

# THE ISLAMIC STATE AS ICARUS: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF AN UNTENABLE THREAT





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# PREFACE

It is not an exaggeration to say that over the last two years, few if any international security threats have consumed Washington's—and the world's—attention as much as the terrorist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), or simply as the Islamic State.

It is easy to understand why. After breaking with al-Qaeda in 2014, ISIS rapidly seized large swaths of land in Iraq and Syria and declared these areas as its caliphate. In recent months, it has expanded its campaign, launching attacks across the Middle East and North Africa. The group has earned further notoriety through its adept use of social media to broadcast its barbaric acts. Of particular concern to the United States and its allies in the West is the fact that ISIS has recruited many fighters from Europe.

In Washington, some have labelled ISIS as one of, if not the most, serious security threats that the United States has ever faced. And yet relatively little research has been done on the true nature of the ISIS threat. How much harm could this group afflict in the coming years? Will it maintain its current momentum and strength? And will it displace al-Qaeda as the world's most feared and potent terrorist syndicate?

These questions are particularly salient for South Asia, and especially for Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have served as a core bastion for al-Qaeda. In January 2015, ISIS formally announced its expansion into this region; appointed several former Taliban leaders as local representatives; and claimed responsibility for a gruesome bus attack several months later in Pakistan. After the announcement of the death of Afghan Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar in July, a number of high-profile Taliban and Taliban-allied militants announced that they were transferring their allegiances to Islamic State—intensifying a trend already underway before Omar's death announcement. In some parts of Afghanistan, pro-ISIS fighters are now facing off against Taliban loyalists on the battlefield.

The Wilson Center's Asia Program is pleased to publish *The Islamic State as Icarus: A Critical Assessment of an Untenable Threat*, by long-time South Asia specialist Thomas F. Lynch III. The study traces the evolution and spread of ISIS, including its inroads into South Asia, and provides a careful analysis of the nature of the ISIS threat. Lynch, in fact,

concludes that this threat could well diminish in the years ahead. “Like Icarus,” he writes, “ISIS has vowed to fly dangerously high, undertaking a brash and high risk strategy. This has exposed it widely, and made it many enemies.” Additionally, he argues that the group’s “relative underperformance” in South Asia says much about its “inherent weaknesses as a serious challenger to longstanding al Qaeda preeminence in the global Salafi jihadist terrorism space.”

One may or may not disagree with such an assessment. What is clear, however, is that in an environment in which the ISIS threat is often depicted in the most terrifying terms, the perspective in Lynch’s study provides fresh insights—and should spark some useful debate.

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# CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b>	1
<b>What is the Islamic State (IS) Caliphate?</b>	2
ISIS's Rapid Rise	2
<b>Islamic Caliphate as a Phenomenon of Salafi Jihadist Fragmentation</b>	4
A History of Tensions with AQ Central	5
ISIS's Godsend: Civil War in Syria	6
Rupture with al-Qaeda	8
<b>The Islamic State Caliphate and the Icarus Effect: Burning Brightly But Near the Sun</b>	10
Major Pushback from Multiple Foreign Militaries	11
The Dubious Quality of, and Limited Responses from,	
Appeals to Potential Affiliates	12
Self-Defeating Foreign Fighter Recruitment Efforts	17
Precarious Finances	18
A Jihadist Pariah	19
Risky Social Media Messaging	20
An Ambitious and Unforgiving Territorial Timeline	20
<b>The Islamic State Caliphate: Impacts and Implications in South Asia</b>	21
<b>Summary and Conclusions</b>	25
<b>Appendix A</b>	26
<b>Appendix B</b>	31
<b>Appendix C</b>	35
<b>Notes</b>	36
<b>About the Author</b>	45

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper defines the Islamic State (IS) “Caliphate,” its founding factors, its unique features, and its not-so-unique features. It also highlights the major impacts that this IS Caliphate has had on the al Qaeda leadership of the global jihad and on jihad in South Asia. It develops conclusions based on classic literature pertaining to the inception and sustainment of durable and pernicious terrorist groups, as well as on media sources and outlets throughout the Middle East and South Asia.

The paper does not describe all the impacts of the IS Caliphate on groups, subgroups, or splinter jihadi terrorist outfits across the Islamic world. Instead, it concentrates on the major trends found to be important in understanding the IS Caliphate’s immediate and long-term impact on the global Salafi jihadist milieu, and particularly on the international Salafi jihadist space in South Asia.<sup>1</sup>

The paper offers several conclusions about the IS Caliphate as of August 2015. First, the declaration of a caliphate by Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) has caused a significant rupture in the global Salafi jihadist constellation, directly challenging al Qaeda’s longstanding ascendancy in this space. Second, the IS Caliphate will remain a dangerous security problem for the Middle East so long as ISIS retains a critical mass of support from the Sunni tribal leaders and the former Baathist military leaders in Iraq who have played a leading role in ISIS’s rapid ascent. Third, the foundation of IS Caliphate support is fragile, and the persistent brutalization of Iraqi and Syrian Sunnis by the many foreign fighter fanatics in ISIS is certain to compromise IS Caliphate viability. Fourth, ISIS’s rapid rise into a caliphate has simultaneously created a monster coalition of opposition from surrounding nation states and from within the Salafi jihadist community itself. Fifth and finally, the IS Caliphate’s appeal for international allegiance from Salafi jihadist groups and individual jihadists has generated an uneven response. The IS Caliphate appeal has resonated more with individuals than with jihadist groups, more with newly evolving Salafi jihadist outfits than with longstanding ones, and far more in Europe, North Africa, and Central Asia than in South Asia. The reasons associated with ISIS’s relative underperformance in South Asia say a lot about the IS Caliphate’s inherent weaknesses as a serious challenger to longstanding al Qaeda preeminence in the global Salafi jihadist terrorism space.

