamic State, highlights its use of light, decentralized detachments to fashion a creative, bold, and mobile force whose approach is different in key respects from Hussein's army.

This does not mean, however, that analysts should reduce the Ba'athists to prisoners of pre-2003 Iraqi military doctrines. Freed from the strictures imposed by Hussein, it is likely that many learned new battle techniques and improvised existing ones. Rather, what should be stressed is that there is no linear connection between Ba'athist doctrines and Islamic State battle methods. Instead, the Islamic State's battle techniques fall into three categories—employing Ba'athist tactics, adapting Ba'athist methods, and

a Hussein's faith campaign facilitated the demise of Ba'athist secularism. See Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

inventing its own new techniques. Though this article compares Ba'athist and jihadist military tactics, a detailed evaluation of how they fused together as an increasing number of Hussein's military officials joined the Islamic State is beyond the scope of this article.[b]

The July 2014 Milibiyya Offensive

At the end of July 2014, the Islamic State attacked the village of Milibiyya, located approximately 10 kilometers southeast of Hassaka, Syria. According to a senior Islamic State source, 400-500 regime soldiers from the 17th Division and the paramilitary National Defense Forces (NDF) were garrisoning Milibiyya.[8] The Islamic State deployed 123 men—121 fighters, a suicide bomber, and a cameraman to film the operation—and targeted Milibiyya for its heavy weapons arsenal, including GRAD rockets and about 60 artillery pieces. The attack lasted from approximately 3 AM to 11 AM.

The Islamic State surrounded the village from the south, west, and north, leaving the main entrance in the east unguarded. Emirs from the Caucasus, headed by the Georgian Abu Umar al-Shishani, led the operation. The other commanders were Abu Hala al-Russi and Abu Mujahid al-Russi. Al-Shishani led light infantry forces from the south, while Abu Hala commanded heavier artillery from the west, including DShK and PK heavy machine guns and 121mm cannons. Abu Mujahid directed a sniper brigade in the north, positioned in what locals call the cotton factory. The three Islamic State units attacked simultaneously. Surrounded on three sides, regime forces fled to Milibiyya's unguarded main entrance. There, a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) was detonated, leading to the eventual collapse of regime forces.

The Milibiyya operation highlights the Islamic State's deviation from traditional Ba'athist military tactics. Under Hussein, force ratios varied from 2:1 for attack to 6:1 at the point of penetration.[9] At the outset of the Iran-Iraq war, Baghdad had a 6:1 overall force advantage.[10][c] But in Milibiyya, the Islamic State was at a quantitative disadvantage of 1:4, illustrating that it often conceives of battles in guerilla rather than conventional military terms. The Islamic State's quantitative disadvantages are offset by its qualitatively superior troops and motivation, a characteristic lacking in the Ba'athist army where many frontline soldiers quickly surrendered in 1991.

But Milibiyya also illustrated how some Ba'athist military doctrines have continued to shape the Islamic State's practices. Although in this case the SVBIED was employed at the end of the attack, the Islamic State often uses SVBIEDs at the outset to break through lines and feign assaults. The use of SVBIEDs has often been highlighted,[11] but its place in the Islamic State's military doctrine is not well understood. Some analysts have emphasized their shock value in disorienting enemy forces and causing chaos.[12] Others have focused on the extensive damage they cause.[13] But, arguably, the key to understanding the Islamic State's use of SVBIEDs is Ba'athist military doctrine. Following Baghdad's dismal showing against the Israelis in 1973 and its failed campaigns against Kurdish rebellions, the army moved away from frontal assaults to focus on overwhelming firepower.[14] Central Intelligence Agency reports on Iraqi tactics noted that assaults were "preceded by artillery barrages" and that "the Iraqis learned to rely heavily upon armored units for offensive operations. By 1984, tank formations were almost always used for the primary assault."[15]

"The Islamic State is a hybrid organization. Its members' disparate experiences combined to transform an insurgent force into a formidable army that can shift from a guerilla militia to a conventional army."

In its early days, the Islamic State changed strategy by favoring infantry over armor. Unlike the Iraqi army, the Islamic State did not have sufficient caches of artillery and armor to sustain long assaults until it captured Mosul in June 2014. Instead, it had abundant and superior infantry. But Islamic State commanders clung to Ba'athist doctrines. They merely substituted SVBIEDs for artillery and armor, employing suicide bombers in the same fashion. For this reason SVBIEDs are used heavily at the outset of Islamic State offensives. They can be seen as a continuation of traditional Ba'ath techniques albeit adapted to the current situation.

Another indication that some Ba'athist military doctrines have become ingrained is that the Islamic State almost always deploys SVBIEDs against targets in fixed areas selected before the battle and only rarely changes these targets.[16] The Iraqi army favored frontal assaults over maneuvering and flanking operations.[17] Its heavy artillery—even mobile mechanisms such as surface to air missile launchers—was static.[18] Artillery was deployed according to predetermined firing plans and was rarely repositioned.[19] During the Gulf War, prepositioned oil drums on roads were used to guide salvos against coalition forces, but when they maneuvered away, the Iraqis still aimed at the drums.[20] The Islamic State does the same.

The August 2015 Umm-al-Shuk Offensive

On August 29, 2015, Islamic State forces amassed in Umm al-Shuk, about 10 kilometers southwest of Hassaka. Moving north, Islamic State fighters opened fire against heavily fortified defensive positions of the YPG about 2.9 kilometers away. Approximately 50-60 fighters used heavy weapons such as DshKs and mortars in a battle that lasted from 9 PM until the morning. This was a tactical diversion from the real objective, the Martyr Aras post several hundred meters to the east. In a cluster of houses in Rajim al-Tufayhi, they amassed a platoon of fewer than 10 men. These camouflaged forc-

b Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the creator of the Islamic State's forerunner, was distrustful of Ba'athists. His successor, Abu Umar al- Baghdadi, proved more accepting. When current Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took control in 2010, the numbers of Ba'athists then increased. Already by 2007, analysts were highlighting the links between al-Qa`ida in Iraq and the Ba'athists. See Andrew Tilghman, "The Myth of AQI," *Washington Monthly*, October 2007. For the later expansion of ties, see Martin Chulov, "Isis: The Inside Story," *Guardian*, December 14, 2014; Shiv Malik et al., "How Isis Crippled al-Qaida," *Guardian*, June 11, 2015; Liz Sly, "The Hidden Hand Behind the Islamic State Militants? Saddam Hussein's," *Washington Post*, April 5, 2015; and Hamza Hendawi and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "There's One Major Reason Why ISIS Has Been So Successful," Associated Press, August 8, 2015.

c As the war progressed, Iraq's quantitative advantage fell to 2:1, although in some battles, such as al-Faw, it was as high as 13.33:1. Stephen Pelletiere and Douglas Johnson, *Lessons Learned: The Iran-Iraq War*, U.S. Marine Corps, v. 1, pp. 10 and 39.

"The use of IEDs demonstrates the Islamic State's smooth transition from an insurgent force to a traditional military, tailoring its advantages to specific situations."

es tried to crawl the 915 meters to the Kurdish post, but suffered losses and retreated.[d] Though a failure, the Umm al-Shuk attack reveals that the Islamic State is willing to take risks, aiming to be a much more flexible and nimble fighting force than its Ba'athist predecessor.

