

# Apocalyptic Islam

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## What Makes ISIS a Serious Threat to America

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ISIS poses a serious threat to America and the American way of life. Whether ISIS has the ability to target the United States currently or in the near future, the aspects which constitute the brutal terror organization and state-like characteristics make ISIS an inevitable threat that America will have to confront sooner or later. This study does not encompass or delve into the historical founding of ISIS; rather, this analysis seeks to explain the aspects of ISIS which cause it to be an expanding, resilient, and powerful threat in global politics, and in the end, to the United States. The current aspects of ISIS that contribute to their increasing and omnipresent threat are recruiting tactics and ability, the organizations financial ability, military capability and strength, state functionality, and ideological principles. Considering all of these facets, there are those who believe America should not become more involved or invested in the Middle East's problems, but when these characteristics are combined ISIS serves as a very serious threat to America, its national security, and its interests. The scope of this analysis does not intend to postulate policy solutions or recommendations, but to simply demonstrate the increased need for American involvement and policy change.

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## Introduction

The world is a tumultuous minefield of danger. At every corner and every turn it seems as if there is a threat, an obstacle, or a test, and the United State is not immune. As Michael Morell, in *The Great War of Our Time*, states, “the world is a very dangerous place.”<sup>1</sup> Morell does not stop there, going on to explain his belief that “the world is going to become an even more dangerous place in terms of international terrorism.”<sup>2</sup> Terrorism is not new; terrorism has been used throughout history as a means of achieving political goals in many circumstances. The terrorist breed the world is seeing today is different than others in earlier periods of history. In fact, over the past decades the world has seen the emergence of terrorist groups that derive from new varying principals and ideologies and which strive toward differing goals and objectives. Included in this mix are Al Qaeda and its affiliates. But as Daniel Byman, author of *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement*, points out, in order to truly understand the operational environment today, these groups must be placed “in the context of the broader jihadist movement.”<sup>3</sup> This broader jihadist movement has paved the way for many terrorist groups to reach fruition. Amidst the birth of other scattered terrorist organizations, a group named the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, also known as ISIS, rose to international prowess.

The birth of ISIS did not happen spontaneously, or rapidly, even if media coverage of ISIS may paint this picture. Clarifying this, “The events marking the Islamic State’s dramatic rise from obscurity were sudden and unforeseen. The group and its ideology, however, were well within view for nearly eight years.”<sup>4</sup> ISIS’s rise to the international terror spotlight did not occur

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<sup>1</sup> Morell, Michael, and Bill Harlow. *The Great War of Our Time: The CIA's Fight Against Terrorism - From Al Qaeda to ISIS*. First ed. New York, New York: Twelve: Hachette Book Group, 2015. Page 300.

<sup>2</sup> Morell 301

<sup>3</sup> Byman, Daniel. *Al Qaeda, The Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Page 2.

<sup>4</sup> Bunzel, Cole. "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State." *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World* 19 (2015). Accessed November 16, 2015.

spontaneously. Quite contrarily, ISIS transformed from the early 2000's through "various incarnations, first as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), then the Mujahidin Advisory Council, and then the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)."<sup>5</sup> Although ISIS originated and has historical roots in al-Qaeda, ISIS has formed its own brand of terrorism. The mechanism and process by which ISIS became unaffiliated from al-Qaeda is outside the scope of this study. What is noteworthy for the purpose of this study is that through ISIS's genesis, ISIS has come to vary from al-Qaeda in many regards, while still maintaining some similarities with jihadism. Succinctly put, "If jihadism were to be placed on a political spectrum, al-Qaeda would be its left and the Islamic State its right."<sup>6</sup> The history of these terror organizations bare accounts for some of the similarities between them, but many differences of ideology and tactics between ISIS and al-Qaeda have ripened.

ISIS has climbed to the forefront of the international terror scene today by emphasizing their contrarities with al-Qaeda. The position ISIS has earned through their actions and implementation of their ideology has additionally contributed to countries around the world believing that ISIS "poses a serious threat to regional and global security."<sup>7</sup> ISIS is a brutal and ruthless terror organization that will stop at nothing to achieve its goals, leaving decimation in its wake. America must confront the ever growing danger presented by ISIS's ideology, recruitment and finance practices, as well as its military and governing capabilities, which together form a serious threat to America's national security and Middle Eastern regional stability interests.

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<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>. Page 4.

<sup>5</sup> Weiss, Michael, and Hassan Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, New York: Regan Arts, 2015. Page xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Bunzel 9

<sup>7</sup> "ISIS: A Threat to the Regional and Global Security and Stability." Iraqi Embassy to Malaysia-Kuala Lumpur. September 3, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://mofamission.gov.iq/en/Malaysia&article=1239>.

## Literature Review

ISIS is a relatively new phenomenon. It is true that terrorism has existed throughout history, and even true that the United States has waged war on terrorism and many of its groups, such as al-Qaeda and the Taliban, over the past few decades. What is different is that ISIS poses a much more substantial threat than any other previous terror organization. Scholarship and literature on ISIS has been tasked with understanding the ISIS organization, derived from al-Qaeda, fundamentally differing from that organization, and that is continuously evolving and implementing strategies and tactics to achieve their ideological goals. To accomplish this task, the existing literature consists mostly of articles and reports about ISIS, contextual and historical publications on ISIS, and is accompanied by a limited number of comprehensive reports and books. These various types of literature provide insight into ISIS's origin, current operations and beliefs, and future policy direction.

Of the existing literature there is a significant amount that discusses the historical origins of ISIS, of which there are competing views. A large category of this literature is written on ISIS's derivation from al-Qaeda. In fact, all of the books included in the analysis of this study, and many of the limited and comprehensive reports, discussed this topic in some fashion. Where the difference among the literature occurs is in the interpretation of the historical origin of ISIS and what it ultimately resulted in for the group. There is the line of thought like Daniel Byman, who explains that "The Islamic State grew out of Al Qaeda in Iraq, [but] ... At the same time, the Islamic State and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi violently broke with Al Qaeda in late 2013."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Weiss and Hassan, in *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, track the historical progression of ISIS "under various incarnations," ending in the organization being fundamentally

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<sup>8</sup> Byman 163

different than al-Qaeda.<sup>9</sup> Like these two books, a report by Cole Bunzel traces ISIS's history. However, unlike both of the previous authors who describe ISIS's progression in history in comprehensive terms, physical existence, political intentions, and ideological aspects, Bunzel emphasizes the historical importance of ISIS's ideology: "This paper sets forth the main lines of the ideology of the Islamic State and carefully follows its historical trajectory."<sup>10</sup> Even in his ideological history of ISIS, Bunzel includes much about ideological connection and subsequent divide with al-Qaeda, providing a quote from Zawahiri, "The Islamic State was no doubt originally a 'branch' of al-Qaeda."<sup>11</sup> Michael Morell is much like the rest, acknowledging that "ISIS was born of al Qaeda," but deviates by stating that "ISIS is effectively al Qaeda."<sup>12</sup> Morell, a former CIA director and an experienced and knowledgeable expert on terrorism, oversimplifies ISIS by grouping al Qaeda and ISIS under the same conglomerate. By stating that ISIS and al Qaeda are effectively the same, he dismisses the differences that the groups have and the reasons for their divide. For this reason, this study will acknowledge the importance of the historical context that these authors provided, and will recognize that ISIS is fundamentally different from other terror groups, giving ISIS its greater potential risk to America.

Another theme present in the existing literature is attributing blame for ISIS's creation and persistence. Some believe that the United States is to blame for what ISIS has become, such as Weiss and Hassan: "Whatever Washington's intentions, its perceived alliance of convenience with murderous regimes in Syria and Iran is keeping Sunnis who loathe ISIS from participating."<sup>13</sup> Musa al-Gharbi offers a very similar claim in his article, "The Secret of ISIL's appeal." There are multiple competing authors who believe a much different narrative, the

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<sup>9</sup> Weiss and Hassan xiii

<sup>10</sup> Bunzel 5

<sup>11</sup> Bunzel 29

<sup>12</sup> Morell 305 & 307

<sup>13</sup> Weiss and Hassan

narrative that says al-Maliki, Iraq's leader, caused ISIS's formation and strength. Weiss and Hassan, along with their argument for the United States narrative, point out the al-Maliki's policies led to "more than seven hundred Iraqis [who] were being killed each month, and the conditions for Sunni rejectionism turning into jihadist extremism." A PBS documentary, *The Rise of ISIS*, also takes this historical perspective. Both of these competing viewpoints contribute to the historiographical understanding of ISIS through multiple different perspectives. This study will contribute to the historical attribution of error by concluding that the United States has not engaged in as aggressive or proactive policies as it should be, thereby allowing ISIS to become stronger.

This American policy debate is also played out in existing literature. There are authors like Cole Bunzel, who believe that the problem of ISIS remains that of "regional governments and their citizens who are most threatened by the Islamic State," and that "Ultimately, they must lead this war, not the United States."<sup>14</sup> In an ideological world, a scenario in which the states of a region that been fighting amidst themselves for thousands of years can come together to defeat an enemy on a unilateral front is realistic. Unfortunately, the Middle East region has not confronted ISIS on this scale, leaving ISIS to hone its craft and become stronger. Therefore, like the majority of existing literature claims, a United States role is necessary in eliminating the ISIS threat. There are many levels on the spectrum of American action and policy, but Michael Morell puts this viewpoint about national security the best, "The United States, of course, is going to have to deal with all these problems."<sup>15</sup> This study acknowledges the merit in this side of the literary debate by contributing to the literature of advocating for continued and increased

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<sup>14</sup> Bunzel 36

<sup>15</sup> Morell 323

American action as a result of the threat presented by a multifaceted, and formidable organization.