## WHAT IS THE ISLAMIC STATE (IS) CALIPHATE?

ISIS<sup>2</sup> rose rapidly in 2013 and 2014 to become the major Sunni insurgent and terrorist group in eastern Syria and western Iraq. The rapid and overwhelming success of ISIS during this period came as part of a carefully planned and executed expansion that made good on the group's namesake goal – the creation of an Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or IS Caliphate.<sup>3</sup>

A lot of early focus on ISIS has been on its military acumen and gains. This focus has included attention to ISIS's predation of munitions and supplies from less capable or fortunate anti-Assad Sunni insurgent groups in Syria. ISIS has also captured Iraqi military equipment – most of it originally provided by the United States – from the collapsing Iraqi military forces in western towns and military bases from Mosul to Tikrit and Baiji. ISIS's mounting military successes in 2014 and 2015 from eastern Syria to western Iraq were vital to its ascent. However, even more of ISIS's growth came from its exploitation of massive political and social discontent among Sunni Arabs on both sides of the border.

ISIS's history can be traced to its forefathers' affiliations with the wider global Salafi jihadist movement. But its actions and activities beginning in 2013 put ISIS at direct odds with the global Salafi jihadist hierarchy, and specifically al Qaeda (AQ). The origins of ISIS's affiliations with Syrian and Iraqi Sunni tribal leaders and former Ba'athist military officers, and the origins of its dramatic falling-out with AQ, are important to properly understand the IS Caliphate's dangerous challenge in the Middle East – but also its questionable prospects for leadership of the wider global Salafist jihad.

### ISIS's Rapid Rise

First and foremost, ISIS took advantage of widespread discontent toward Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Shia-led government harbored by Sunni Iraqis living in western and northern parts of that country. This discontent grew rampant after the U.S. departure from Iraq at the end of 2011. After the American departure, Maliki and his Iraqi Shi'ite-dominated government systematically replaced Sunni military leaders with Shia ones, dismissing large numbers of Sunni national police and soldiers from ranks established under the Americans from 2007-10, and ousting popular Sunni politicians from positions of national prominence.<sup>4</sup> ISIS's 2014 capture of most of western Iraq was abetted by tepid resistance from the alienated local Sunni population, and in some cases by active assistance from local Sunnis, including other Sunni insurgent groups like Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshabandiya and Ansar al-Sunna. In June 2014, with its loyalty badly compromised by the sectarian politics practiced by Prime Minister Maliki, the top Iraqi military leadership in Mosul fled north to Kurdistan via helicopter. Many of the remaining Iraqi soldiers shed their uniforms and blended into the population.

The jihadist core of ISIS arose from the terrorists and militant Sunni leaders who had been all but broken by the U.S. military surge of 2007-08 and by the corresponding

Sunni “Awakening.” This latter movement witnessed a critical majority of Iraqi Sunnis joining forces with U.S. and Iraqi national military troops in return for American cash and the prospect of a meaningful place in the new Iraqi political order. By 2010, many jihadist targets of the surge, including most of the ideological cadre of what later became ISIS, were in hiding or incarcerated – including ISIS spiritual leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was detained in the U.S.-run Camp Bucca. However, from 2010-12, the Iraqi government released many detained Sunni militants, and later ISIS sympathizers began to break free thousands of prisoners throughout Iraq. These unrepentant jihadists organized and radicalized Sunni tribes and cities in western Iraq for armed struggle. The trend continued into 2013-14, culminating in the liberation of thousands of jihadists and unrepentant former Ba’athist leaders from four prisons in Mosul and one in Tikrit.<sup>6</sup> Reportedly, the ISIS military commander behind the invasion of Mosul in 2014, Abu `Abd al-Rahman al-Bilawi, was himself a former inmate freed in 2012.

ISIS also extended its capabilities by appropriating much of the financial capital and production capacity of western Iraq. As 2013 turned into 2014, ISIS looted several Iraqi banks, including an alleged \$429 million dollars from Mosul’s Central bank. ISIS also capitalized on Sunni disloyalty to central authority by overtaking oil and gas smuggling routes across western Iraq and northern Syria. Then it moved to the active capture of Iraqi oil capacity, seeking to profit directly from the overrun Baiji oil refinery – one of Iraq’s largest, and a facility that produces more than 300,000 barrels per day.<sup>7</sup>

ISIS used social media skillfully, though also in an undisciplined manner, to advance its aims of intimidation and consolidation of a caliphate. ISIS’s media production team grew rapidly on the backs of willing and expert Sunni Iraqis and became especially adept at extending its target audience beyond the Arabic-speaking world. Less than 24 hours after its June 2014 capture of Mosul, ISIS’s media wing, *al-Furqan*, published the third issue of its English-language magazine, *Islamic State News*, complete with pictures detailing its military victory and various economic development programs helping the people of Iraq. A month later, it released a highly professional and graphic film demonstrating ISIS’s capacity to find, torture, and kill in a most grizzly fashion any Iraqi government and military officials trying to hide among the people.