The highly creative operation was likely decided at the tactical level without input from the strategic command. This indicates that the Islamic State has overcome the greatest obstacle to Arab military effectiveness—tactical deficiency.[21] Historically, Iraqi forces from platoon to brigade have "repeatedly showed little aggressive initiative, little willingness to innovate or improvise, little ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances, and little ability to act independently."[22 e]

The Islamic State, however, is not saddled with this patrimony. King's College Professor Andreas Krieg, who embedded with Iraqi Kurdish forces, concluded that Islamic State tactical commanders are given significant latitude to improvise.[23] The organization's decentralized structure affords them "significant autonomy to initiate operations without strategic-level authorization."[24] Some analysts see junior units' lack of "strategic coherence" and "tactical restlessness" as a weakness.[25] In truth, it is vital to the Islamic State's success. Tactical leeway nourishes a mobile force that innovatively strikes against larger and better-equipped forces.

Moreover, the Islamic State exhibits a learning curve by improving its effectiveness over time. In contrast, the Ba'athists "simply did not learn from one battle to the next,"[26] largely due to the Iraqi army's overcentralized military hierarchy. It had "a rigid top-down C2 (command and control) system" where senior commanders made all the decisions.[27] In the 2003 war, Hussein did not permit division and corps commanders authority over units.[28] Commanders up to the corps level refused to initiate activity, fearing execution if they failed.[29] Junior officers could not plan offensives, and even if they were permitted, they could never draw them up. Tactical forces were only successful in heavily scripted operations and static positions. For these reasons, Ba'athist forces were not only trained but indoctrinated to conduct purely static defensive operations. The Islamic State's tactical creativity is likely due to the jihadist experience, where small cells operate outside the purview of the leadership's command, rather than an epiphany by its Ba'athist members.

d The author visited the site the following day, viewed Islamic State fighters through binoculars, and was briefed by YPG field commanders.

e In contrast, McLaurin argues that tactical commanders and conscripts are "reasonably competent fighters" and blames the senior echelons for poor military performance. R.D. McLaurin, "Military Operations in the Gulf War: The Battle of Khorramshahr," *U.S. Army Human Engineering Laboratory* (Aberdeen Proving Ground, 1982), p. 25.

The June 2015 Hassaka Offensive

On May 31, 2015, the Islamic State attacked Hassaka from the south, quickly capturing the southern regime-held neighborhoods as the NDF units there collapsed. The YPG, which controlled the northern part of the city, did not intervene until June 27 when the Islamic State moved north, brushing up against the Kurdish quarters. From Jabal Aziz, west of the city, the YPG moved troops southeast to Hassaka's southern entrance where Islamic State forces were concentrated. From the village of Fallahi, east of Hassaka, the YPG marched southwest. These deployments were designed to encircle the Islamic State and cut off its supply routes from the cities of al-Arisha and al-Hawl. After several weeks of fighting, the YPG cornered the Islamic State in the southeastern neighborhood of al-Zuhur.

Among the Islamic State's heavy weapons employed were SVBE-IDs, mortars, and tanks. The Islamic State used high ground, placing snipers and DShKs on tall buildings. As fighters retreated, they mined buildings and planted remote controlled improvised explosive devices (IEDs). They burned tires as smokescreens, impeding the coalition's airstrikes.[30]

The al-Zuhur siege best illustrates the hybrid organization that the Islamic State has become, using insurgent tactics in defensive positions. The weapon of choice for the Islamic State's predecessors during the U.S. occupation in Iraq was the IED, which was an effective tool that protected its own troops. But in al-Zuhur, it was used to screen the withdrawal of a conventional fighting force. The use of IEDs demonstrates the Islamic State's smooth transition from an insurgent force to a traditional military, tailoring its advantages to specific situations. The tactics used during the withdrawal reflect the employment of methods the Ba'athists never utilized.

The Hassaka offensive further demonstrates how the Islamic State now approaches battles. The insurgent's objective is to win the population's support.[31] Receptive Arabs in the southern parts of Hassaka facilitated the Islamic State's lightning-speed occupation, but the northern areas are populated with hostile Kurdish civilians who actively aided the YPG. Such demographics would normally dissuade insurgents from futile operations like the Hassaka offensive. But the Islamic State is no longer an insurgent organization that can only hold remote territory or engage in hit-and-run ambushes. Its desire to become a continuously conquering state to which Muslims can emigrate has led it to modify and even abandon various guerilla tactics.

The Hassaka offensive also illustrates the Islamic State's use of intelligence. The Ba'athist military consistently failed at collecting, assessing, and sharing intelligence,[32] which was sometimes politicized with battlefield and casualty losses underreported.[33] At other times it was not analyzed. Rarely was it dispatched to field units. During the Gulf War, Iraqi prisoners of war revealed that intelligence was "almost zero."[34] Intelligence officers and their commanders gleaned information about coalition troops through Western radio and television broadcasts.[35] During the invasion of Kuwait, field commanders relied on tourist maps.[36]

Intelligence and reconnaissance, however, are a key factor in the Islamic State's success. According to Ciwan Ibrahim, head of Syrian Kurdish internal security, the Islamic State initially sends small groups into enemy territory to ascertain its power holders.[37] Next comes close-target reconnaissance of checkpoints, defensive positions, enemy routines, force size, and weaponry. An advance guard is then dispatched to provide early warning and security to

ensure unhindered movements. Finally, the main force moves in. Sleeper cells are a part of this strategy, and infiltrating enemy ranks reflects the apex of counterintelligence. Their use in Hassaka expedited the NDF's quick collapse there while facilitating the seizure of other towns.[38]

Islamic State agents captured by the YPG revealed to the author how the organization surveils enemy territory. One adolescent claimed that he was dispatched to the village of Ayn Isa to identify military targets for SVBIEDs.[39] He then reported to his handlers, who sent an SVBEID to the point he identified. The Islamic State has also created sleeper cells in YPG-controlled areas to assemble and detonate car bombs.[40]

Use of Special Forces

The Islamic State's use of frontline special forces represents a sharp deviation from traditional Ba'ath techniques. FSA commanders such as Captain Hassan Hajari of the Suqur al-Jabal Brigade[41] note that SVBIEDs are often followed by small commando units working in groups of 20 or fewer, known as the *Inghimasiyyin*,[42] largely foreign contingents according to Islamic State commanders.[43 f] Prized for their speed and ability,[44 g] they are specially trained for fighting in close quarters.[45] Their mission is to break enemy defensive lines and take difficult targets such as fortified positions.[46]

In contrast, forward Ba'athist units were poorly staffed by conscripts[47] but backed up by more proficient armor and artillery units.[48] In the rear were Hussein's elite Republican Guard units, who "served as the theater reserve and counterattack force."[49] The difference between frontline Ba'athist and Islamic State fighters also extends to ideology. The *Inghimasiyyin* are highly motivated and fearless, donning explosive belts that they do not hesitate to use.[h] Dr. Nasser Hajj Mansour, a senior official in the Syrian Kurds' Defense Ministry, emphasized that initial Islamic State infantry forces are composed of highly ideological foreign fighters and that subsequent assault units contain less ideological troops.[50] In contrast, frontline Ba'athist infantry had no ideological connection to the regime and was often no more than cannon fodder. Thus, while Ba'athist forces were progressively more effective as one moved away from the front lines, Islamic State troops are qualitatively more superior as one moves toward them.