Due to the nature and brevity of ISIS's existence, relative in time, the majority of the existing literature covering ISIS exists in brief articles or reports, with very few comprehensive publications. Since ISIS is a recent phenomenon within the last decade, much of the work done investigating ISIS has been by journalists and correspondents. This is showcased in the plethora of literature and published information on media outlets such as *PBS*, *al Jazeera*, *The Atlantic*, and *Time*, to name just a few. These articles and stories have a limited scope, focusing on one or very few aspects of ISIS. Other reports such as Jessica D. Lewis's *Middle East Security Report 21* take a more holistic approach to understanding ISIS, yet still emphasize a limited scope – such as an emphasis on “two Centers of Gravity” in Lewis's case.”<sup>16</sup> More holistic studies, which look at many of ISIS's characteristics, are few and incomplete. These studies include Weiss and Hassan's book *ISIS* and Rachel Ehrenfeld's “ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization.” These are valuable contributions toward a better understanding of ISIS, although these contributions are, for the most part, merely descriptive and historical. This study hopes to take the descriptive aspects of these holistic studies, to portray facets of ISIS while at the same time forming an argument for American action in the face of ISIS's posed threat. This differs from other sources because it uses a holistic approach to analyzing aspects of ISIS in order to drive an argument for action, rather than to provide historical understanding and description.

### **Methodology and Research Design**

The fanatic and brutal terror organization, ISIS, has encapsulated much of the media attention and foreign affairs. ISIS propaganda videos, atrocities, and other actions based upon

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. "The Islamic State: A Counter-Strategy For a Counter-State." *Middle East Security Report 21* (2014). Accessed November 17, 2015. <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Lewis-Center of gravity.pdf>. Page 5



their ideology have captured the attention of a global audience in a fury of growth, both in power and size, and have resulted in their astounding success in comparison with other terror organizations which have preceded it. These factors have allowed ISIS to pose a dire threat to many states all across the world. This realized global threat and development of ISIS has caused a rapid shift of scholarly attention toward ISIS, while the media continues to publish updated reports and stories about ISIS. Due to the relative brevity of ISIS's existence, there are only a few books which discuss the historical birth of ISIS as an organization. A small number of analytical books regard ISIS's facets and functions as they are today. For this reason, to evaluate and understand ISIS's aspects today, and how they pose a grave threat to America, this study predicates its findings on a qualitative analysis. It will use a variety and combination of media reports and documentaries, as well as analytical reports from various institutions.

This report collects the majority of its evidence from the vast availability of media resources. The reason why the media, news coverage, articles, and broadcasts, are particularly useful for this analysis is because they are directly applicable to the scope of the project. Since this analysis seeks to understand aspects of ISIS as they exist today, and how those aspects are contributing to an increasing threat to America, utilizing news coverage seems natural. Media covers real-time events, and seeks to understand the environment, and report situations as they present themselves. By seeking out media coverage of different aspects of ISIS, a multitude of evidence was compiled about many different factors. A danger exists that the evidence derived from news sources can be biased, because news outlets operate as for-profit businesses, or have a tarnished hue of yellow journalism. To combat this belief or perception, and to control for this phenomenon if it exists for this topic, many different media outlets were used to encapsulate a range of perspectives. This includes media outlets such as *PBS*, *CBS news*, *Independent news* – a

British news source, *al Jazeera* – a Middle East perspective, *Time*, and *The Atlantic*. Including this vast selection of news outlets in this study, multiple perspectives are considered. These news sources as a whole provide focused, valuable, and current analysis of ISIS and its aspects, which can be used after thorough analysis and consideration to show how America is gravely threatened by ISIS.

To support these news sources, an analysis of institutional reports and books is used. Analyzing media sources is not substantial on its own because media sources have an agenda and are narrowly focused. Media sources do provide a great deal of evidence that can be extracted for particular topics to which each source is pertained, but to gather a more cohesive understanding of ISIS and its factors, analysis turns towards institutional reports and previous books.

Institutional reports are large analyses that have accumulated much evidence on various and differing categorical aspects of ISIS and explain ISIS in more complete terms. Books, on the other hand, have largely explained the historical roots of ISIS while exploring some of its attributes in context. These sources together are analyzed in order to accompany and complement evidence derived from media sources. By analyzing these sources in conjunction with the primarily media sources, categorical aspects of ISIS have become more defined and narrowed.

Rather than trying to explain a plethora of scattered facts and trends, through the analysis of these sources the backbone of the argument is placed in context and more defined terms.

Institutional reports and previous books are analyzed and used to complement the primary evidence found within media sources, and to help create and divide ISIS's aspects with clearly defined lines and themes.

This study lacks majorly in its use of government and ISIS created documents. Because of the nature of study is a terror organization which the government is actively invested and

interested in, analyzing the organization becomes limited. This limitation occurs in the sense that key intelligence gathered on the organization may not be made available to the greater public. Primary evidence that is available such as actual ISIS videos and recruiting techniques are more brutal than they are informationally substantive. Other documents such as governmental publications, reports, and assessments of ISIS, and ISIS created material are often under restricted or limited access. These materials are hard to find due to their sensitive nature and inaccessibility to the public. Some government or ISIS generated material is used in this analysis, but it has largely been excluded or missing, rendering analytical rigor to other sources.

This study, to understand ISIS's aspects and how it threatens America, looks qualitatively at the media, institutional reports, and books. This analysis lacks implementation and use of government and ISIS created documental support due to the nature and scope of the topic and the sensitivity and limited accessibility of the material. Instead this study critically analyzes ISIS by separating source material by categorical aspects of ISIS, analyzing each source on its own, and building enough evidence to show the nuance between some of ISIS's aspects and how they establish a grave threat for America.

This analysis will seek to answer multiple different questions in order to determine whether ISIS poses, or will pose, a serious threat to the United States. First and foremost, this analysis will seek to answer the main research question: does ISIS threaten American security and American national interests in the Middle East? In order to answer this question the analysis will use a preponderance of evidence from the aforementioned sources that show ISIS has multiple capabilities, ideological inclinations, and strengths which constitutes ISIS as a serious threat. To guide this evidentiary proof to support the claim that ISIS poses a serious threat to America's national security and regional interests, multiple other questions will be addressed and

answered along the way. The discussion will seek to address the following questions. Does ISIS's recruitment ability provide it with the expansion, growth, and resilience to provide and sustain a serious threat to America, and to what extent does this projected recruiting strength threaten America? Does ISIS's military capability demonstrate the power and strength necessary to threaten the Middle East and the West, and to what extent does its military capacity threaten America? How does ISIS's ideology directly conflict with the Middle East stability, as well as America's security? To what extent do ISIS's financial and state-like functions create a perpetual and resilient threat to America and the Middle East?

This analysis will seek to address all of these questions. By addressing these questions, and presenting a preponderance of supporting evidence for each, this analysis will show that ISIS does in threaten America's national security and regional stability interests. The key dilemma is meaning of "serious threat." In other words, at what level is a threat serious versus merely a nuisance, or to another extreme existential? This analysis will show that this threat is serious by answering the questions presented in each section of the analysis and discussion. It will demonstrate how ISIS threatens America physically, whether it is Americans' lives within America's border or abroad, and that America's interests are threatened by a destabilized Middle East in the presence of territorial control of ISIS. This analysis will show it goes beyond merely nuisance because it will demonstrate that ISIS will continue to grow in strength, influence, and power unless confronted. But, this analysis will also show ISIS's threat does not go to the extent of becoming an existential threat, because although it can cause damage – even great damage – ISIS cannot bring about the destruction of the United States. Therefore, this analysis seeks to answer multiple questions, by analyzing qualitatively a multitude of sources, in order to

demonstrate that ISIS poses a serious threat to America's national security and its regional Middle East stability interests.

### **Analysis and Findings**

Closely looking at media sources, as well as institutional reports and books, has shown that ISIS is ever increasing as a global threat. All of these materials make different points and draw from different evidence and reasoning. What an analysis of these sources does show is that there are trends in the aspects of ISIS which are making ISIS a more substantial threat for the world, and the United States. These trends include ISIS's recruitment tactics, military capabilities, financing, and their government and state function. After looking at a multitude of sources that leads to a culmination of evidence dividing into these four aspects of ISIS, it is clear that ISIS poses a substantial and serious threat to many countries around the world, and in particular the West and the United States, necessitating an American policy confronting the growing threat.

One aspect contributing towards ISIS's increasing threat is its ability and success in recruiting. ISIS is a "slick propaganda machine," and its ability to recruit has brought ISIS tremendous power and numbers.<sup>17</sup> Daniel Byman expands this idea by adding, "The Islamic State's recent success and its massive presence on social media have enabled it to recruit huge numbers of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq, giving it tremendous power."<sup>18</sup> Morell, at the time he wrote his book, confirms the same premise, "Somewhere between 3,500 and 5,000 jihadist wannabes have traveled to Syria and Iraq from Western Europe, Canada, Australia, and the United States."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, "ISIS has an effective propaganda machine that produces impressive amounts of media materials," and "is ISIS's main tool for spreading its ideology and

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<sup>17</sup> Weiss and Hassan xv

<sup>18</sup> Byman 170

<sup>19</sup> Morell 308

political agenda. It is also used to recruit foreign fighters.”<sup>20</sup> The foreign fighters have been increasing ISIS’s size and power in a tremendous way as Byman pointed out, and the places these foreign fighters are coming from, due to the reaches of ISIS recruiting through propaganda, are far and wide. Foreign fighters are storming Syria and Iraq on behalf of ISIS: “From the thousands who flock from Turkey to hundreds from France, the U.K., and Germany, ISIS recruits [are joining at] approximately 20 members a day.”<sup>21</sup> This recruiting capability is astounding and extremely effective. This effectiveness is allowing ISIS to grow and become an ever increasing threat to the rest of the world and United States’ national security and Middle East regional stability interest.