Yet for all of its successes up and through mid-2014, ISIS quickly confronted daunting challenges. By early 2015, ISIS faced a two-front war with a vast array of enemies within and outside of its contiguous spaces. In Syria, ISIS is now battling not only pro-Assad forces, but also sister extremist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra (or al Nusra Front), the al-Qaeda affiliate it once tried to subordinate; Kurdish groups in northeastern Syria that are vying for control of the resource-rich al-Hasakah Province; and other Islamic and Syrian nationalist opposition groups.

In Iraq, ISIS faces the difficult challenge of governing the territory it now controls. IS Caliphate leaders must provide services to millions of people, steady an economy under siege financially and militarily, and try to make a very restrictive form of Shari`a law

attractive to Sunni Iraqis in the long term. ISIS's past history in Iraq suggests that it will face many challenges in meeting these tests. ISIS's forerunner jihadist outfit, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), failed to hold onto Sunni tribal loyalties in Iraq during the mid-2000s. In January 2014, ISIS enjoyed surprising success in a brief campaign in Anbar Province that allowed it to gain and maintain control over much of Fallujah and Ramadi, but it failed to fully exploit these gains with powerful tribal leaders in Anbar – who saw the group as a threat to their autonomy and their own personal interests.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond its immediate region, the IS Caliphate appeal has resonated, but in an uneven fashion. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's brash bid for leadership of the global Salafi jihadist community has generated thousands of foot soldiers and allegiance from renegade jihadist outfits. However, its successes appear overstated, its jihadist enemies at least as strong as it is, and its future highly uncertain – all of which help explain ISIS's conspicuous weaknesses in South Asia.

## **ISLAMIC STATE (IS) CALIPHATE AS A PHENOMENON OF SALAFI JIHADIST FRAGMENTATION**

ISIS did not materialize from thin air in 2011-2012. Its main Salafi jihadist leaders, including its spiritual and corporate leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, were originally, in the mid-2000s, members of or affiliated with the Al Qaeda affiliate in Iraq (AQI), occasionally referred to then as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).<sup>9</sup> Led by the infamous Jordanian jihadist Abu Musab Zarqawi, this Salafi terrorist organization rose and fell in spectacular fashion during the vicious Iraq civil war of 2003-08. Before his death in June 2006, Zarqawi's AQI had initially pleased, but soon confounded, the global jihadist standard-bearers, led by al-Qaeda (AQ) leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri from their refuge in South Asia.

Abu Musab Zarqawi's jihadist roots were with that AQ core. Zarqawi spent time with the mujihadeen in Afghanistan during the war there against the Soviet Union, reportedly meeting with Osama bin Laden on at least one occasion. After a decade of ultimately unsuccessful efforts to organize a successful jihad in Jordan, half of those spent in a Jordanian prison, Zarqawi returned to Afghanistan in 1999 to train members of his Jordan-based jihadist group, Jund al-Sham. After briefly fighting against the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan against the Afghan Taliban, Zarqawi fled through Iran into Iraq in December 2001. Bouncing around from Iran to Iraq and to Syria from 2002-2003 to avoid extradition to Jordan, Zarqawi found his way into northern Iraq in late 2002 or early 2003.<sup>10</sup> With encouragement from, but something less than formal direction from, AQ leaders, Zarqawi established sleeper cells in Baghdad to resist the coming American invasion. Beginning in March 2003, Zarqawi propagated long-suppressed radical Islam in Saddam-less Iraq, finding points of convergence with newly displaced and fearful Iraq Sunni tribal leaders and also with Sunni Baathist leaders – ironically, the same Baathists who had brutally suppressed political and radical Islam under Saddam. Zarqawi's terrorist

outfit took center stage in Iraq violence. His AQI was blamed for thousands of acts of terror in Iraq from 2003-06, including some of the most heinous against Coalition forces and Iraqi Shi'ites. Among the many major attacks, two stood out: the August 2003 suicide bombing of the UN Assistance Mission in Baghdad that killed 22 people, including newly arrived UN Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello; and the February 2006 bombing of the Shi'ite Al Askari (or Golden Dome) Mosque in Samarra that killed over 100, and triggered a spasm of retaliatory violence by Shia Muslims that became the catalyst for a rapacious Sunni-versus-Shia sectarian battle that killed tens of thousands of Iraqis from 2006-08.<sup>11</sup>

### A History of Tensions with AQ Central

Yet, Zarqawi did not remain a loyal acolyte of AQ. In 2004, AQ designated Zarqawi's outfit as its new affiliate, al Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, expecting Zarqawi to operate as a faithful emir in response to the preferences of AQ's leadership core.<sup>12</sup> But Zarqawi had other ideas. By late 2004 we know that AQ's number two, al-Zawahiri, dispatched at least one messenger to chastise Zarqawi for too much brutality and too little fealty to al Qaeda's core leadership aims.<sup>13</sup> Among Zarqawi's divergent aims was the seminal Salafi jihadist issue of where and how to best strike against the western, "far enemy," of Islam.<sup>14</sup>

Zawahiri wrote to Zarqawi in July 2005 that he must exercise restraint, and limit attacks against Muslim civilians. Such attacks, Zawahiri wrote, "won't be acceptable to the Muslim populace however much you have tried to explain it."<sup>15</sup> Zawahiri went on to tell Zarqawi that his jihad in Iraq must adhere to a step-by-step process exercising targeted violence to attain sequential goals. These steps were to first expel the "far enemy," American infidels from Iraq and then fill their void with an Islamic emirate. Then, Zawahiri went on, an Iraqi Islamic emirate could extend jihad into neighboring "secular" Sunni countries followed by a clash with Israel. At that point, and only at that point, would it be time for the Salafi jihadist faithful to unite in formal jihad against the Shia, who would have no chance against such an empowered Sunni Muslim *umma*.<sup>16</sup>