The Caucasus Factor

Although the Islamic State blends Ba'athist and insurgent tactics, it also draws on other groups' techniques. The organization has a large contingent of fighters from the Caucasus. Many of them fought against the Russians in Chechnya. There, rebels defended their capital of Grozny against the Russians and later employed guerilla tactics after losing it. Highly ideological and motivated,[51]

In this Islamic State image, one of its fighters is pictured in Fallujah, Iraq, in July 2015.

they relied on mobile, light infantry units. Platoons of 10-15 men swarmed armored columns,[52] rarely ambushing with more than 75 men.[53] They hugged the Russians from 50-250 meters away, rendering heavy artillery unusable.[54 i] They were nimble,[55] with mortar crews firing several rounds before relocating to avoid Russian detection.[56] These agile troops outflanked the Russians from the rear, a tactic the Ba'athists could not perform.[57]

Like the Islamic State, the Chechens encountered unfavorable force ratios. In 1994-95, the Chechens had about 10,000 fighters against approximately 24,000 Russians.[58 j] During the second Battle for Grozny in 1996, they attacked with about 1,500 troops against 12,000 Russians.[59] During the third Battle for Grozny four years later, they were 2,000-3,000 against 95,000.[60] When Russian forces invaded Grozny in January 1995, rebels created a concentric three-ring defense with strongpoints for firing positions.[61] To defend it in 2000, they dug trenches and used an elaborate underground tunnel system.[62] The Islamic State has created similar defenses in its cities of Mosul and Raqqa, building walls and digging trenches in concentric circles.[k] Like the Islamic State during the al-Zuhur siege, the Chechens mined everything from doorways to Russian soldiers' corpses when retreating from Grozny.[63] They set charges at oil installations and chemical plants.[64] And like the Islamic State, the Chechens possessed a vast array of heavy weaponry.[65] In fact, the Islamic State's adaptation to the coalition air campaign may draw on the Chechens' own experiences.[66]

But just as there are discrepancies between Ba'athist and Islamic State tactics, they exist between the organization and the Chechens. Against the Russians, the least skilled fighters were placed at the front.[67] And unlike the Islamic State's ample manpower and

f An Islamic State commander of an *Inghimasi* brigade in the Salah al-Din province in Iraq claimed he had 300 men with an additional 600 in similar brigades in the governates of Mosul and al-Anbar. For the criterion used to select them, see Absi Sumaysam, "Al-Inghimasiyyun: Al-Quwwah Al-Dharibah li-al-Tanzimat Al-Jihadiyyah." [Inghimasis: The Striking Force of Jihadi Organizations], *al-Arabi al-Jadid*, December 22, 2014.

g The Islamic State commander also noted they are the best troops.

h The *Inghimasiyyin* should not be confused with suicide bombers whose sole mission is to blow themselves up. The Inghimasiyyin only detonate their charges after fighting and only if death is imminent. For the differences between them, see Absi Sumaysam.

i Other analysis claims the range was 25-100 meters. Arthur Speyer, "The Two Sides of Grozny," in Russell Glenn ed., *Capital Preservation: Preparing for Urban Operations in the Twenty-First Century* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation), p. 88.

j Other analysis notes that Russia had 45,000 troops against 15,000 Chechen guerrillas. Speyer, p. 68.

k The Islamic State began building these trenches in Mosul in 2014, long before the Western press began reporting on it. See "Da'ish Tahfur Khanadiq Hawl Madinat Al-Mosul." [Da'ish Digs Trenches Around Mosul City], *Karbala News*, December 18, 2014. For Raqqa, see Bawla Astih, "ISIS is Digging," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 25, 2015.

weaponry, the Chechens had limited resources, which prevented conducting extensive engagements.[68]

Conclusion

The Islamic State has evolved as a fighting force throughout its various iterations and expansion. The conscription of Ba'athists brought the organization valuable military experience, but instead of a wholesale embrace of these teachings, a continually developing Islamic State has selected, adapted, and at times even rejected these techniques. Ba'athist influence can be seen clearly—for example, in its use of SVBIEDs as early overwhelming firepower. But from morale to tactical command, the organization is not saddled with the Ba'athists' liabilities. The Islamic State's expert use of forward agents and sleeper cells to gather intelligence is in direct contrast to the Ba'athists' utter lack of pre-battle reconnaissance. Moreover, the group continues to adapt and innovate, sinuously moving between guerilla tactics, conventional military techniques, and hybrid methods. A clear demonstration of this creativity is the use of tactical battle diversions devised without the input of senior leaders. And the Islamic State adapts to specific contexts rather than applying rigid doctrines. For example, lacking the Ba'athists' superior force ratios, the group instead often deploys special forces at the outset of battles. For this reason, the Islamic State is a formidable military force that cannot be easily categorized.

Understanding the Islamic State's various components, its military evolution, and its battlefield strengths is vital if it is to be defeated. Dismissing it as an insurgent organization or the offspring of a conventional army blinds military strategists to its hybrid realities. Its multifaceted nature affords it a panoply of strategy and tactics that it tailors to its current foes. This flexibility and unpredictability is a key to its success that cannot be overlooked. CTC

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Junud al-Sham and the German Foreign Fighter Threat

By Guido Steinberg

In 2013 and 2014, more than 30 German fighters joined Junud al-Sham (Soldiers of Syria), a Chechen jihadist group in northern Syria. Most of them hailed from the jihadist hotspots of Berlin, Bonn, and Frankfurt and belonged to a German group called Millatu Ibrahim (Abraham's community) led by Austrian-Egyptian Mohamed Mahmoud. After the emergence of the Islamic State, most of these Germans left Junud al-Sham and joined the Iraqi-led organization. Nevertheless, their experience with the Chechen group was important because they received extensive training by Junud al-Sham and in many cases had their first battlefield experiences under its leadership. Moreover, the shared experiences of that group created tight bonds between Germans, Turks, Caucasians, and jihadis of other nationalities, which will likely shape the nature of the terrorist threat in Germany and other European states in the coming years.

Among the more than 30,000 foreign fighters who have flocked to Syria since 2011 to join the fight against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, Chechens have been one of the largest contingents. Although commonly referred to as Chechens, they include Caucasians of other origins, such as Dagestanis and Ingush, all of whom have chosen Syria as an alternative battlefield to their native Caucasus region where jihadis have suffered numerous setbacks in their fight against the Russians and their local allies in recent years. As a result, since 2012, several thousand Caucasians have made their way to Syria.

Although not the largest Chechen group, Junud al-Sham—led by veteran Chechen jihadi Murad Margoshvili—has managed to remain independent while closely cooperating with Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, with which it took part in many of the major operations in the Syrian provinces of Latakia, Aleppo, and Idlib from 2013 to 2015. Junud al-Sham has trained hundreds of fighters from the Caucasus, Turkey, Germany, Austria, and a host of other nations and prepared them for the fight against the Assad regime. In the course of the emerging struggle between Jabhat al-Nusra and its allies on the one side and the Islamic State on the other, though, most non-Caucasians left Junud al-Sham in late 2013 and early 2014 and joined the Islamic State. A small minority has stayed with their Chechen brethren in Junud al-Sham.