Other aspects of ISIS which are increasing their threat toward the United States are its military capabilities and governmental functions. First, ISIS has “proven more militarily effective than its local enemies.”<sup>22</sup> In fact, “the group swept into western Iraq nearly unimpeded, conquering most of the country’s territories, including the [large] city of Mosul.”<sup>23</sup> Massimo Calabresi elaborates saying, “ISIS came dangerously close to destroying Iraq,” an enormous regionally destabilizing scenario.<sup>24</sup> ISIS now controls large parts of Iraq and Syria, which provides them “with a firm territorial base.”<sup>25</sup> These successes and achievements are necessary for ISIS, because military success is part of their “military strategy to destroy modern states... in conjunction with a military strategy to expand control of territory... which translate military

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<sup>20</sup> Ehrenfeld, Rachel. “ISIS: Portrait of a Jihadi Terrorist Organization.” Crethiplethi.com. November 26, 2014. Accessed November 16, 2015. [http://www.crethiplethi.com/files/cp\\_0115.pdf](http://www.crethiplethi.com/files/cp_0115.pdf). Page 202.

<sup>21</sup> Lu, Alicia. "How Does ISIS Recruit, Exactly? Its Techniques Are Ruthless, Terrifying, And Efficient." Bustle News. September 18, 2014. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://www.bustle.com/articles/40535-how-does-isis-recruit-exactly-its-techniques-are-ruthless-terrifying-and-efficient>. Page 2.

<sup>22</sup> Byman 174

<sup>23</sup> Bunzel 31

<sup>24</sup> Scherer, Michael, Massimo Calabresi, Mark Thompson, Alex Rogers, Aryn Baker, Suha Ma'Ayeh, Rebecca Collard, Kay Armin Serjoie, Vivienne Walt, Omar Waraich, Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, and Conal Urquhart. "Inside ISIS: A TIME Special Report." TIME. March 9, 2015. Accessed November 17, 2015. <http://time.com/inside-isis-a-time-special-report/>. Page 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ehrenfeld 58

victories into political victories.”<sup>26</sup> These military victories are a function of many different capabilities and attributes of their military forces. ISIS’s military success, due to many militaristic attributes, is paralleled by ISIS’s ability provide state functions. Lewis explains that ISIS “seeks to perform certain state functions within an area of physical control that may uphold and defend with its military.”<sup>27</sup> ISIS is very effective in setting up and performing a variety of state functions, especially where no government rule exists. Describing this, Ehrenfeld accounts, “In Mosul and the other areas it occupied, ISIS set up a governmental network to establish its control over the population and fill the void created after the Iraqi government institutions collapsed in the wake of the ISIS occupation.”<sup>28</sup> Collectively, ISIS’s military abilities as well as their effectiveness to operate as a state government and provide state functions, has made ISIS a formidable, persistent, and resilient threat to the United States.

Another aspect of ISIS that makes it a threat to the United States is its financing abilities. ISIS has been able to token a “remarkably successful war economy.”<sup>29</sup> They have been able to utilize a collection of tools ranging from selling captured oil resources, various criminal activities, taxes, and donations to collect vast amounts of money. This money has been able to fund ISIS’s expansion and terrorist empire. The amount of money that they are bringing in each day is reported differently by different sources, but this number ranges anywhere from 1.5 million to 3 million dollars a day.<sup>30</sup> This has led ISIS to become the “world’s richest terrorist

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<sup>26</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 13

<sup>27</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 9

<sup>28</sup> Ehrenfeld 72

<sup>29</sup> Weiss and Hassan 233

<sup>30</sup> Satti, Brooke. "Funding Terrorists: The Rise of ISIS." Security Intelligence. October 10, 2014. Accessed November 16, 2015. <https://securityintelligence.com/funding-terrorists-the-rise-of-isis/>. Page 3. & Sreenivasan, Hari , Erika Solomon, and PBS NewsHour. *How ISIS Built Its Own Multi-Million Dollar Industry by Attacking Oilfields*. Accessed November 25, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/islamic-state-makes-million-dollars-day/>.

group, with an estimated \$2 billion on hand.”<sup>31</sup> By becoming richer and establishing sources of constant income, ISIS is and will be poised to grow and present itself as a constant threat to America. The vast amounts of money will fund its brutal enterprise, to include its recruiting, state functions, and military.

One last aspect of ISIS which makes it a potent threat to the United States is its ideology. As an Iraqi publication claims, ISIS’s “true ideology is [one of] terrorizing peaceful people and looting their belongings savagely through crimes which fall under international crimes.”<sup>32</sup> From ISIS’s point of view, they find the justification of their actions within Islam and the Quran: “The Islamic State also draws on a millenarian strand within Islam.”<sup>33</sup> ISIS finds justification through religion as the basis for their actions, and the religious goal is to bring the world under one Islamic caliphate and create global domination and societal control.<sup>34</sup> Not only does ISIS seek eventual universal domain over the entire world as an all-powerful Islamic state. ISIS also sees has an apocalyptic vision, one that finds itself in a perpetual war with the West and that believes in justified brutality and criminality to achieve its end goals. It is for this reason, ISIS’s core beliefs, that their other aspects become so gravely dangerous. When combined with other the other aspects which make ISIS powerful and threatening, ISIS’s ideology calls for the destruction of all others, and particularly the West, with no remorse, qualms, or hesitation. ISIS, culminating with the ideological core, is a serious threat to America’s national security and regional stability interest, necessitating an American policy response.

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<sup>31</sup> Satti 2

<sup>32</sup> "ISIS: A Threat to the Regional and Global Security and Stability." Iraqi Embassy to Malaysia-Kuala Lumpur.

<sup>33</sup> Byman 171

<sup>34</sup> Brangham, William, Gwen Ifill, and PBS NewsHour. *How the Islamic State Indoctrinates Afghan Children*. Podcast audio. Accessed November 25, 2015.



## Competing Claims

The evidence shows that ISIS poses a grave threat to America. This threat is based upon factors of ISIS such as recruitment, military and governmental capabilities, and ideology. These factors in large create a conglomerate of terror that has the potential to grow and become an existential risk to the West and the rest of the civilized world. In fact, today there has been much alarm and worry concerning ISIS's threat, and keen media coverage on this terror group. This study seeks to demonstrate the importance of understanding how ISIS is a grave threat to America and its way of life in order to allude to a necessity for a policy response to the expanded terrorist threat; others do not have the same belief or idea. More specifically, others' conclusions about the threat posed by ISIS to America and America's response or commitment differ greatly. This means that others agree upon or acknowledge many of the same aspects or principles of ISIS discussed in this study. Different ideas include the idea that ISIS does not pose a substantial risk to the United States, or if it does pose a risk it is minimal, that ISIS is expanding as a result of increased American response, and that the United States should not become involved in the Middle East's problems again, regardless of what is happening.

First, there are arguments that suggest that ISIS does not constitute a serious, immediate threat to America. Michael Morell, in *The Great War of our Time*, states that an ISIS-directed attack on the United States has not happened yet, but it will, even though "Today, such an attack would be relatively unsophisticated."<sup>35</sup> Morell states this in the context of discussing many of the threats posed by ISIS, which many of them are the same as in this analysis. The difference is that Morell believes ISIS is not poised to directly threaten the United States in a great way at this time, even though he believes that ISIS is a fast growing terrorist group of which "the threat it

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<sup>35</sup> Morell 308

poses to us is as wide-ranging as any we have seen.”<sup>36</sup> Another voice in this line of argument is Musa al-Gharbi: “the U.S. should cease picking sides and intervening in conflicts in which there are no direct and urgent national security imperatives.”<sup>37</sup> Al-Gharbi’s beliefs are yet another demonstration of the argument that ISIS does not currently pose a serious security or national threat to the United States, alluding to the idea that the United States should remain uninvolved largely with the Middle East and ISIS at this time. Al-Gharbi’s argument, like Morell’s, is imbedded in an analysis that recognizes ISIS’s ability to recruit and act as a state government, even going as far as to acknowledge the United States power to change the international system, and offering, “It could counter ISIL’s narrative by simply changing the way it does business in the Middle East.”<sup>38</sup> Both of these voices show a line of competing argumentation that ISIS does not pose a serious threat to America, even though these voices are in agreement with or acknowledge threatening aspects of ISIS.

Similar to competing claims that ISIS does not pose a threat, there are claims that what America is already doing is causing ISIS’s threat to increase. These arguments believe that a military campaign can actually strengthen the Islamic State’s ideology by lending credence to its conspiratorial worldview.”<sup>39</sup> More pointedly, Al-Gharbi pursues this same argument, “As long as the united States and its allies continue to champion the global status quo – along with the oppression, exploitation and injustice that entails – the appeal of resistance actors such as ISIS will persist or even grow.”<sup>40</sup> This contrasts greatly from this study, which aims to show that ISIS itself is growing and becoming more threatening regardless of western action. These contrasting

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<sup>36</sup> Morell 305

<sup>37</sup> Al-Gharbi, Musa. "The Secrete of ISIL's Appeal." *ISISL's Appeal Derives From Who It's Against*. June 17, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/6/the-secret-of-isils-appeal.html>. Page 6.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Gharbi 5

<sup>39</sup> Bunzel 36

<sup>40</sup> Al-Gharbi 5

claims demonstrate that some believe that western states, including the United States, are driving ISIS to become more threatening. The difference between this argument and that which this study hopes to make is analyzing which phenomenon comes first: ISIS's expansion on its own for reasons in itself or the West causing that very growth.