Zawahiri's criticism of Zarqawi received the most media attention when made public in late 2005, but other prominent Sunni jihadists also publicly questioned Zarqawi's unusually brutal methods in Iraq. Even Zarqawi's Jordanian religious mentor Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi criticized Zarqawi's bloodthirsty tactics. Maqdisi rejected Zarqawi's classification of Shiites as nonbelievers, telling Al-Jazeera that he did not consider ordinary Shiites as non-Muslims, and therefore it was "...forbidden to equate the ordinary Shiite with the American in warfare." And in November 2004, Maqdisi told a prominent Middle East newspaper that Zarqawi's operations "damage [the reputation] of Islam," and compared Zarqawi's methods with those of the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria – a group bin Laden ultimately repudiated because of its vicious attacks against Algerian civilians.<sup>17</sup>

For bin Laden's AQ, the correct priority focus was to plot, plan, and execute

catastrophic strikes against America and the west in western lands, and in Muslim lands where American interests were vulnerable. Bin Laden's AQ also believed that it was wasted energy to focus violence against the Shi'ites of the Muslim world, arguing that the first priority was to drive off the "far enemy" infidels who propped up illegitimate Sunni Muslim regimes.<sup>18</sup> Zarqawi's AQI differed in objective. While it did conduct large scale strikes against U.S. and western targets in Iraq, it did not temper activities in a manner that enabled development of AQ-desired safe havens for the planning and plotting of catastrophic terror against "far enemy" targets beyond the region. Zarqawi was also unwilling to step back from full-bore terror against Iraqi Shia targets, catalyzing a national Sunni-Shia war that bin Laden's AQ wished to put off.<sup>19</sup>

Zarqawi's 2006 death masked the serious jihadist feud between bin Laden's AQ and Zarqawi's AQI. Zarqawi's successors, placed under duress by a resurgent US troop presence and collapsing support within the Iraq Sunni community, were killed or captured in waves during 2007-09. There was no overt showdown between divergent Salafi jihadist visions, no power struggle between a breakaway would-be Iraqi Salafist emirate and the self-proclaimed leadership-in-waiting-for-a-caliphate aspired to by bin Laden and Zawahiri.

### **ISIS's Godsend: Civil War in Syria**

And yet the seeds of jihadist schism did not die with Zarqawi in 2006 or with bin Laden in 2011. Instead these seeds lay dormant in the minds of the one-time Zarqawi followers hiding in Syria or imprisoned in Iraq.<sup>20</sup> Among them was Iraqi-born Ibrahim Awad al-Badry (aka: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi). Like al-Baghdadi, who became the leader of AQI in 2010, many Iraqi jihadists had languished in Iraqi prisons for several years before getting released as the American military left Iraq during 2010 and 2011. For these ideologues, the dawn of a civil war in Syria – a movement to overthrow Shia Alawite Syrian President Bashar al Assad – was a godsend.

Beginning in 2011, the Syrian civil war generated a lawless, ungoverned incubator for radicals and revolutionaries. By late 2011, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was sending hundreds of Iraqi jihadists into Syria to advise and assist the many Sunni groups joining the fight against Syrian President Assad's military.<sup>21</sup> But they did not come to join with others; they came to form their own ascendant jihadist outfit. These sons of Zarqawi and AQI, al-Baghdadi's cadre, brought critical martial knowledge and quickly acquired status. The number of foreign fighters coming to Syria to join the fight against "unbeliever" Bashar al Assad rose rapidly. They grew alongside other Sunni jihadist anti-Assad revolutionary groups – including ones strongly aligned with AQ's core leadership believed in South Asia – but without real collaboration with these groups. In April 2013, al-Baghdadi changed the name of AQI to ISIS and by mid-to-late 2013, al-Baghdadi's ISIS expanded by exploiting and victimizing fellow Syrian revolutionary militias, gaining weapons and material after clashes with – and outright preying on – fellow Syrian revolutionary groups. Most

importantly, ISIS gained control of Syrian territory.

As it expanded in Syria, al-Baghdadi's Iraqi-led ISIS jihadist cadre grew in appeal to scores of western Iraqi Sunni tribal leaders and former Saddam-era Baathist leaders – each of whom grew ever more disdainful of the sectarian manner in which Iraqi Shia Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki was running Iraq. In late 2011, the Iraqi Army Chief of Staff wrote a report to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani complaining that Prime Minister Maliki and his loyalists had been systematically placing Shia loyalists into the top 20 positions in the military – disempowering Army institutions designed to balance Sunni, Shia and Kurdish appointments. Then, within 96 hours of the December 15, 2011 departure ceremony for American troops from Iraq, Prime Minister Maliki moved to detain the most senior

## The seeds were sown for an expansion of the Salafi jihadist group in Iraq and Syria, and one with aspirations too big to be contained by AQ's more limited vision of a global Salafi jihad.