Information introduced at a series of terrorism trials in Germany and one in Turkey has shed significant new light on the organization and its structure, its strength, its national and ethnic composition, and its German contingent. Most importantly, Harun Pashtoon, a 29-year-old German-Afghan who left Junud al-Sham in March 2014 and returned to his native Munich, testified in his own and others' trials, providing an extensive overview of the organization and its members.[a] A second German, Benjamin Xu, a young jihadi of Macedonian-Chinese origin from Berlin and born in 1996, was arrested in Turkey in March 2014, where he volunteered detailed information to his interrogators about his stay in Syria with Junud al-Sham and subsequently the Islamic State.[1 b]

Murad Margoshvili and Junud al-Sham

In 2013, the Chechen jihadist contingent in Syria experienced serious internal disagreements, which led to the breakup of its largest organization, the Army of Emigrants and Helpers (Jaish al-Muhajirin wa-l-Ansar, or JMA). The split was instigated by its leader Abu Umar al-Shishani, who moved steadily closer to the Islamic State from early summer 2013, culminating in his public declaration of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on November 21 of that year. Already in July 2013, his second-in-command Saifullah al-Shishani had left the group over criticism of its new alliance with the Islamic State and joined Jabhat al-Nusra in late 2013. Another commander named Salahuddin al-Shishani continued to use the JMA label and claimed to operate as the Syrian branch of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus and its then-leader Doku Umarov.[2 c]

Junud al-Sham is the only major Chechen group that continues to claim independence from larger organizations, be it the Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra, or the Caucasus Emirate. It owes its reputation and probably its very existence to its charismatic leader, Murad Margoshvili (fighting name Muslim Abu al-Walid al-Shishani, born 1972). Among the Chechen commanders in Syria, he is the only one who is widely known to have taken part, as a field commander, in the Chechen wars against Russia. His reputation seems to have suffered from his release from a Russian jail in 2005 after only two years in custody, leading to rumors about collaboration with the

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a Pashtoon was sentenced to 11 years in prison by the Higher State Court in Munich in July 2015.

b Xu and two accomplices had opened fire on Turkish policemen during a routine stop in the southern province of Nigde. They killed three but were quickly apprehended.

c A significant part of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus has gone over to the Islamic State side. See Derek Henry Flood: "The Islamic State Raises Its Black Flag Over The Caucasus," *CTC Sentinel* 8:6 (2015): pp. 1-4.

authorities. This, coupled with the ideological rift between Jabhat al-Nusra/al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State, might have prevented him from becoming the overall leader of the Caucasians in Syria. Nevertheless, Junud al-Sham is a well-known and well-respected organization, which has managed to survive to this very day, and one that attracted many foreign fighters in 2013, although it never recovered from its losses afterwards.

Margoshvili is renowned among Caucasian and Turkish jihadis, who have reportedly nicknamed him "the Viking" due to his imposing stature and red-blond beard and long hair. Like all the major Chechen commanders in Syria, Margoshvili is a Georgian national and ethnic Kist, a minority closely related to the Chechens and located in the Pankisi gorge, formerly the main supply line for the rebels in neighboring Chechnya.[3] According to his German language video biography published in 2013, Margoshvili served in the Soviet Red Army and in 1995 was attracted to the Chechen struggle when the legendary Saudi Arabian field commander Khattab (originally Thamir al-Suwailim, who died in 2002) established training camps in Chechnya. Rising in the ranks of the rebels, he first commandeered his own fighting group during the second Chechen war (1999-2006), under the command of Khattab and then his successor, the Saudi Abu Walid al-Ghamidi (d. 2006). Pictures of the young Margoshvili between 1999 and 2002 show him together with jihadist heroes of the Chechen struggle like Khattab, Abu Walid, Shamil Bassayev (d. 2006), and Aslan Maskhadov (d. 2005).[4]

Repeatedly injured during fighting in Grozny, he was arrested by Russian troops in 2003 and spent the next two years in jail. It remains an unsolved riddle why the Russians, who are known for their harsh treatment of suspected terrorists, released him at all and after such a short time, a fact which raised doubts as to whether Margoshvili might have cooperated with his captors. After reportedly having recovered from the repercussions of heavy torture, Margoshvili returned to fight in a new jihadist unit in Dagestan from 2008 onward. When he did not manage to rejoin the struggle in Chechnya in the following years, Margoshvili decided to carry the fight to Syria when the civil war broke out there; he arrived in Syria in 2012.[5]

Margoshvili quickly managed to establish a small organization in the Turkish border area, specifically in a region called Turkmen Mountain (Jabal Turkman) in the northeastern part of the coastal province of Latakia and in the northern part of Idlib, where Junud al-Sham was clearly identifiable from spring 2013.[d] Because of their military experience, Margoshvili and his lieutenants were able to offer advanced guerilla training for the growing numbers of Caucasian, Turkish, European, and Arab fighters flocking to Syria. In its early publications, Junud al-Sham published videos and pictures of training in the Syrian mountains and boasted that it trained "young Mujahidin, who arrive from the whole world to fight the jihad."[e] As a result, the group seems to have grown quickly, with its numbers

Murad Margoshvili JIHADI MEDIA

reaching some 200-350 fighters in mid- to late-2013.[f]

The organization quickly developed its own command structure with Chechens dominating its upper ranks. Margoshvili was its uncontested leader and became a focus of the group's propaganda effort, which celebrated the exploits of the veteran. His second-in-command and head of military operations was and is Abu Bakr al-Shishani.[6] The number three seems to have been Abu Turab al-Shishani, who is also presented as a military leader in the organization's propaganda but seems to have been subordinate to Abu Bakr.[7] Quite possibly, each of the two commanders was responsible for one of the group's two main areas of operations, the coastal mountains and the northern suburbs of Aleppo. Below these two, there are several Caucasians known to have served as mid-level functionaries and commanders of smaller units of the organization—some of them Chechens who lived in Europe before moving to Syria.[g]

Non-Chechen Europeans, Turks, and Arabs only headed small contingents of compatriots without playing a major role in the organization. The only non-Chechens in superior positions in 2013 seem to have been two Arab religious scholars, a North African allegedly named Abu Schams al-Maghribi, who according to Pashtoon was a well-known authority, and an Egyptian called Abu Abdallah. Al-Maghribi is said to have been very close to Margoshvili, but nothing further is known about his career.[8] Although Margoshvili claimed that Arabs and Syrians played important roles in the organization, there is no evidence that they were of particular importance for it.

Junud al-Sham and the Conflict Between Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State

After having secured its headquarters and surroundings in Jabal Turkman in May 2013, Junud al-Sham took part in most major military campaigns headed by Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham.

d According to Pashtoon, Margoshvili lived in the village of Rihaniya, which is near Rabia. Testimony by Harun Pashtoon in the presence of the author, Higher State Court Düsseldorf, May 15, 2015.

e The quote is taken from Margoshvili's video biography, where a short clip of the training is shown. On its Google+ page, the group published photographs of its Emir Muslim giving a speech before the start of military training ("#Amir #Muslim Abu Waleed bei der Ansprache vor dem Beginn des #Militärtrainings") and a picture of the German jihadist Denis Cuspert with an RPG. See https://plus.google.com/+ShamcenterInfo/posts.

f Pashtoon gave a number of 200-250 during trial in Munich. Testimony by Harun Pashtoon in the presence of the author, Higher State Court Munich, February 6, 2015. In post-arrest interviews, he is reported to have quoted a slightly higher number of 300-350 fighters.

g In 2013 and 2014, a Caucasian named Abu Riduan was responsible for the obligatory security checks of recruits. Testimony by Harun Pashtoon in the presence of the author, Higher State Court Munich, March 5, 2015.