Lastly, addressing the ultimate conclusion of ISIS's posed threat, there are those who believe that the United States should remain largely uninvolved. Depicting this claim, Cole Bunzel's concludes, "Nonetheless, it remains regional governments and their citizens who are most threatened by the Islamic State. Ultimately, they must lead this war, not the United States."<sup>41</sup> Claims like these make argue for limited United States' response to ISIS's threatening global posture. Interestingly, Bunzel confides "The longer the group enjoys a plausible claim to statehood, the more likely its organizational and ideological unity will remain intact," and grow."<sup>42</sup> This argument, like the others, still acknowledges the fact and is even supported by the idea that aspects of ISIS such as "governing territory and dispensing justice" are creating a growing threat.<sup>43</sup> Although arguments like these acknowledge that aspects of ISIS are encouraging it to grow and become more threatening, these arguments differ in the sense that they seek to advocate for action and policy change by others, but not the United States.

In all, there are multiple competing claims. Many, if not all, of these claims, regardless of their differences, acknowledge and argue that ISIS's aspects are contributing to a greater threat. Other claims and the one made in this study differ in a key way. The difference occurs in the perception of threat level to the United States, what is causing ISIS's threatening aspects to become more effective, and America's response to the situation. All of these points constitute a

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<sup>41</sup> Bunzel 36

<sup>42</sup> Bunzel 37

<sup>43</sup> Bunzel 36

difference in ultimate conclusion, extent, and implication, rather than understanding aspects which increase ISIS's threat.

## **Discussion**

America faced an attack on September 11, 2001 from al-Qaida. Today, ISIS is increasing in power, beyond the power which other organizations such as Al-Qaida have wielded in the past. The scope of this study does not seek to compare ISIS with al-Qaida; rather, referencing 9/11 draws seriousness to the impending gravity of the terrorist capability ISIS brings to the global stage today. There are those who do not seem to believe ISIS poses a stark risk to the United States or perhaps that the United States is contributing toward ISIS's rise to power, and possibly should not be a participant in the Middle Eastern turmoil in Syria and Iraq today. Despite these contrary views, ISIS poses a very serious risk to Western civilization, and the United States in particular. ISIS's power and growth is not predicated upon nor solely derived from United States action, leaving United States' Middle East policy as a small contributing factor in one aspect of ISIS's power and strength as a terrorist organization. Today, ISIS threatens America through the sum of its recruiting effectiveness, military and government capabilities, financing abilities, and ideology.

ISIS's capability and effectiveness to recruit through multiple propaganda venues is alarming for the United States. One large category that ISIS uses to propagate its recruiting efforts is the media and technology, and social media in particular. ISIS has been extremely successful in utilizing media and technology outlets to target the younger generations in today's society by using various outlets and propaganda appeals. ISIS has become the most successful terror group to sell their message to new members and fighters because they capitalize on media and make quality production a priority. Actually, ISIS is able to prioritize and produce vast

amounts of media in part because “ISIS has an entire media company backing its video production and distribution, the Al-Hayat Media Center.”<sup>44</sup> Their videos, as Morell points out, are not run-of-the-mill videos, but rather “Madison-Avenue quality messaging on the internet... [to attract] vulnerable young men and women to travel to Syria.”<sup>45</sup> Sir Peter Fahey, in an interview with CBS admits, “I think the big concern about the current situation is just a huge amount of material which is available on social media, in various publications and various videos.”<sup>46</sup> Some of the most used social media sources which ISIS uses include Instagram, Facebook, You Tube, and Twitter.<sup>47</sup> Renee Lewis analyzes “The ISIS Twitter Census,” concluding, “The armed group operating in Iraq and Syria has been more successful at using technology to propagate its message than any other groups.”<sup>48</sup> To shed light on just how active ISIS is with Twitter, Lewis estimates, “There are at least 46,000 Twitter accounts used to promote the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.”<sup>49</sup> This intense media propaganda is highly effective and pulls on multiple different appeals to motivate targets to join ISIS.

ISIS’s propaganda is very effective at pulling people into its grasp through multiple different appeals. Some of the appeals are the promise of military victory, utopia, moral obligation, and a fight against the ‘crusader’ West. Milo Comerford describes that in ISIS’s propaganda, there are “two moral duties above all else, hijrah (migration to the caliphate) and

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<sup>44</sup> Lu 4

<sup>45</sup> Morell 307

<sup>46</sup> Ward, Clarissa. "Recruiting for ISIS." 60 Minutes. June 14, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/recruiting-for-isis-60-minutes-2/>. Page 6.

<sup>47</sup> Lu 4 & Wood, Graeme. "What ISIS Really Wants." The Atlantic. March 1, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>. Page 18.

<sup>48</sup> Lewis, Renee. "ISIL's Social Media Success from Core Group of Twitter Users, Study Finds." Brookings Report on ISIL's Twitter Use. March 6, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/3/6/brookings-report-on-isils-twitter-use.html>. Page 2.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis, Renee 2

jihad (which it defines exclusively as violent struggle).”<sup>50</sup> This line of logic is a sort of Islamic purism, which pulls on the emotional heartstrings strings of Muslims in order to get them to convert to ISIS’s brand of radical Islam. A different draw ISIS propaganda uses in order to entice members is a vision of utopia. A strong London supporter of ISIS, Choudary proclaims, “The newly formed Islamic state in Iraq and Syria [is] a kind of utopia.”<sup>51</sup> ISIS uses arguments that will be presented later in this study -- state-like functions -- in order to paint a facade that ISIS controlled land is bliss in comparison to what preceded it. Two other argumentative tools ISIS uses in order to lure members into ISIS territory are military strength and prowess as well as an idea of defending against an oppressive West. As Ward points out, for those attracted by these arguments, “jihad offers the promise of power and glory.”<sup>52</sup> In fact, this propaganda technique has been extremely effective for ISIS in light of their military effectiveness with conquering land; “Its military achievements... motivated residents to join its ranks, swelling the number of recruits.”<sup>53</sup> In addition, considering Western involvement and bombing of ISIS targets, ISIS claims it is at war against a crusading West, that is, a West bent on destroying the Middle East. ISIS uses the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan to justify their violence now, and propagate the belief that “the West is at War with Islam,” not just ISIS.<sup>54</sup> All other these ISIS propaganda tactics used to recruit ISIS fighters have been extremely useful, all while condoning the use of violence against the West. This messaging increases the threat posed to America, not only because ISIS’s brutal organization is growing, but also because anti-West and anti-American messaging is reaching a vast audience.

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<sup>50</sup> Comerford, Milo. "From an Islamic 'caliphate' to War with the West, Just What Is Isis' Ideology?" Independent. June 29, 2015. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/from-an-islamic-caliphate-to-war-with-the-west-just-what-is-isis-ideology-10353852.html>. Page 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ward 2

<sup>52</sup> Ward 6

<sup>53</sup> Ehrenfeld 96

<sup>54</sup> Ward 5

Other effective propaganda appeals ISIS uses include bribery and defection, training or brainwashing children, and propaganda directed toward women. Bribery is used by ISIS as a tool to attract children, adults, and other organizations fighters. Concerning bribery as an incentive to defectors, Weiss and Hassan state that “ISIS... has experience recruiting from FSA cadres and offers incentives for mainstream rebels to defect to its ranks.”<sup>55</sup> This can pose a serious threat to America because America may be a supporter of other groups fighting ISIS, and if American funded equipment or resources flows to ISIS through defections, American policy is working against itself, making it harder to combat ISIS. With that, ISIS’s effectiveness to recruit experienced rebels from other groups increases its military capacity and combined knowledge of the battlespace, increasing ISIS’s overall military strength, posing an ever increasing threat to America. Not only has ISIS been able to recruit militants from other groups, other groups have been abandoning other allegiances in favor of ISIS. The distinction must be made between supporters or groups who have pledged allegiance and splinter cells of ISIS. The groups who have pledged their allegiance are not cells of ISIS abroad; rather, these groups have pledged their ideological support to ISIS, expressing that they will either help in ISIS’s ambitions or to even conduct actions in support of ISIS’s global ambitions. It was after “Baghdadi called for jihadi groups around the world to pledge allegiance,” that a slew of groups expressed their support for ISIS.<sup>56</sup> IntelCenter provides a list of all the jihadi groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIS as of 15 December 2015. This list includes 43 global affiliates, spanning the globe.<sup>57</sup> This shows ISIS’s ability to threatening nations around the world, creating a looming national security threat for the United States.

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<sup>55</sup> Weiss and Hassan 213

<sup>56</sup> "Islamic State's 43 Global Affiliates Interactive World Map." IntelCenter. December 15, 2016. Accessed February 25, 2016. <http://intelcenter.com/maps/is-affiliates-map.html#gs.jcm5Eao>.