Sunni government leaders including the Vice President, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. At the behest of Maliki, Iraqi Special troops surrounded their homes and offices, arrested their staffers and then secured dubious confessions by staffers that these Sunni political leaders had directed them to carry out assassinations and attacks outside of the law. On the basis of these suspicious confessions, Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi was convicted in absentia

(he had fled for his life already) for the crime of terrorism and sentenced to death. When Iraq's Sunnis protested these moves by the Maliki government in 2012-13, they met a harsh fate. When Sunni tribes organized a series of gatherings from January-April 2013 to peacefully protest the Maliki government purge of Sunni Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi, things turned violent in a major way. In the Tikrit suburb of Hawijah, an April Sunni protest was met with an Iraqi Army attack that included helicopter gunships that killed scores of Sunni protesters. By April 26, 2013, thousands of Sunnis began protesting the Maliki government from Mosul to Baghdad, and sectarian bombings began occurring across Iraq at a rate not seen since 2008.<sup>22</sup> In these events and more, the seeds were sown for an expansion of the Salafi jihadist group in Iraq and Syria, and one with aspirations too big to be contained by AQ's more limited vision of a global Salafi jihad.

Observers of the jihadist milieu in Syria reported that soon after al-Baghdadi declared the formal establishment of ISIS in April 2013, open competition broke out between ISIS and the groups anointed to be the vanguards of the al Qaeda-endorsed revolutionary vanguard against Bashir al-Assad. Tensions between ISIS and the AQ-endorsed Syrian Al Nusra Front became a full-blown feud.<sup>23</sup> Al-Baghdadi considered himself the rightful heir to a Sunni Islam caliphate because his blood lines, according to

al-Baghdadi, made him a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed's family.<sup>24</sup> Baghdadi therefore chafed at any requirement to suborn his fighters to the Al Nusra Front.

In early 2014, Osama bin Laden's successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, made a personal appeal to Baghdadi to have ISIS abandon its role in Syria and to return to Iraq alone, where ISIS's roots were. Zawahiri also demanded that ISIS immediately stop any fighting against jihadist brothers like Al Nusra in Syria.<sup>25</sup> Al-Baghdadi rejected this appeal, and Zawahiri's AQ general command formally disowned ISIS in February 2014.<sup>26</sup> The ISIS rejection of the AQ appeal for order and discipline within jihadist ranks featured pushback against al-Zawahiri in a manner not witnessed since the era of Abu Musab Zarqawi: ISIS spokesmen chastised Zawahiri for being too tepid in AQ's use of violence, and insisted that AQ must brand all Shi'ites worldwide to be apostate and legitimate targets of jihad.<sup>27</sup>

### Rupture with al-Qaeda

With AQ having banished ISIS from its constellation, ISIS declared itself to be separate from AQ – an open rupture in the Salafi jihadist universe now laid bare. Yet this was merely the formalization of troubles between Zarqawi's Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and AQ's core that harkened back to the mid-2000s. In 2004, Zarqawi wrote to the al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan articulating his plan to attack Shiites in Iraq with the aim of igniting sectarian conflict. Zarqawi was certain the United States would withdraw quickly from Iraq, but wrote that Shiite militia members already dominated the New Iraqi Army, putting his group on the defensive. The situation was dire enough, in Zarqawi's analysis, that he was willing to risk a strategic break with bin Laden and Zawahiri. He wrote, "If you agree with us on [targeting Shiites] we will be your readied soldiers. If things appear otherwise to you, we are brothers, and the disagreement will not spoil our friendship."<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the seeds of a formal schism within the Salafi jihadist movement were sown in Iraq in the mid-2000s and blossomed into a full rupture in the 2014-15 period. Although there are many important dimensions of this rupture, the four major disagreements separating ISIS from AQ are:<sup>29</sup>

- **The "far enemy first" thesis.** AQ believes that Americans and westerners must be driven from Muslim lands as a first priority. In addition, AQ believes that territory and energy resources should be used to sustain a vanguard of expert jihadist operatives to plot and plan catastrophic attacks on western lands. ISIS does not share this view, focusing instead upon attacks against local foes and opposition groups as its first objectives.<sup>30</sup>
- **The use of indiscriminate violence.** ISIS, as did Zarqawi's AQI before it, believes in the power and absolute necessity of indiscriminate and graphic violence to establish the imperative for unbridled jihad and is unwilling to tether or temper that violence in an effort to attain other goals.<sup>31</sup> In effect, ISIS takes a very broad view of those



who deserve death as a consequence of their disbelief. Like all Salafi jihadists, the leadership of ISIS treats non-believers, non-Muslims and Shiite Muslims alike, as meriting death in support of the cause to throw off the yoke of outside oppression of ‘true belief.’ But ISIS has demonstrated that it will brand a very large number of fellow Sunni Muslims to be *takfir* (or insufficiently religious) and deserving of death. These include tyrants (Sunni Muslim regimes that fail to rule in strict accordance with sharia law), apostates (Sunni Muslims who work too closely with tyrants, infidels or other non-believers), as well as heretics and polytheists (Sunni Muslims insufficiently orthodox in their beliefs).<sup>32</sup> Conversely, with knowledge gained from slumping popular opinion after several years of indiscriminate terror that killed thousands of innocent Sunni Muslims in the apostate, heretic and polytheists categories, AQ believes in tempered violence that eschews direct attacks on heretics and polytheists in an effort not to alienate the wider Sunni Muslim *umma*.<sup>33</sup>