This began with the coastal offensive of August 2013 when Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, the Islamic State (known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, at the time), and several smaller outfits attacked small towns and villages around Baruda in the coastal mountains. The rebels were able to take some of the locations but were quickly repelled when regime reinforcements arrived. The Islamist coalition left a lasting impression, however, by committing numerous atrocities against the Alawite civilian population.[9]

This was the only time that Junud al-Sham cooperated with the Islamic State/ISIL. When tensions rose between Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIL that summer, Margoshvili took the side of the former. Just like most other Islamist rebels in Syria, he believed that it was paramount to avoid a confrontation between Muslims in order not to weaken the struggle against the al-Assad regime, but slowly had to come to terms with the fact that the Iraqi-dominated organization aimed to control the rebellion and subjugate the other insurgent groups. Margoshvili later conceded that he was too late in understanding the Islamic State's strategy and complained bitterly that its emergence weakened the rebels' overall objective. He especially chastised Abu Umar al-Shishani and his followers in the JMA for swearing allegiance to the Islamic State and perpetrating crimes against fellow rebels and the Syrian population.[h]

Margoshvili's support for Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham pushed many foreigners to leave his group and join the Islamic State.[i] As a result, Junud al-Sham shrank in numbers and was forced to intensify its cooperation with the other rebels.[j] This was clearly discernible over the course of the next two years when Junud al-Sham operated as part of the rebel alliance led by Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, an alliance that from March 2015 called itself Jaish al-Fath (Army of Conquest). The first big operation was an attack on Aleppo Central Prison in early February 2014, the last major regime stronghold in the area, which was led by Margoshvili. Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham took part, but Junud al-Sham and other Chechens seem to have constituted most of the fighting force.[10] The offensive suffered from the ongoing in-fighting among the insurgents in the surrounding areas and was beaten back by regime forces, which managed to lift the year-long prison siege and inflict heavy losses on the assailants.[11]

Probably due to its loss of membership to the Islamic State, which continued in 2014, Junud al-Sham never regained comparable prominence but instead had to act as a small junior partner of Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham. As such, it took part in an attack on the city of Kasab next to the Turkish border and the Mediterranean Sea in northern Latakia. The large offensive, dubbed Battle of Anfal by the rebels, began on March 21, 2014, and involved the big Islamist groups plus a small Free Syrian Army contingent. The insurgents advanced to the coast and took the strategically important Height 45, which controlled the road between the city of Latakia and the Turkish border.[12] Only a few days later, however, the rebel coalition was again beaten back by advancing government troops. Not much was heard of Junud al-Sham for the following year until it participated in the takeover of the city of Jisr al-Shughur in the western part of the province of Idlib in April 2015. This was part of a major advance of the newly formed Jaish al-Fath under the leadership of Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham. Junud al-Sham was only one among many groups involved, and it remains unclear whether it had played any significant role in the fighting.[13] Although Junud al-Sham continues to exist as an independent group, it seems to be much smaller today than in 2013 or 2014.

"Junud al-Sham's most important contribution to the jihadist scene may have been in its training of hundreds of foreign fighters, providing them with their first battlefield experiences and forging relationships between its members."

The Germans in Junud al-Sham

Junud al-Sham's most important contribution to the jihadist scene may have been in its training of hundreds of foreign fighters, providing them with their first battlefield experiences in Latakia and Aleppo and forging relationships between its European, Turkish, and Caucasian members.

More than 30 German fighters joined Junud al-Sham, and while most of them arrived in 2013, some had already come to Syria as early as 2012. Most Germans were drawn to Junud al-Sham because they were either members or supporters of a German group of jihadis called Millatu Ibrahim. This group was founded in Berlin in late 2011 after its leader Mohamed Mahmoud (aka Abu Usama al-Gharib) moved from Vienna to Berlin and made contact with like-minded German jihadis, most prominently Denis Cuspert (aka Abu Talha al-Almani), a former gangster rapper.[14] The small group took part in violent demonstrations in Solingen and Bonn in the western part of the country in May 2012 and consequently was banned by the federal government. Many members, including its two leaders, fled to Egypt and then to Derna in Libya, where they reportedly received training by sympathetic groups before they traveled to Turkey in late 2012 or early 2013. Mahmoud was arrested by Turkish authorities in March 2013 and remained in jail until he was released in August 2014, directly joining the Islamic State

h In a long speech published in July 2014, Margoshvili described in detail how it took him and the other rebels a long time and many bitter experiences to understand that the Islamic State had no intention of cooperating with fellow insurgents, even if they were jihadis. He complained bitterly about the internal conflict (*fitna*) among the rebels in general and held the Islamic State and its supporters responsible. He especially blamed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his organization for betraying al-Qa`ida despite having sworn an oath to the organization and its leader, and he criticized them for weakening the insurgency by trying to take over liberated territories and killing other rebels and their leaders. The text was translated into German by a member or supporter of Junud al-Sham. "Amir Muslim Abu Walid of the Brigade Junud al-Sham: Wisdom takes a break" (in German), n.p., n.d., pp. 6-7.

i Margoshvili is reported to have freed those fighters who wanted to leave from all obligations incurred by their oath of allegiance to him. Testimony by Harun Pashtoon in the presence of the author, Higher State Court Munich, March 5, 2015.

j Margoshvili himself mentioned the loss of fighters in his July 2014 speech. "Amir Muslim Abu Walid: Wisdom takes a break," p. 15.

afterward.[k] Cuspert and the others managed to enter Syria in spring 2013 where they joined Junud al-Sham and received training.[l]

A prior connection between the German extremist network and Chechen jihadis seems to have been established in a mosque in Berlin, where Cuspert was known to have been in contact with local Chechen and Turkish radicals. This network seems to have been the connection between the German jihadist scene and the Chechens in Syria. It sent other militants who had remained in Germany in spite of the ban and the subsequent crackdown until early 2013 to Junud al-Sham in Syria.[m]

The sequence of events and the role of the Berlin network becomes clear in the report about the interrogations of Benjamin Xu in Turkish custody. Xu's father, Nimetullah, was a constant visitor to a mosque called "Fusilat 33" in the Berlin quarter of Wedding, which was administered by Turkish jihadis and where Turks and Chechens regularly met.[n] In April 2013, Nimetullah Xu and Fatih Kahraman, a close friend of Cuspert's from Berlin, traveled to Turkey, where they met Benjamin and headed to Syria. They were received by a group of German Junud al-Sham fighters at the border crossing of Bab al-Hawa and went on to train with the group.[15] While more German recruits—many of them Turks and Chechens from Berlin and some others from Frankfurt and Bonn—continued arriving in the Junud al-Sham camps, a group of them, among them Denis Cuspert, took part in the coastal offensive in August 2013 where they gained their first battlefield experience.[o]

From August 2013, Germans began to leave Junud al-Sham and join the Islamic State (ISIL at the time). Cuspert, his close associate Farid Saal, and some others were the first to leave. They settled in northern Latakia, where ISIL had built a base under the command of the notorious Abu Aiman al-Iraqi, but remained in contact with members of Junud al-Sham. Until they left the area in late 2013 and early 2014, they tried to convince the remaining Germans in Junud al-Sham to defect as well. They were successful in this, as most of them did in fact join ISIL in these months.[p] Although some Germans stayed with the Chechen organization and took part in the attack on Aleppo prison in early February 2014, only a few Germans have stayed with Margoshvili—their commander Abu Fahd (originally Rashid A.), a German Arab from the Bonn region, and his lieutenant Muhammad Turki (aka Mehmet Ceylan).[q] Mohamed Mahmoud, Denis Cuspert, and dozens of supporters of Millatu Ibrahim together with many Turks and some Chechens moved eastward with ISIL, and those who have not died have formed the core of the now Islamic State's German contingent. Mahmoud became its leader and Cuspert its leading propagandist before his reported death in a U.S. strike in Syria in October 2015.[16]

Conclusion

Since the inception of the German jihadist scene in the 1990s, its members have developed a strong sympathy for the Chechen cause. In 1999, Mohammed Atta and his friends wanted to fight in Chechnya before they were convinced to travel to Afghanistan because they lacked military training. The Sauerland group failed to find a way to the Caucasian battlefields before joining the Islamic Jihad Union in Pakistan in 2006. With the end of the second Chechen war in 2006, the opportunity to join their brethren in the Caucasus seemed to have been missed for good. But with the emergence of a Chechen jihadist diaspora and the establishment of organizations like Junud al-Sham in Syria, German jihadis finally have been able to link up.