<sup>57</sup> "Islamic State's 43"

Bribing children to join ISIS, or even intimidating children, are strategies ISIS have used according to Ziena Karam and Hari Sreenivasan's PBS report, *How Is ISIS Recruiting the next Generation of Fighters?*<sup>58</sup> Not only is ISIS bribing children to join ISIS, but ISIS is also showing children propaganda videos at a very young age in addition to teaching young children ISIS's doctrine within the confines of the school.<sup>59</sup> This is dangerous for the United States, because it represents forward thinking and longevity for ISIS. ISIS is building a new generation of loyalists, while increasing its current ranks, ensuring the organization will persist into the future. By teaching children at a young age, ISIS has more time to cultivate more elaborate plans on potential enemy targets, as ISIS's doctrine of world domination and jihad against infidels, and the West in particular, dictates.

One last aspect of ISIS's recruitment capability that is especially alarming is its focus on women. Recently ISIS opened up women's ability to become active in its society at an increased level, and started efforts to target women through its propaganda machine. ISIS realized that "Women are necessary for a state function," and began promising women the prospect of marriage, families, jobs, a home, and a better life suited for religious devotion.<sup>60</sup> The risk to America in this is that, as a recent French hotline showed that 45% of ISIS's inquiries involve women, "as ISIS attracts more female adherents, the likelihood of seeing a woman brandishing a knife in the terrorist group's name only increases."<sup>61</sup> What this means is that as ISIS continues to expand its reach into both gender groups, the likelihood increases that an ISIS sponsored or inspired attack on America could happen due to a diversification of ISIS forces, beyond

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<sup>58</sup> Karam, Ziena, Hari Sreenivasan, and PBS NewsHour. *How Is ISIS Recruiting the next Generation of Fighters?* Podcast audio. Accessed November 25, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/isis-recruiting-next-generation-fighters/>.

<sup>59</sup> Brangham, William, Gwen Ifill, and PBS NewsHour

<sup>60</sup> Baker, Aryn. "How ISIS Is Recruiting Women From Around the World." *Time World*. September 6, 2014. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://time.com/3276567/how-isis-is-recruiting-women-from-around-the-world/>. Pages 1-3.

<sup>61</sup> Baker 1-2



conventional and traditional forces. Contributing to this, ISIS “actively seeks out Western recruits as part of its strategy to expand internationally,” and through “its appeals to both genders, the Islamic State hopes to build a complete society.”<sup>62</sup> By recruiting to create a complete society, ISIS is bolstering its legitimacy as a state and striving to increase its power through state-like functions while setting itself up to persist well into the future. Because of this, America not only faces an immediate threat from increasing size and abundance of ISIS fighters, but also the prospect of an even greater threat in the future. Taken as a whole, ISIS’s recruiting tactics pose a substantial and serious threat to America, both as an immediate threat to national security and as an ever increasing threat to America interest in stabilizing the region and its vision for regional peace.

ISIS’s recruiting and propaganda positions it as an expanding threat, but its military capabilities are equally, if not more, worrisome for the United States. First, ISIS’s military is unlike other terrorist organizations’ militaries in the past. Weiss and Hassan report that ISIS is “a conventional military that mobilizes and deploys foot soldiers with a professional acumen that has impressed members of the US military.”<sup>63</sup> ISIS’s military has been able to “seize military and urban terrain in Iraq and Syria, and conduct offensives across multiple fronts sequentially, setting the terms of battle across several fronts at once.”<sup>64</sup> As an example, ISIS took over “most of Al-Anbar province in western Iraq at the beginning of 2014,” and has not lost control since.<sup>65</sup> ISIS’s military successes come from the ability to “design and execute military campaigns at the strategic and operational level” and operate as skilled military units.<sup>66</sup> An alarming aspect of this is that ISIS is taking over sovereign land in the Middle East and creating a foothold to conduct

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<sup>62</sup> Baker 3 & Wood 13

<sup>63</sup> Weiss and Hassan xv

<sup>64</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 17

<sup>65</sup> Ehrenfeld 58

<sup>66</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 17

further operations. An even more worrisome problem that arises from ISIS's land captures regards the fact that when the United States military left Iraq after the Iraqi War, much of the military equipment was left for the Iraqi army to use. When major cities were captured by ISIS, which equipment was lost with it; simply put, "Its armies are supplied from captured arsenals" - arsenals made by America - and have the potential to be effectively used to cause great damage.<sup>67</sup>

ISIS's military force and success was bolstered by captured equipment, but its leadership makes its military force formidable and gives it the conventional capabilities. As Byman says, "Baghdadi [ISIS's proclaimed leader] appointed a number of former military and intelligence officers who had served under Saddam to senior positions."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Byman states that ISIS has drawn heavily on former Iraqi military officials... leaders [who] were seasoned during years of fighting against US and allied forces in Iraq."<sup>69</sup> Martin Smith's *Frontline* account of ISIS also explains how ISIS utilizes these former Baathists from Saddam's party in key military positions, who provide military skill and administration to the army. This experience and skill, as Smith's production explains, could be seen in ISIS's assault on Kurdish territory, where the Kurds were easily overrun and defeated.<sup>70</sup> The Kurds are not a subpar military force, but rather experienced forces that are battle tested fighters. For this reason the ISIS military presents a worrisome risk for the United States. ISIS's military is an institution "comprised of many layers of tactical, operational, and strategic capability," that has been "more successful than that of any other force with which they have come into violent contact."<sup>71</sup> Highly skilled and expertly led,

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<sup>67</sup> Scherer et al. 1

<sup>68</sup> Byman 165

<sup>69</sup> Byman 174

<sup>70</sup> *FRONTLINE: The Rise of the ISIS*. Produced by Martin Smith. United States: PBS, 2014. Film.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 22

ISIS's military has demonstrated that it can operate an effective conventional force, a force which could cause extensive casualties to the United States if the two forces were to clash.

ISIS military strategy has largely been focused on conquering territory, but there is a shift in military tactics that may poise ISIS as a direct threat to the United States. Recently, attacks in “Kobane, France, Tunisia and Kuwait do not appear to have a military purpose and may suggest that ISIS has decided to pursue its war for territory in tandem with its war against the world.”<sup>72</sup> If attacks are perpetrated against the West, the United States would find itself faced with an established terrorist military, one which has been more successful and expertly led than any other terrorist military before. Even if the United States does not suffer from a direct attack from ISIS's military, ISIS's leader issued an order for “ISIS's supporters all over the world to kill Western citizens, especially Frenchmen and Americans.”<sup>73</sup> What this means is that although ISIS's skilled military may not hit Americans directly, a call of ISIS inspired attacks may propel America into a fight against ISIS fighters. All considered, ISIS's military is effective, as demonstrated through its past successes, and is highly skilled, presenting a substantial threat to America's most precious resource – her blood – if America were to face ISIS's military.

Two other factors that are increasing ISIS's military and physical threat are foreign fighters and a possible dirty bomb capability. Iraq has seemed to have lost “highly dangerous” radioactive material stolen last year.”<sup>74</sup> This radioactive material is extremely dangerous. In fact, “if not managed properly it could cause permanent injury to a person in close proximity to it for

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<sup>72</sup> Walt, Vivienne. "Terrorist Attacks Suggest a Change in ISIS Tactics." Time World. Accessed November 16, 2015. <http://time.com/3937602/isis-terrorist-attacks/>. Page 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ehrenfeld 258

<sup>74</sup> Rasheed, Ahmed, Aref Mohammed, and Stephen Kalin. "Exclusive: Radioactive Material Stolen in Iraq Raises Security Fears." Reuters. February 17, 2016. Accessed February 25, 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-radiation-idUSKCN0VQ22F>. Page 1.

minutes or hours, and could be fatal to someone exposed for a period of hours to days.”<sup>75</sup> This is a serious threat because, as a senior security official says, “We are afraid the radioactive element will fall into the hands of Daesh,” more frequently referred to as ISIS.<sup>76</sup> Although it has not been confirmed that ISIS is really in control of this material, the psychological impact of the possibility is great in itself. The fact that ISIS may have the ability to attach radioactive material to an explosive device “leading to radioactive pollution of ‘catastrophic proportions,” as well as having the potential to cause mass casualties or long-term fatalities, poses a national security threat to all of ISIS’s enemy and a threat to America’s regional interest.<sup>77</sup> Now pair this knowledge with the fact that “the FBI [has] interrupted four attempts in the past five years by gangs with suspected Russian connections that sought to sell radioactive material to Middle Eastern Extremists.”<sup>78</sup> In one particular instance, a captured middleman toting nuclear material says, “it was essential that the smuggled uranium go to Arabs.”<sup>79</sup> So, with this not only does ISIS potentially already have dirty bomb capabilities from stolen radioactive material, but black market trades of material are continuously trying to put these dirty bomb capabilities into extremists hands. It is only a matter of time before ISIS acquires these military capabilities. The threat of these capabilities is highlighted with this statement: “In the age of the Islamic State, it’s especially terrifying to have real smugglers of nuclear bomb material apparently making connections with real buyers.”<sup>80</sup> If ISIS acquires these military assets, they will unleash them towards their ideological goals of killing all apostates, including the Americans or all

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<sup>75</sup> Rasheed et al. 2

<sup>76</sup> Rasheed et al. 2

<sup>77</sup> Rasheed et al. 3

<sup>78</sup> Butler, Desmond, and Vadim Ghirda. "Nuclear Smugglers Tried Selling Radioactive Materials To ISIS." The World Post. October 07, 2015. Accessed February 25, 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/nuclear-smugglers-shopped-radioactive-material-to-isis-terrorists\\_us\\_561470c1e4b021e856d2cfa0](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/nuclear-smugglers-shopped-radioactive-material-to-isis-terrorists_us_561470c1e4b021e856d2cfa0). Page 2.