- **The sequencing of adversaries.** Laid bare in Zawahiri’s July 2005 letter to Zarqawi, AQ sees risk in battling its many enemies at the same time, preferring to focus first on driving off foreign infidels and then toppling apostate Sunni Muslim governments before moving onto the elimination of Israel and any wider clashes with Shia Muslims or Hindus. ISIS is indiscriminate in its clash with a multitude of enemies, taking on all adversaries at once in a conspicuous and incredibly risk-tolerant manner that is anathema for AQ.<sup>34</sup>
- **The timeline to a comprehensive Caliphate.** From its inception, AQ has talked about establishing a wider Muslim caliphate from Spain to the Philippines. Its vision has been a generational one, framed around the notion that AQ would help inspire and encourage regional and local Salafi jihadist affiliates to attain autonomy and status as “Islamic emirates” and then, over a long period of time, merge these emirates into one full caliphate the leader (or caliph) of which remains to be determined at some distant point (see figure 1).<sup>35</sup> For ISIS, this bottom-up, lengthy process of building an Islamic Caliphate is intolerable. Less than two months after it captured Mosul, ISIS declared itself to be the Islamic State caliphate and declared Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its caliph – a June 29, 2014 announcement made by Baghdadi himself. The caliphate leadership then announced its aims to expand and extend the caliphate through a wider network of *wayilats* (regions) across the Muslim world (see figure 2). It also declared that it would pursue a five-year plan to topple standing governments and unify these locations under one broad Sharia-law-based, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi-led caliphate.<sup>36</sup>

So while the IS Caliphate is a serious security and sovereignty challenge to Iraq and to Syria, it is an even more significant challenge for global jihad and AQ. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s June 2014 declaration of a Salafist caliphate transformed a dormant schism into an open and formal rupture in the Salafi jihadist community.<sup>39</sup> ISIS has established an

alternate vision for the future of Salafi jihadism, and it has introduced a formal competition into the jihadist space that is being played out across several important dimensions. The IS Caliphate declaration has formalized this competition by issuing an appeal to all jihadist groups to turn away from AQ and instead declare their loyalties to ISIS.<sup>40</sup> The question is whether the AQ vision of tempered violence and a strategic and sequential focus for its major operations will remain ascendant, or if the approach of the upstart ISIS will displace almost two decades of AQ preeminence in the global jihadist space.

## THE ISLAMIC STATE CALIPHATE AND THE ICARUS EFFECT: BURNING BRIGHTLY BUT NEAR THE SUN

The IS Caliphate is very dangerous in western Iraq and in ungoverned spaces in Syria. Several western think tanks and private analysts argue that ISIS is also a dire international threat, according context and meaning to IS Caliphate leadership statements and activities demonstrating aspirations beyond the consolidation of power and territory in Iraq and Syria.<sup>41</sup> However, ISIS prospects for becoming a durable and pernicious leader of a global Salafi jihadist terrorist movement remain questionable. While its expansive aims may be genuinely representative of its ideology, its methods have yet to muster the affiliations or the capabilities necessary to meet its stated aims or desired timelines. Moreover, the very successes that have marked its rapid ascent also make it highly vulnerable to an equally rapid fall. As the lead story in the March 21, 2015 edition of the *Economist* stated, “The call of the caliphate has galvanized zealots. Yet, even as IS launches terrorist attacks, the

Figure 1<sup>37</sup>

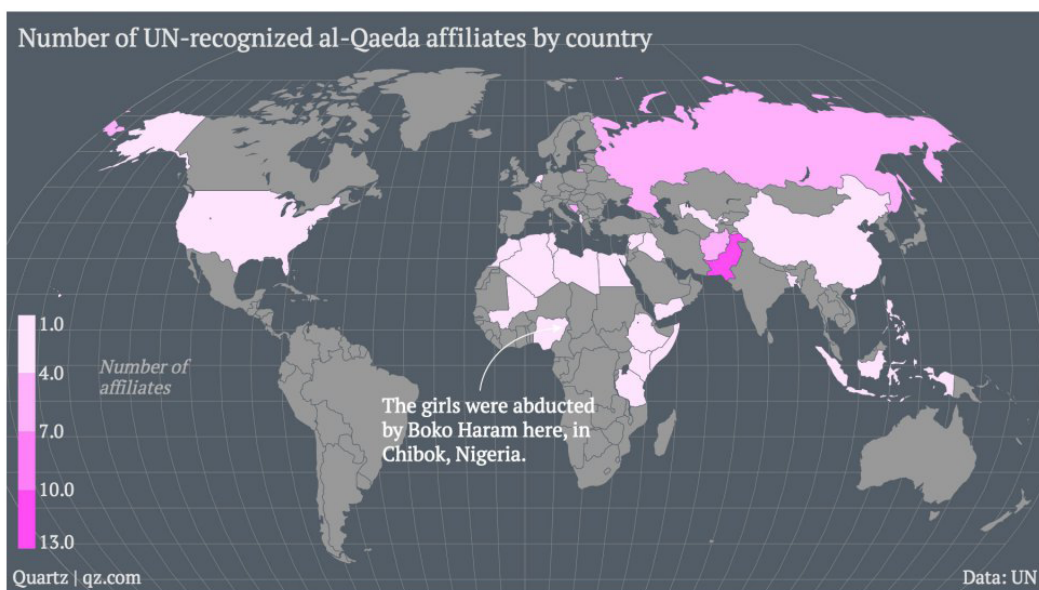


Figure 2<sup>38</sup>



good news is that cracks in the caliphate are becoming increasingly apparent. ISIS is losing ground, money, and the consent of the people it rules.”<sup>42</sup> Despite some limited turf gains in parts of Iraq and Syria in early 2015, independent assessments confirm that ISIS lost almost 10 percent of its territory in the first six months of 2015.<sup>43</sup>