The new bonds will add a fresh dimension to the terrorist threat in Germany and Austria, with Germans, Turks, Arabs, and Chechens forming an even more international crowd than before. Most importantly, success of counterterrorism operations in Europe will increasingly depend on cooperation with Russia and Turkey. The terrorist threat from these little-understood networks will affect all European countries with a substantial Chechen diaspora. This is especially the case for Austria, where about half of all 250 nationals who went to Syria are of Chechen origin.[17] Furthermore, over the years, jihadis from Germany and Austria had, for the most part, lacked training and battlefield experience, which might explain the relatively low number of terrorist attacks and plots there.[r] Partly due to training and fighting with the Chechens both before and after the Germans joined the Islamic State, this has changed and has made German jihadis and their allies a more potent terrorist threat. CTC

k Mahmoud's wife stayed with Junud al-Sham in fall 2013.

l Pictures of Cuspert during training can be seen at https://plus.google.com/+ShamcenterInfo/posts. There is a video showing a small group of German Junud al-Sham members during training. Sham Center (in cooperation with Junud al-Sham), "Holiday Greetings: A Speech by Abu Talha Al Almani" (in German).

m The ban of the organization involved house searches and other measures, which prompted many members of Millatu Ibrahim to leave the country.

n The trial of two Turkish administrators of the mosque, Ismet D. and Emin F., started in January 2016. Both had been to Syria for a short visit with their friends in Junud al-Sham, but they returned shortly after. The attorney general accused them of having supported the organization with money and recruits.

o Video footage showing Cuspert close to Margoshvili during the fighting was shown in the trial against his friend Fatih Kahraman in Berlin in 2015.

p This process was described in detail by Pashtoon's testimonies during trial in Munich, Berlin, and Düsseldorf. According to Pashtoon, Farid Saal from Bonn visited the remaining Germans in order to win them over to ISIL.

q While Abu Fahd seems to have remained in Syria and might have stayed with Junud al-Sham, Ceylan was killed in early 2014.

r Germans only started to travel to jihadist war zones in 2006, long after their French and British counterparts. Most of them did not stay long enough to acquire experience. Nevertheless, there have been serious plots in Germany linked to overseas training, like the Sauerland case in 2007, which were thwarted by German and allied authorities. The only fatal jihadist attack in Germany to date was the shooting of American airmen at Frankfurt airport on March 2, 2011, by Arid Uka, a young Kosovar who had grown up in Germany. Two airmen were killed, and two were seriously injured.

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Depictions of Children and Youth in the Islamic State's Martyrdom Propaganda, 2015-2016

By Mia Bloom, John Horgan, and Charlie Winter

The Islamic State is mobilizing children and youth at an increasing and unprecedented rate. The authors present preliminary findings from a new database in which they recorded and analyzed child and youth "martyrs" eulogized by the Islamic State between January 2015 and January 2016. The data suggests that the number of child and youth militants far exceeds current estimates. The article presents data on the children and youth's country of origin, age, role, location of death, and under what circumstances they were killed. The authors also describe several trends in the propaganda before discussing the varied and complex implications of the Islamic State's long-term vision for its children and youth.

Violent extremist organizations (VEOs) are mobilizing children at an ever-accelerating rate. The Pakistani Taliban run several so-called schools dedicated to graduating prepubescent bombers, Houthi rebels in Yemen have routinized the inclusion of children in their ranks, while the Lebanese Hezbollah has begun accepting adolescents into its ranks to boost its presence in Syria.[1] The mobilization of children into VEOs (and featuring them in propaganda) is not a new phenomenon and has many historical antecedents. This is perhaps most common in the context of child soldiers. However, the Islamic State has so heavily championed the mobilization of children—on a scale rarely associated even with VEOs—that it suggests organizational concerns that far outweigh short-term propaganda benefits. That is not to minimize the importance of the latter for the Islamic State. Indeed, the publicity-hungry organization vividly depicts the wide-ranging and routine participation of children in its jihadist media projects.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of media commentary has highlighted the most public and dramatic roles played by children, namely as executioners in firing squads or beheadings.[2] However, the presence and participation of children in the comprehensive corpus of Islamic State propaganda extends beyond ultra-violence. Indeed, on an almost daily basis, children are featured in multiple contexts, from highly publicized executions and training camps to Qur'an memorization fairs and *dawa* caravans.[3]

So far, analysis of this phenomenon has been scant, with a few exceptions.[4] While it is a well-known fact that the Islamic State uses child soldiers—defined here using a modification of the United Nations definition of "any person [of 18 years of age or under] who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity"—the nature and range of circumstances of their recruitment and engagement are rarely explored.[a] We seek to redress this gap by drawing on an original database of photographic martyrdom propaganda featuring children and youth. A cursory exploration of this data suggests that the Islamic State's systematic use of children is more widespread than previously imagined. Indeed, the rate of youth deaths in the Islamic State's name between January 2015 and January 2016 is more than twice the most regularly cited estimate.[b]

Below, after describing our methodology, we present findings from the archive, outlining key features and identifying, among other things, details about the children's origins, places of death, and roles they played for the Islamic State. We then explore trends in the organization's youth deployment before offering preliminary conclusions regarding the routinization and acceleration of children's engagement on the Islamic State battlefield.

Methodology

We recorded instances of young people (both younger children and youth) who were featured in official Islamic State reports as "martyrs" from January 1, 2015, to January 31, 2016, downloading the photographs and coding them into a database. Other data were recorded prior to this period but not systematically (nor was the earlier data subject to coder reliability checks), and thus were excluded. The majority of the 89 images collected, which were invariably of male children and youth, were sourced from Islamic State propa-

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a The Paris Principles and Guidelines published by UNICEF in 2007 states that "a child soldiers associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age." "The Paris Principles: principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups," UNICEF, February 2007, p. 7.

b In July 2015, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that eight children had died in Islamic State operations between January 2015 and July 2015 by 'detonat[ing] themselves using vehicle bombs.' However, according to our data, in the same time period, the number of children who died on suicide operations was actually 21. "Over 50 ISIS child soldiers killed in 2015," NOW, July 15, 2015.

gandists on Twitter. Three of the photographs were unofficially disseminated by known Islamic State fighters also via Twitter. Over the course of the year, as targeted account suspensions accelerated and Twitter became less hospitable to jihadis, propaganda dissemination shifted to the hybrid messaging app Telegram. Reflecting this, some of the data are also drawn directly from the Islamic State's official Telegram channel. The constantly shifting nature of Islamic State propaganda dissemination means that we cannot claim (nor do we seek to) that this database is exhaustive. Rather, it represents a snapshot in time of how the Islamic State featured children and youth in its martyrdom propaganda.

Once the 89 images were downloaded, each was tagged and coded according to 24 variables, including the subject's *kunya* (*nom de guerre*), nationality, location of death, facial expression, and backdrop/setting.[c] Each image was logged with as much detail as possible, such that any anomalies or outliers could be highlighted in the descriptive analysis.