<sup>79</sup> Butler and Ghirda 4

<sup>80</sup> Butler and Ghirda 3

nonbelievers in the Middle East. This creates a very serious threat to America's national security and regional interests.

Even more, ISIS is increasing its military ability substantially through the influx of foreign fighters. Over time foreign fighters have been pouring into Syria and Iraq to give their support to ISIS. As an example, "The Soufan group finds 27,000 [foreign fighters] from 86 countries drawn to ISIS territory."<sup>81</sup> Also, these fighters have not just come in one wave in recent months. Rather these fighters have been increasingly migrating to the war-torn region to provide their support. Supporting this, the Soufan group points out, "The number of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria has more than doubled since last year."<sup>82</sup> This influx of foreign fighters is providing much needed military reinforcement and force to ISIS's capacity. In addition to merely providing increasing numbers to ISIS's military capacity, the diversity of these foreign fighters creates another unique threat capacity. There foreign fighters do not just come from one region: 8,000 have come from regional counties in the Middle East; 5,000 have come from European countries; 4,700 have come from the former Soviet Union countries."<sup>83</sup> How this poses a significant threat to America is that "between 20 and 30% of foreign fighters were returning to their home countries."<sup>84</sup> Therefore, not only do foreign fighters exacerbate ISIS's military capacity, further destabilizing the Middle East with their presence and war ambitions, but ISIS's ability to foster a foreign force that becomes highly trained and experienced creates a national security threat for America, and other countries - especially if these fighters return home seeking to further ISIS's fight around the world.

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<sup>81</sup> "Number of Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria Doubles in a Year, Report Finds." Theguardian: Islamic State. December 08, 2015. Accessed February 25, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/08/isis-foreign-fighters-iraq-syria-doubles-report>. Page 1.

<sup>82</sup> "Number of Foreign" 1

<sup>83</sup> "Number of Foreign" 1

<sup>84</sup> "Number of Foreign" 1

Contributing to ISIS's military and recruiting capabilities, ISIS's ability to serve state and governmental functions in many ways demonstrates that ISIS has the potential to remain a long term, persistent, and real threat for the United States. A large portion of ISIS's goals is to "build a state, purify it, and expand it," which is the reason why ISIS has formed "state-like structure in the vast territory it controls."<sup>85</sup> These state-like functions that ISIS provides include institutions and governance, a legal structure and rule, and social services. For the first aspect, ISIS is very successful at establishing and providing institutions and governance: "The Islamic State is operational, with functional institutions, governance, laws, executors, and citizens."<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, "The Islamic State has a centralized hierarchical structure directed by its leader who is its highest authority."<sup>87</sup> This hierarchical administration and governance is more clearly defined by Weiss and Hassan: "ISIS divides regions into wilayat (provinces...) and smaller *qawati*' (townships)," and in each of these has its own leadership in each township.<sup>88</sup> Within these governmental institutions and framework, ISIS provides conquered people with state rule and structure. To provide an example of ISIS's institutional ability, "New recruits who come in are inducted in a thorough, bureaucratized manner, with their personal information logged and passports copied."<sup>89</sup> ISIS also went one step further, "ISIS issued official Islamic Caliphate passports... [and] planned to restore the use of gold and silver dinars" as a currency. This shows ISIS's drive to provide a formal state governance and rule over its citizens. Not only is there just the hierarchical framework of leadership, the institutions which ISIS has established have brought order and rule to society.

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<sup>85</sup> Byman 170

<sup>86</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 23

<sup>87</sup> Ehrenfeld 117

<sup>88</sup> Weiss and Hassan 230

<sup>89</sup> Byman 174

A major state-function ISIS affords their people is effective rule enforcement and legal system. ISIS strives to enforce and act as a judicator because one of the conditions to be a caliph states that one must have “‘*amr*, or authority,” necessitating that “territory in which [the caliph] can enforce Islamic law.”<sup>90</sup> ISIS accomplishes this through policing local communities, to both “stop crime and to ensure adherence to the Islamic State’s draconian rules.”<sup>91</sup> The draconian rules are what Byman refers to as a “medieval form of law”, which enforces the Quranic decree of the *muhtasib*, leading ISIS to have “ten Morality Police headquarters in Aleppo province and additional headquarters in Al-Raqqah province” to enforce the strictures of religious law throughout ISIS society.<sup>92</sup> ISIS’s police forces’ enforcement of law in ISIS territory is strict and effective. No matter the type of rule and enforcement ISIS is providing, draconian or not, ISIS is providing a comforting structure to a society yearning for rule after living in lawlessness or corruption. In fact, Aryn Baker, a businessmen who reports for *Time*, feels safe with how things are in ISIS controlled areas, and says that “there is no smoking... no bribes, and they [the citizens] have tranquility and security.”<sup>93</sup> This security that people ISIS controls feel is allowing ISIS to become a more powerful state by achieving de facto state legitimacy. To contribute to this, ISIS acts as a judicator and mediator between disputes – another essential state function. Surprisingly, being a terrorist organization, “ISIL is increasingly seen as the best, if not the only, conduit to redress local grievances.”<sup>94</sup> Serving a legitimate state function, ISIS effectively mediates between disputing actors in order to effectively solve problems within its society. Describing ISIS judicial system, “As part of its administration of ruled territory, ISIS has appointed an emir in charge of ‘tribal affairs,’ ... [who] receives envoys to discuss local grievances or complaints,”

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<sup>90</sup> Wood 16

<sup>91</sup> Byman 175

<sup>92</sup> Byman 175 & Ehrenfeld 101

<sup>93</sup> Scherer et al. 5

<sup>94</sup> Al-Gharbi 4

as part of a system of sharia courts in several cities.<sup>95</sup> By providing government enforcement and a judicial system or legal remedies, ISIS is establishing confidence with its conquered people and firm state roots through legitimate state action.

Contributing to ISIS's other state functions, ISIS provides social services and programs. Some of these services or programs include "free housing, food, and clothing for all."<sup>96</sup> Byman gives a more detailed description of the extent to which ISIS provides to its society, "the Islamic State runs schools, subsidizes staples like bread, and provides rudimentary services, ensuring electricity and gas supplies, repairing roads, and restoring infrastructure. It even operates a consumer protection office."<sup>97</sup> As one can see, ISIS is very active in ensuring it provides for the society it conquers. Although those adhering to its societal measures may not believe in ISIS's brand of religious conquest or methods, those conquered appreciate the state-like government and function ISIS provides. Providing all of these state-like functions contributes to ISIS's threat toward the United States. The governmental functions ISIS is providing are building their legitimacy within the community, allowing them to more firmly hold onto land, while expanding their organization through increased recruitment and further conquered lands. The threatening aspect is that as "long as the Islamic State maintains the trappings of an actual state in Iraq and Syria – or beyond – governing and dispensing justice, support for the group and its ideology will continue to grow."<sup>98</sup> A growth in ISIS's ideology, one that is inherently dangerous for the United States and the West in general due to ISIS's ability to act as a state and garnish legitimacy and respect, serves as a substantial and resilient threat the United States must face.

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<sup>95</sup> Weiss and Hassan 207 & Ehrenfeld 114

<sup>96</sup> Wood 20

<sup>97</sup> Byman 175

<sup>98</sup> Bunzel 36



ISIS also has the ability to finance its expanding terrorist operations by making a profit many different ways. As Jessica Lewis states, ISIS seeks to “control critical infrastructure to extract rents and generate tactical and political leverage.”<sup>99</sup> One of the most effective ways ISIS can do this, and be a major financier of its operations, is through sale of oil and other captured resources. Lewis predicts that “ISIS may expand its control over Iraq’s water sources.”<sup>100</sup> ISIS would do this because they “aim to generate funds through hydroelectric power and water resources,” of which ISIS was briefly able to do they with its control of the large Mosul Dam, and attempt to attack Hadith Dam.<sup>101</sup> Another resource that ISIS can capture and control is food: “The militants have also pillaged upward of 50,000 tons of grain from government-owned silos, which they turned into flour and sold.”<sup>102</sup> And lastly, ISIS uses oil to collect funds. Oil generates massive amount of income for ISIS because “the Islamic State oversees some of Syria and Iraq’s most lucrative oil resources, controlling perhaps 50,000 barrels a day in production, and using longstanding smuggling routes to sell oil and refined petroleum on the black market.”<sup>103</sup> In PBS’s report, “*How ISIS built its own multi-million dollar industry by attacking oilfields,*” reporter Erika Soloman describes how ISIS has control of captured oilfields and is in control of the already existing employees of oil production. Soloman also goes on to explain how ISIS takes this oil and refined petroleum and sells it to its neighbors, even to ISIS’s opposition, on the black market at an undercut cost simply because they need oil.<sup>104</sup> It is apparent that ISIS is using captured natural resources to fund its operation and continue to grow as a terrorist organization.