### Major Pushback from Multiple Foreign Militaries

ISIS has rapidly generated a constellation of sworn national enemies on the borders of all the areas it controls. By late November 2014, the US-organized anti-ISIS coalition included 62 member countries, with major military contributions coming from the US and also including: France, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon Netherlands, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, and the UK.<sup>44</sup> Turkey was an original member of the anti-ISIS coalition but was initially a tepid participant due to its complex relationship with the Kurds. However, it greatly intensified its involvement in July 2015 when, in response to ISIS-attributed attacks on its territory, it allowed its Incirlik airbase to become a platform for manned and unmanned American and coalition aircraft in the fight against ISIS in Syria and presumably Iraq.<sup>45</sup> Additional states have joined the anti-ISIS coalition in 2015, including Sweden in April 2015, pushing the coalition to an estimated 64 member countries.<sup>46</sup>

Though not a member of the coalition, Iran has made substantial contributions in material and manpower, reportedly including two brigades of volunteer Revolutionary Guards units and a large number of the Guards’ officer leadership cadre. While noteworthy, Iran’s participation in the struggle against ISIS in Iraq remains controversial. Tehran has sent a lot of money, a lot of weapons, and a lot of advisory capacity – empowering Iraqi Shiite militias numbering up to 100,000 to perform as capable combatants (and in many ways the most capable combatants) against ISIS in Iraq in 2014-15.<sup>47</sup> However, Iran’s presence has also been a propaganda boon for ISIS in Sunni territories, stoking the ISIS sectarian narrative that Iraq’s Shiites are at the beck-and-call of Tehran and increasing Sunni community willingness to suffer under ISIS rule rather than Iraqi Shiite rule.<sup>48</sup> The

US-led coalition has not been coordinating combat actions with Iran, and misaligned American and Iranian security priorities for Iraq and Syria make it hard to see how Washington and Tehran might increase anti-ISIS collaboration despite the fact that some observers openly wonder whether the July 2015 Iran nuclear weapons deal might provide such an opening.<sup>49</sup>

No major Salafi jihadist outfit – not AQ and not the Afghan Taliban after the 9/11 terror strikes in the United States – has previously inspired such a comprehensive set of encircling state adversaries in such a short time.

As of July 2015, almost a year after its US-led inception, coordinated coalition military and political activities had taken a notable toll on ISIS. The IS Caliphate was pushed out of the Syrian town of Kobane by Kurdish fighters and American airpower; run out of the Iraqi Sunni stronghold of Tikrit by a combination of Iraqi Army units, Shiite militias, and Iranian military units and senior generals; and put under the gun in Syria by rival Salafist units conducting guerilla attacks and assassinations. Compared to its peak in early fall 2014, ISIS-held territory in March 2015 had shrunk by some 25 percent.<sup>50</sup> As noted earlier, ISIS territorial losses in the first six months of 2015 were at almost 10 percent (see figure 3).

Put in context by American terrorism experts Dan Byman and Jennifer Williams,

*“The Islamic State’s fate is tied to Iraq and Syria, and reversals on the battlefield—more likely now that the United States and its allies are more engaged—could erode its appeal. Like its predecessor organization in Iraq, the Islamic State may also find that its brutality repels more than it attracts, diminishing its luster among potential supporters and making it vulnerable when the people suddenly turn against it.”<sup>52</sup>*

### **The Dubious Quality of, and Limited Responses from, Appeals to Potential Affiliates**

ISIS’s feud with AQ has made it a pariah in the global jihadist marketplace, sparking a number of direct clashes over manpower, finances, and other resources – including overt confrontation over jihadist affiliates, individual recruits, sources of jihadist financing, and ascendance in the jihadist multimedia and social media space.

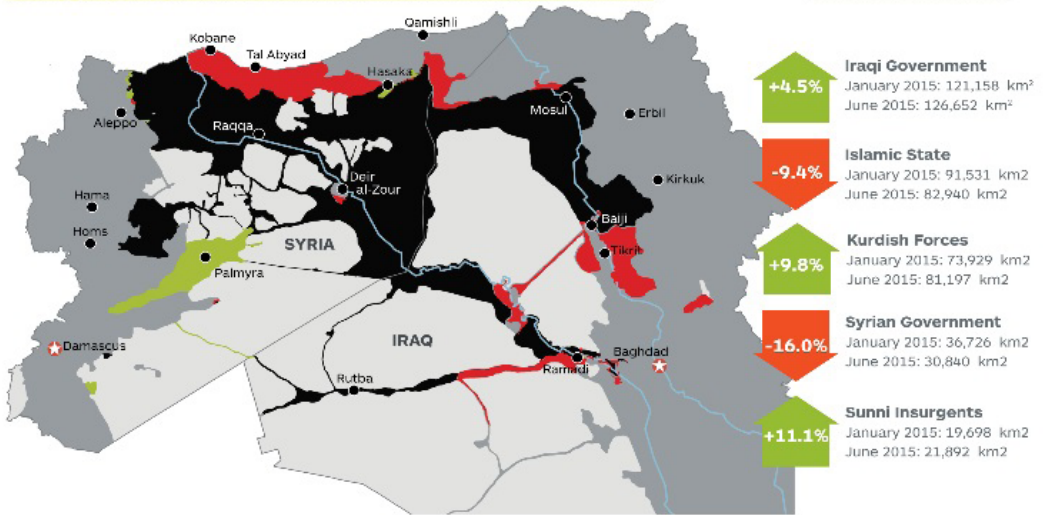
ISIS’s 2014 appeal to other jihadist groups to formally align with it has generated a splashy but ultimately uneven response. As of August 2015, the IS Caliphate claimed a relationship with 42 separate jihadist groups (see Appendix A). Thirty of these groups have pledged formal affiliation with ISIS, while 12 have taken a lesser pledge of “support.” Generally speaking, the jihadist outfits pledging affiliation are those with little to no pedigree, with severe organizational problems, or that have been shunned by al Qaeda over time as too undisciplined for incorporation into the AQ constellation. With the recent exception of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and of Hezbi-e-Islami (HiG) – the Afghan Taliban group led by Gulbiddin Hekmatyar – those Salafi jihadist outfits