When the Islamic State releases images of martyred children and youth, it does not provide biographical details. This created a significant obstacle to analysis. To resolve this challenge and determine country of origin, the individual's *kunya* was used as a proxy for nationality—for example, *al-'Iraqi* denotes that they are/were Iraqi, whereas *al-Lubnani* would correspond to being Lebanese. However, in 24 percent of the cases, where the *kunya* was *al-Ansari*, it was not possible to determine with a high degree of certainty whether the nationality was Syrian or Iraqi (as it could feasibly be either). For that reason, these cases of children and youth who died in Syria and Iraq were coded as "Syrian/Iraqi."[d] The remaining eight children and youth had *kunyas* that did not designate their origins—for example *al-Muhajir* (literally, 'the emigrant') or *al-'Ilami* ('the media man')—and were coded as "undesignated." Age is another key detail not reported by the Islamic State. As such, the sample was classified according to categories provided by Dr. Heidi Ellis and Ms. Elizabeth Nimmons of Boston Children's Hospital's Refugee Trauma and Resilience Center and follow from age categories for child development—"Pre-Adolescent" (8 to 12), "Adolescent" (12 to 16), or "Older Adolescent" (16 to 21).[e] We used inter-coder reliability checks for this classification. Each image was independently coded by three people and, where possible, cross-compared with media reports.[f] In all but 10 cases, the age categories were coded consistently. The remaining 10 were discussed and reconciled by the entire team.

A similar database of adults featured in martyrdom propaganda from November 19, 2015, to January 31, 2016, was assembled as a control sample to contrast trends in adult eulogies with those of the children and youth, thereby allowing us to determine whether significant variation was present (location, type of target, role, etc.). Photographs of each adult featured in official Islamic State "martyrdom" propaganda were downloaded and coded to the same variables. It is worth noting, at this juncture, that there are more adult eulogies available—114 adults in the space of 73 days, compared to 89 youth in 395 days—because more adults than children and youth are involved in the Islamic State's military operations.

The Data

From January 1, 2015, to January 31, 2016, 89 children and youth were eulogized in Islamic State propaganda. Fifty-one percent were alleged to have died in Iraq, while 36 percent died in Syria. The remainder were killed during operations in Yemen, Libya, and Nigeria. Sixty percent of the sample was categorized as "Adolescent" based on Islamic State photographs, 34 percent were classified as "Older Adolescent," and 6 percent were "Pre-Adolescent." Thirty-one percent were Syrian, 25 percent Syrian/Iraqi, and 11 percent Iraqi. The remaining 33 percent were from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Libya, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and Nigeria.

Of the 89 cases, 39 percent died upon detonating a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) against their target. Thirty-three percent were killed as foot soldiers in unspecified battlefield operations, 6 percent died while working as propagandists embedded within units/brigades, and 4 percent committed suicide in mass casualty attacks against civilians.[g] The final 18 percent were *inghimasis* (derived from the Arabic "to plunge"), meaning they

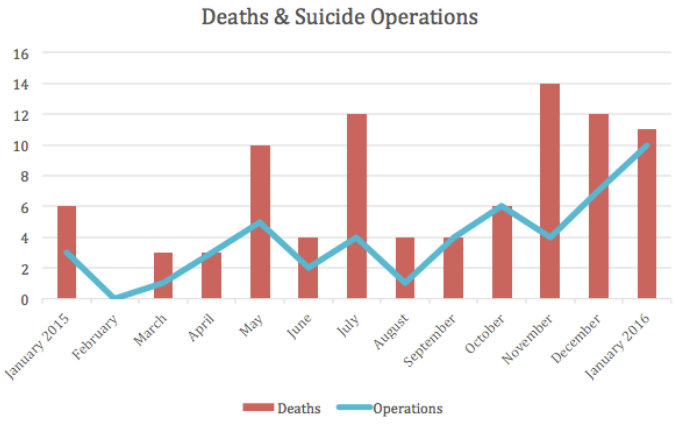

Figure 1: Deaths and suicide operations

c Images were coding according to the following variables: date of publication, country in which death was reported, province in which death was reported, subject nationality, *kunya*, age category, role, target, target type, propaganda type, presence of weapons, presence of suicide belt, flag, presence of a Qur'an, microphone used, backdrop, clothing/attire, headgear, subject alone or accompanied, staged/unstaged, raised finger (to symbolize *tawhid*), facial expression based on Matsumoto and Hwang's criteria, facial hair, and accompanying narrative.

d It should be noted that al-Ansari—a *kunya* denoting localness that harks back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad— does not just refer to Syrians and Iraqis. However, in the territorial context of Syria and Iraq, it does.

e We used age categories based on child development theory with a maximum age of 21 years old. However, no one over the age of 18 was included in this sample. Any "martyrs" whose age was known to be over 18 years old were inserted into the control group database.

f In at least five cases, we were able to verify the actual age of the bombers because of additional media reporting in the Western press, and in each case, the range had been coded correctly. Such cross comparison was only possible in a minority of instances as most military Islamic State operations do not receive media attention.

g Here, "mass casualty attacks against civilians" refers to an operation in which there are "three or more killings in a single incident," as per the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) definition. Investigative Assistance for Violent Crimes Act of 2012, 28 USC 530C(b)(1)(M)(i).

died in what we more commonly term marauding operations in which a group of mostly adult fighters infiltrates and attacks an enemy position using light automatic weapons before killing themselves by detonating suicide belts. Forty percent of the time, the children and youth died in operations targeting state security forces (including military and police targets). Twenty-one percent were killed fighting against paramilitary forces (militias and non-state opposition), and only 3 percent carried out suicide attacks against civilians. No target was specified for the remaining 36 percent.

A number of stylistic elements of the data are worth mentioning. In 6 percent of the photographs, the children and youth are masked. Of the remaining cases, 46 percent are depicted with smiles on their faces, 27 percent with neutral expressions, and 26 percent with angry expressions.[h] Their mode of dress is evenly distributed between casual civilian and formal military attire. Fifty-three percent are wearing battle fatigues and are often holding weapons; the rest are dressed in casual clothes, from caps and t-shirts to Afghan-style *pakol* or *salwar kameez*. The location of the photoshoots ranged broadly: 27 percent were taken in a military context (e.g. in a trench), and 22 percent were taken in an unremarkable setting (e.g. a beige room). A further 28 percent of the children and youth were standing in orchards and meadows, scenery presumably chosen to echo the paradise to which they thought they were destined. The theme of happiness at the prospect of martyrdom occurred regularly. In one case, a pre-adolescent child smiled widely at the camera, wearing his baseball cap back-to-front, sitting atop what appears to be a fairground ride. While there was an Islamic State flag featured in 19 percent of the images, none featured a Qur'an, which is an oft-used motif in jihadist martyrdom propaganda.