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<sup>99</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 15

<sup>100</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 15

<sup>101</sup> Satti 6

<sup>102</sup> Satti 6

<sup>103</sup> Byman 173

<sup>104</sup> Sreenivasan, Hari , Erika Solomon, and PBS NewsHour

In addition to ISIS's exploitation of captured resources, ISIS receives money from donors and taxes. It is the wealthy "donors in Persian Gulf states such as Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia [that] have historically funded an array of Sunni militants," like ISIS.<sup>105</sup> ISIS may not rely heavily on donation today, although when "ISIS was starting off, it relied heavily on cash donations from sympathizers," but "deep-pocketed individuals... still contribute to the group."<sup>106</sup> These donors who contribute are very wealthy sympathizers who are invested in seeing Sunni militant groups, such as ISIS, win their ultimate jihad outcomes. Although donations do not compare to the financial income ISIS obtains from oil sales, it is still worth noting that donors are seeing that ISIS continues to grow, expand, and operate to accomplish its intentions. With donors, ISIS extracts many forms of taxes from the people it conquers; "ISIS collects taxes on anything it believes to be of value."<sup>107</sup> ISIS considers many things to be of value and tax things ranging from annual savings to capital assets, gold to livestock, dates to crops and income, as well as taxing non-Muslim lives.<sup>108</sup> What this means is under ISIS rule a non-Muslim can reside, but they will have to make payments on ISIS's assessment of their life in order to keep living in the territory. Taxing and donations are both sources of income for ISIS that helps ISIS expand its organization and operations.

Criminal activities are another major source of income for ISIS. Byman notices that "the group also gets money from taxing local populations and looting."<sup>109</sup> Byman is keen to show that ISIS's ability to fund its organization extends even further beyond taxing and donors, and into the realm of criminality. This looting Byman speaks of is what Weiss and Hassan call "war spoils," which "is one of the group's largest valuable sources of income," including weapons,

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<sup>105</sup> Byman 173

<sup>106</sup> Satti 3 & Weiss and Hassan 235

<sup>107</sup> Satti 6

<sup>108</sup> Weiss and Hassan 235

<sup>109</sup> Byman 173

artifacts, and other valuables.<sup>110</sup> A second criminal aspect of ISIS is ransom, for which they get “tens of millions each year.”<sup>111</sup> This amount, on top of the vast amounts of money ISIS is getting through petroleum and oil production, is extraordinary for an organization like ISIS. The possibilities do not stop there, leaving even more venues for ISIS to gather funding. Other criminal enterprises that ISIS has its hand in are human trafficking, extortion, and robbery.<sup>112</sup> An example of robbery is that reportedly “the group seized up to an additional \$430 million from the Central Bank in Mosul and other financial institutions.”<sup>113</sup> These criminal activities only contribute to the already profitable financial empire that ISIS has created.

All of this financial power and accumulation is threatening for the United States. The accumulation of wealth represents a danger for the United States because ISIS’s “sizable wealth has allowed the group to increase its operational scope, attain weapons and resources, and recruit local and foreign fighters.”<sup>114</sup> What this means that because ISIS is self-sustaining, accumulating millions of dollars a day. ISIS has a deep pocket to support itself and use towards expanding their physical and organizational size, as well as to increase its operational brutality. Adequate funding will allow ISIS to conduct more of their visionary attacks on their perceived enemies, which includes America as of ISIS’s priority targets. Similarly, Byman claims that “Foreign funding helps sustain the Islamic State.”<sup>115</sup> Not only does funding allow ISIS to continue to gain group, increased financing allows ISIS to establish itself and persist, bolstering its state function and longevity. Due to ISIS’s potential for increased size and operational ability, and the increased prospect of longevity and state capability, America is more at risk. America must seek

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<sup>110</sup> Weiss and Hassan 235

<sup>111</sup> Byman 173

<sup>112</sup> Satti 3

<sup>113</sup> Ehrenfeld 152

<sup>114</sup> Satti 8

<sup>115</sup> Byman 173

to bolster its national security, lest confront a possibly more powerful and embedded ISIS in the near future.

Considering all of ISIS's other aspects which demonstrate its versatility to expand, conquer, and rule, as well as effectively finance its organization, ISIS's ideology makes it a perpetually serious threat to the United States. Before the finer points about ISIS are discussed, it must be known that ISIS ideology is rooted in the Islamic faith and the Quran. Because of this, it is when ISIS "is under attack from religious authorities... it is most defensive."<sup>116</sup> Such as in the case when 120 Muslim scholars released a letter that "picks apart the extremist ideology of the militants who have left a wake of brutal death and destruction...who have dragged Islam 'through the mud.'<sup>117</sup> ISIS fervently defends against these types of ideological assaults because "the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam."<sup>118</sup> It seems as if ISIS envelopes itself in Quranic beliefs and believes nothing else, as if its members are wearing blinders to the tangible world. That is exactly what Clarissa Ward, a CBS correspondent says in response to an interview with Abu Rumaysah, an ardent ISIS supporter: "you come face to face with a version of Islam that wipes out every other aspect of a person's identity... his beliefs bar even the most basic human feelings."<sup>119</sup> This ardent adherence to ISIS's brand of Islam is evident in "The Islamic State's Creed and Path."<sup>120</sup> Each stricture of ISIS's creed appears to be religiously driven, but in the most mundane, raw, and brutish sense. Even much of ISIS's "behavior, which characterizes the conduct of some of the Salafist-jihadi organizations (including Al-Qaeda), has historical Islamic roots attributed to a

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<sup>116</sup> Comerford 5

<sup>117</sup> Markoe, Lauren. "Muslim Scholars Release Open Letter to Islamic State Meticulously Blasting Its Ideology." Huffpost Religion. September 24, 2014. Accessed November 16, 2015.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/24/muslim-scholars-islamic-state\\_n\\_5878038.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/24/muslim-scholars-islamic-state_n_5878038.html). Page 1.

<sup>118</sup> Wood 5

<sup>119</sup> Ward 4

<sup>120</sup> Bunzel 38

statement by the Prophet Muhammad.”<sup>121</sup> For ISIS members, beheadings are justified by the Quran, as seen in their creed, but as Hari Sreenivasan’s PBS broadcast explains, ISIS members use partial Quran verses, incomplete verses, or even incorrect interpretations of the Quran to justify actions.<sup>122</sup> Understanding that ISIS operates with the belief that everything they do is justified by religion is integral to understanding the intricacies of their ideology and why it poses such a threat to the United States.

After understanding that ISIS believes that all actions are justified and called for by religion, no matter the brutality or inhumanity in the act, one can understand how some of the tenets ISIS holds pose a grave threat to the United States. One of those tenets is that ISIS wants dissolution of state borders and to establish a global caliphate. Jessica Lewis also notes that one component of ISIS’s grand plan is its “breaking down [of] state boundaries and generating conditions for civil war,” which would allow ISIS to grow and conquer territory.<sup>123</sup> Closely related to this is the idea of world domination. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS’s leader, wants “its sovereignty... to extend across the entire world.”<sup>124</sup> Ziena Karam and Hari Sreenivasan reiterate this in the PBS NewsHour, “How the Islamic State Indoctrinates Afghan Children,” by saying that when ISIS wants world domination, “they are talking about the world.”<sup>125</sup> In order to think in terms of world domination ISIS needs two things to happen, to eliminate adversaries and unanimous submission to its religious dictations. ISIS expected submission by Muslims or believers by the expectation for “universal allegiance of the entire ummah (global Muslim

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<sup>121</sup> Ehrenfeld 55

<sup>122</sup> Sreenivasan, Hari. *ISIS Uses Half a Quran Verse to Justify Beheadings, See What’s in the Other Half*. Accessed November 25, 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/isis-uses-half-quran-verse-justify-beheadings-see-whats-half/>.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 11

<sup>124</sup> Bunzel 31

<sup>125</sup> Karam, Ziena, Hari Sreenivasan, and PBS NewsHour

community)” because of the moral obligations Muslims have to an existing caliphate.<sup>126</sup> This global Muslim community that is expected to take allegiance to the caliphate is not expected to remain docile. Rather, these newly indoctrinated de facto members by religion are expected to raise jihad: “The Islamic States also emphasizes the offensive form of jihad,” as if it were a duty.”<sup>127</sup> These aspects represent a threat for America. An entity that ideologically sees no sovereign borders, while seeking out eventual world domination by calling on a global, obligated community to raise a holy struggle or war, is a grave threat to every country that does not submit to ISIS mandates. These tenets of ISIS inherently acknowledge that America is an eventual target in the world domination scheme, and by calling all Muslims across the world to ISIS’s allegiance, intuitively motivating them to raise jihad poses a homegrown American threat as well.

More drastically threatening towards the United States is ISIS’s apocalyptic vision and a perceived war with the West. First, ISIS frames any Western involvement in Iraq and Syria as a “campaign only against you and your religion”.<sup>128</sup> Dividing the conceptual world into two spheres – essentially ISIS and the rest of the world – creates an us-or-them mentality ISIS truly believes “the Middle East to be under attack by secular ‘apostate’ rulers and the Western ‘crusader’ backers.”<sup>129</sup> Interestingly enough, an apostate, in ISIS’s eyes, deserves the death penalty. The fact is that ISIS believes ideologically that the rest of the world and the West in particular are crusading against them. Therefore, ISIS actively seeks to posit “The Islamic Caliphate, as an alternative to modern states ... [and] is in fact attempting to destroy the entire

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<sup>126</sup> Comerford 3 & 4

<sup>127</sup> Bunzel 10

<sup>128</sup> Comerford 3

<sup>129</sup> Bunzel 10

modern state system” in the long run.<sup>130</sup> This view of beyond the oppressed and attack, combined with the belief that the caliphate should be the only state in existence, presents a real danger for the United States. Essentially, ISIS denounced the establishment and despises the establishment of America’s modern state, and will eventually seek to destroy it, fueled by a perceived notion that the West, and America in particular, has ‘crusaded’ against Muslims, oppressing them in their lands of the Middle East. That is why ISIS called upon “all supporters to kill Westerners arbitrarily throughout the world – Americans, Canadians, Australians, and their allies, both civilians and military personnel,” which has been answered by “Islamic-inspired attacks having occurred in these countries.”<sup>131</sup> ISIS has gone beyond the point of presenting a long-distance potential threat through governmental persistence, military capability, financial power, and extraordinary growth. ISIS, with its ideological convictions, represents an impending threat to national security, along with regional stability and peace.