The overwhelming majority of the deaths (63 percent) were celebrated in photos corresponding with Islamic State "Breaking News" updates, the blue and red infographics that appear within minutes or hours of an operation. The rest appeared sporadically in Islamic State photographic propaganda campaigns that occurred across the 13-month period under review. The most prominent of these campaigns was "Caravans of the Martyrs," which featured in 25 percent

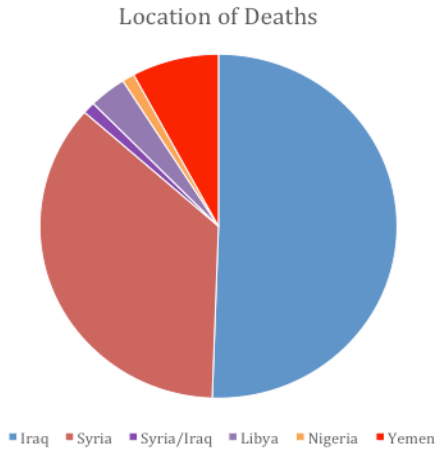

Figure 2: Location of deaths

h Expressions were coded according to research conducted by Matsumoto and Hwang. Like with age categorization, expressions were subjected to intercoder reliability checks. David Matsumoto and Hyi Sung Hwang, "Reading facial expressions," *Psychological Science Agenda*, American Psychological Association, May 2011.

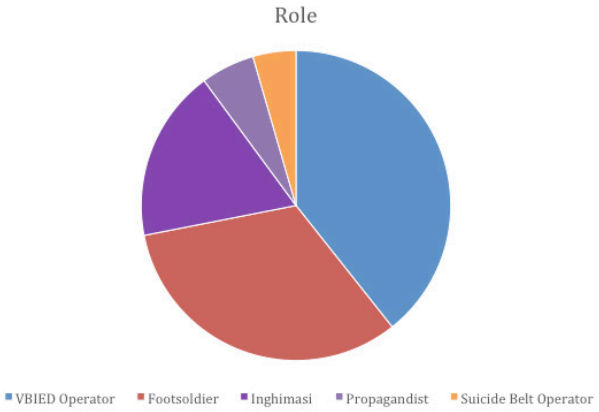

Figure 3: Role

of the data. The remaining cases were part of other, more irregular campaigns, like "Among Them Is He Who Fulfilled His Vow," "Ink of Jihad," and "Media Man, You Are a Mujahid."

When comparing this data with the adult group, there are some noteworthy observations. While there was slightly more variation regarding adult roles and countries of origin, on the whole, the datasets were strikingly similar.[i] Like the youth sample, most adults were killed in Iraq. Similarly, most adults died as VBIED operators, with the remainder killed— in descending order—as foot soldiers, *inghimasis*, and propagandists. Target types are remarkably similar, with 46 percent of adults attacks aimed at state security forces, compared to 40 percent of the children's.

Preliminary Conclusions

The data unambiguously suggests that the Islamic State's mobilization of children and youth for military purposes is accelerating. On a month-by-month basis, the rate of young people dying in suicide operations rose, from six in January 2015 to 11 in January 2016. The rate of operations involving one or more child or youth is likewise increasing; there were three times as many suicide operations involving children and youth in January 2016 as the previous January (2015). It seems plausible that, as military pressure against the Islamic State has increased in recent months, such operations—especially those of the *inghimasi* variety—are becoming more tactically attractive. They represent an effective form of psychological warfare—to project strength, pierce defenses, and strike fear into enemy soldiers' hearts. We can expect that, as their implementation increases, so too will the reported rate of child and youth deaths.

It is equally striking that the Islamic State's children and youth operate in ways similar to the adults. Children are fighting *alongside*, rather than in lieu of, adult males and their respective patterns of involvement closely reflect one another. In other conflicts, the use of child soldiers may represent a strategy of last resort, as a way to "rapidly replace battlefield losses," or in specialized operations for which adults may be less effective.[5] However, in the context of the Islamic State, children are used in much the same ways as their elders.

Notwithstanding some limitations—for example, the data provides a partial snapshot of the reality (in January 2016, there were

i To a certain extent, greater variation is to be expected, given that there are more adults from which to choose.

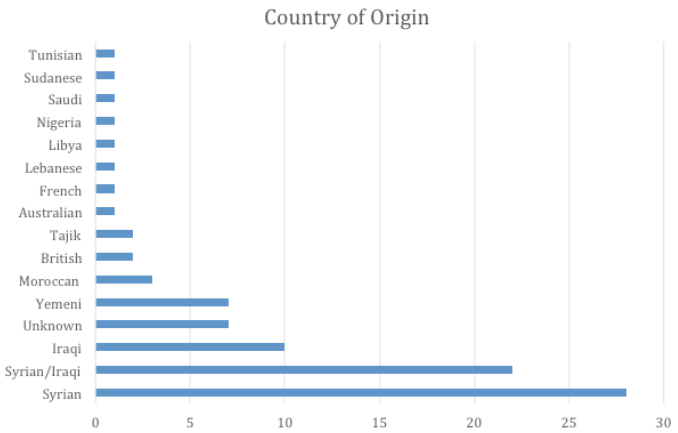

Figure 4: Country of origin

85 suicide operations in Iraq and Syria, only 53 of which were reported in photographic propaganda[j])—this remains the first such database of its kind, and provides a baseline for future research on VEO utilization of children and youth.[k] Yet despite these limitations, we can assert with confidence that the use of children and youth has been normalized under the Islamic State's rule. Instead of hailing them as *young* heroes, the Islamic State media team merely celebrates them as heroes. Indeed, the actual age of the martyr is never mentioned, even in passing. In exceptional cases, Islamic State supporters might celebrate children and youth, but, aside from one instance in which a pre-adolescent boy is photographed while bidding farewell to his father before a mission, there is no special consideration given to age or separation from family. If anything, to the Islamic State's propagandists, the youth of the martyr is incidental.

When considered in the context of the child soldiers in other conflicts, this is somewhat counterintuitive. Historically, when militant organizations enlisted children, they did so surreptitiously, a pattern that emerged with the release of the Machel Report on children in armed conflict in 1996 and the UN resolutions against youth recruitment that followed.[6] The Islamic State bucks this trend brazenly by boasting about its young recruits, something that is indicative of the fact that it is using them differently than the child soldier norm. The data suggests that the Islamic State is not recruiting them to replace lost manpower— children and youth only constitute a small proportion of its battlefield losses overall—and they are not engaging in roles in which they have a comparative advantage over the adults. On the contrary, in most cases, children and youth are dying in the same circumstances as adults. Additionally, existing research argues that children and youth will be used more to attack civilian targets among whom they can blend in better. However, the data shows that Islamic State's children and youth have been used to attack civilians in only 3 percent of the cases.[7]

It is clear that the Islamic State leadership has a long-term vision for youth in its jihadist efforts. While today's child militants may well be tomorrow's adult terrorists, in all likelihood, the moral and ethical issues raised by battlefield engagement with the Islamic State's youth are likely to be at the forefront of the discourse on the international coalition's war against the group in years to come. Furthermore, as small numbers of children either escape or defect from the Islamic State and as more accounts emerge of children's experiences, there is an urgent need to plan and prepare for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former youth militants. CTC

j This came to light upon comparing the dataset with a recent infographic published by the official Islamic State propaganda outlet, A'maq Agency. See "Istishhadi Operations in Iraq and Syria," A'maq Agency, February 2, 2016.

k Further research will be conducted as part of a future Minerva Research Initiative Dataverse. According to its website, the Minerva Initiative is a "Department of Defense (DOD)-sponsored, university-based social science initiative launched by the Secretary of Defense in 2008 focusing on areas of strategic importance to U.S. national security policy."

Citations

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5 Peter Singer, *Children at War* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 98; Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 71.

6 "Impact of armed conflict on children," UN General Assembly, August 26, 1996, A/51/306. See also "UN Security Council votes to name and shame governments, groups who abduct children," Deutsche Welle, June 19, 2016.

7 Michael Gross, *The Ethics of Insurgency: A Critical Guide to Just Guerilla Warfare* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 127.