One more ideological conviction poises ISIS as a substantial threat to America: ISIS’s apocalyptic vision. ISIS believes that Syria is the location of the war of judgement. ISIS even has its magazine named purposefully after this belief: Dabiq, a city in Syria. The magazine opens every issue with the quote, “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah’s permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq.”<sup>132</sup> ISIS already believes that the United States is among the Western crusader states. Therefore, when taken in context of ISIS’s beliefs that the final war of judgement will be against the crusader state, in Dabiq where ISIS is located now, the puzzle begins to fill in and become clearer. ISIS is building an exponentially increasing amount of power through its ability to recruit, finance itself, govern with state-like functions, and its military capability, a power that has the idea that the end is near

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<sup>130</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 9

<sup>131</sup> Bunzel 36

<sup>132</sup> Weiss and Hassan 37

and will culminate in a holy war at ISIS's doorstep. For ISIS, there is nothing to lose, because it is becoming increasingly stronger, and as Anjem Chaudary, an adamant ISIS supporter in London, exclaims, "I don't think there is something called defeat. Because it's victory or martyrdom."<sup>133</sup> The United States is at the expense of this 'martyrdom or victory' mentality. ISIS is becoming more threatening for many reasons, but it is there apocalyptic, anti-West, and world domineering vision that makes those threatening factors a real threat poised to truly harm America. For ISIS, "they believe that they are personally involved in struggles beyond their own lives, and merely to be swept up in the drama, on the side of righteousness, is a privilege and a pleasure."<sup>134</sup> It is this gratuitous apocalypse which makes ISIS a national security threat to America, a threat just waiting to strike, meanwhile getting ever stronger.

## **Conclusion**

The many different aspects of ISIS culminate to show that it poses a significant threat to the United States. The extent of that threat is a realm of debate, with some believing that ISIS may not pose a significant or immediate threat to the United States, barring the United States from becoming increasingly involved. The fact of the matter is ISIS "poses a serious threat to regional and global security and stability." ISIS poses an immediate regional threat to the Middle East, where the United States has staked interests; ISIS also poses a long-term threat to Europe and America's security.<sup>135</sup> Even if the threat to America seems less immediate, the immediate understanding that "an ISIS directed attack [which] has not occurred ... but it will," should serve as a beacon and reminder to those who want America to remain uninvolved from confronting ISIS that America's time will eventually come, a serious looming national security threat.

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<sup>133</sup> Scherer et al. 11

<sup>134</sup> Wood 39

<sup>135</sup> *FRONTLINE: The Rise of the ISIS*. Produced by Martin Smith.



America cannot afford to keep on its current policy path of limited aggression towards ISIS; there is too much at stake.

This study has attempted to demonstrate the immediacy of ISIS's threat. As Byman puts it, "the Islamic State has steadily increased its strength."<sup>136</sup> ISIS has been able to attack and conquer large swaths of lands in both Iraq and Syria through their military ability. This has culminated to the simple fact that "ISIS now controls more territory – in Iraq and Syria – than any other terrorist group anywhere in the world."<sup>137</sup> With this large amount of territory, ISIS has been able to engage in state-like governmental functions which are contributing to its legitimacy among the people it controls, and establishes the prospect of ISIS's longevity and growth. ISIS's growth is fueled by its recruitment power of its propaganda, which has brought grand numbers of foreigner fighters from the West and the United States to fight on its behalf. In fact this number of foreign fighters is extremely large: "between 27,000 and 31,000 foreign fighters from 86 countries have traveled to Iraq and Syria."<sup>138</sup> This is an ever-increasing threat, given that the year before ISIS only could claim 12,000 foreign fighters.<sup>139</sup> Taking this threat more seriously, these fighters "might go to Syria and Iraq to fight local dictators but come back [to the United States] as radicalized and battled hardened tools of jihadist groups eager to bring war home to the West."<sup>140</sup> In fact, Vivienne Walt goes on to say, "French officials believe about 3,000 French citizens have fought with various jihadist groups in Syria since 2011, and that hundreds might be back."<sup>141</sup> This is a grave prospect to contemplate, because individuals who are citizens of the West, who look like they belong in the West, are infiltrating Western society, holding ISIS's

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<sup>136</sup> Byman 171

<sup>137</sup> Morell 306

<sup>138</sup> "Number of Foreign" 1

<sup>139</sup> "Number of Foreign" 1

<sup>140</sup> Byman 181

<sup>141</sup> Walt 4

ideological aspirations that are world domineering, jihadist, and perpetually apocalyptic. Sadly enough, these sorts of attacks have already occurred, because “ramped-up security and surveillance go only so far.”<sup>142</sup> ISIS is producing a growing organization, with effective military capabilities, local legitimacy, and an ideology hell-bent on destroying the West. Without further measures taken by American policy and its administration, a national security nightmare as well as perpetual regional chaos and strife waits.

America’s policy of limited aggression, with the use of airstrikes and logistical support, will not be substantial enough to protect itself and prevent ISIS’s ideological goal. ISIS seeks fervently to destroy at best or harm at the least the West and particularly the United States. Thus far the United States’ administration has “pledged to avoid a ‘boots on the ground’ role for U.S. forces: they can advise and train but not fight directly.”<sup>143</sup> What this does is confirm ISIS’s belief of America: “that the United States does not have the stomach for a tough fight and will pull out of a conflict as soon as Americans start getting killed.”<sup>144</sup> This leaves room for ISIS to brutally operate with great military success -- and continue to grow its operations -- while increasingly preparing itself to fulfill its ideological prophecy. A rebuttal to America’s policy insufficiency is that America has engaged in precision airstrikes on ISIS, and dealt a great deal of damage. Countering this argument precisely, Ali Khedery explains, “I’ve seen senior American officials waste time tweeting about the number of airstrikes. Who cares about these tactical developments? Sunnis are being radicalized at record proportions. A counter terrorism strategy isn’t going to work with ISIS.”<sup>145</sup> If one wants to make the connection, or extrapolate to consider, Vietnam had a similar strategy of tactical victory by body counts. The policy then was

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<sup>142</sup> Walt 4

<sup>143</sup> Byman 186

<sup>144</sup> Byman 177

<sup>145</sup> Weiss and Hassan 240

obsolete, and the policy now is similarly obsolete. Furthermore, when Mark Thomson reported a piece for *Time*, “U.S. warplanes have dropped 8,200 bombs and missiles on ISIS targets in 2,500 air strikes in Iraq and Syria... [while] Kurdish pesh merga forces have retaken a scant 1.3% of the contested territory ISIS has seized.”<sup>146</sup> Explaining this further ISIS has shrunk by 40 percent in Iraq and 20 percent in Syria since its maximum size. But this must be taken with a careful consideration because although “ISIS has lost ground since its mid-2014 height ... los[ing] only 14% of its territory in 2015 ... those territorial losses occurred amid expansion into strategically vital territory in Syria.”<sup>147</sup> This highlights “ISIS’s ability to make strategic gains even while losing vital territory.”<sup>148</sup> With ISIS’s strategic expansion, ISIS is demonstrating their resilience to the military strategy against them from many actors, including the United States. These examples show how ineffective United States and coalition air strikes, and other counter-military measures are, and have been, against ISIS, especially while these attacks are being used as fuel in propaganda.

The United States must adjust its policy in order to confront ISIS. If nothing is done, there will be grave consequences for the United States; “a decision to take no action against the ISIS Caliphate will guarantee its permanent formation.”<sup>149</sup> Less drastically than a policy of no action, inefficient action to mitigate ISIS’s growth in size and power is equally devastating. As Bunzel warns, “The longer the group enjoys plausible claim to statehood, the more likely its organizational and ideological unity will remain intact.”<sup>150</sup> ISIS is gaining strength exponentially. ISIS is garnishing sizable military and state-like power. If ISIS is left unmitigated,

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<sup>146</sup> Scherer et al. 3

<sup>147</sup> Rosen, Armin, and Reuters. Business Insider. January 05, 2016. Accessed February 25, 2016.  
<http://www.businessinsider.com/r-islamic-state-territory-shrinks-in-iraq-and-syria-us-led-coalition-2016-1>.  
Page 1.

<sup>148</sup> Rosen 3

<sup>149</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 26

<sup>150</sup> Bunzel 37

“the ISIS threat will grow outside the scope of possible U.S. action.”<sup>151</sup> Not to conjecture that the U.S will not be able to defeat an adversary like ISIS if it grows unmitigated; but rather, America will not be able to do so unscathed, paying a steep price in American blood. Graeme Wood concedes, “Ideological tools may convince some potential converts... and military tools can limit its horrors. But for an organization as impervious to persuasion as the Islamic State, few measures short of these [ideological and military tools] will matter.”<sup>152</sup> America is at a crossroads. It can choose to stay on its current path of limited aggression, or it can find an alternative better suited to deal with the threat ISIS poses. The consequences for America’s administration are great. Together, many aspects of ISIS pose a substantial threat to America’s citizenry, national security, and global and regional interests. America must confront ISIS before unnecessary American blood is shed at home or abroad.

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<sup>151</sup> Lewis, Jessica D. 26

<sup>152</sup> Wood 39

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