Figure 3<sup>51</sup>

## TERRITORY

1 ISLAMIC STATE TERRITORIAL GAINS AND LOSSES: 1 JANUARY - 29 JUNE 2015

2 WINNERS AND LOSERS



pledging mere “support” for ISIS tend to be far more established and with ongoing or past affiliations with AQ. They include Saudi Arabia’s Islamic State in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques, Libya’s Islamic Youth Shura, Pakistan’s Jundullah, and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines. Given their past or present affiliations with AQ, such groups are likely unwilling to formally sever ties with a longstanding force for leadership. In effect, these groups are probably just hedging their bets.

Within the Middle East and North Africa, ISIS has established loose linkages with multiple Salafi jihadist groups that the ISIS leadership describes as “*governates*” or “*wilayats*.”<sup>53</sup> Most are relatively new jihadist groups without prior allegiance to AQ, and only those in North Africa seem to have engaged in a meaningful level of violent activity to date. ISIS-declared North African affiliates – based from Algeria to Egypt and Sudan – number a dozen and include several very active ones including Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, the Okba Ibn Nafaa Battalion in Tunisia, and Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in the Egyptian Sinai.<sup>54</sup> These affiliations have provided a measure of prestige to local jihadist outfits. In return, these groups have facilitated a significant flow of jihadist fighters into Syria using lines of infiltration very similar to those used by the scores of Libyan, Tunisian, and Moroccan jihadists who came to Iraq via Lebanon and Turkey through Syria for jihad against American military forces from 2004-09.<sup>55</sup> In turn, ISIS has claimed responsibility for several terrorist strikes in the Maghreb, including the March 2015 armed assault on the Bardo Museum and the June 2015 attack against international tourists at the Imperial Marhaba beach hotel, both in Tunisia.<sup>56</sup> But Tunisian officials and other international intelligence agencies

remain uncertain that attack attribution for either event goes any further than to the now-deceased Algerian militant commander of the Okba Ibn Nafaa Group, who had a relationship with ISIS beginning in September 2014 that was limited to one of support, not formal affiliation.<sup>57</sup>

ISIS also has signaled its aim to cultivate groups in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.<sup>58</sup> Two groups in Yemen and one in Saudi Arabia have declared themselves on the side of ISIS (see Appendix A). To date, there is some, but far from overwhelming, evidence that ISIS group formation has taken place in these countries. A March 20, 2015 suicide bomber attack that killed 137 people at a Shi'ite mosque in Sanaa, Yemen, was claimed by ISIS, but American and western officials stated there was no clear operational link between the bombers and Islamic State Caliphate leadership in Iraq and Syria.<sup>59</sup> In Saudi Arabia, early 2015 witnessed claims of a growing ISIS presence. ISIS claimed to be the inspiration for a May bombing at a Shi'ite mosque that killed 21 and wounded another 120. It also claimed to be behind suicide bombing plots against a large mosque in eastern Saudi Arabia thwarted by interior ministry troops in July.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, Saudi officials have steeled their intelligence and security forces to resist ISIS-affiliate organizations, leading an ongoing internal intelligence campaign to identify, disrupt, and defeat any attempt by ISIS to capitalize on general Wahhabi sympathies for Salafists in Syria and Iraq that could be leveraged to establish a viable Salafi jihadist organization in the Kingdom.<sup>61</sup> ISIS also claimed responsibility for a June 2015 suicide bomber attack on a Shiite mosque in Kuwait that killed 27, an attack that Kuwaiti authorities attributed to a single individual inspired by a small cell of ISIS adherents.<sup>62</sup> In each case of ISIS-claimed violence in the Gulf, Shi'ite groups were the targets and the sectarian focus of the one-to-two individual attackers was conspicuous. Although worrisome, the low quality of these attacks, coupled with the strong government responses to them, stands in stark contrast to the other major Salafi jihadist outfits across the Gulf states and North Africa. When compared to longstanding and capable Middle East and Gulf state jihadist groups that remain affiliated with AQ – al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al Shabaab, among others – it is too early in 2015 to argue that AQ has lost any significant ground to the IS caliphate in the very important Middle East and Northern Africa jihadist space (see Appendix B).

Outside of North Africa and the Middle East, ISIS's year-long quest to establish jihadist group affiliates has fared little better, and arguably fared worse. It has not attracted the kind of group affiliations required to ascend to the top of the international jihadist order over time, and almost certainly not in time to assure a self-set five-year target to consolidate the IS Caliphate under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's leadership.

In Yemen, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, ISIS has attracted a hodge-podge of minor splinter groups like the Mujahideen of Yemen; Tehreek-e-Khilafat (Pakistan); 10 former Pakistani Taliban (TTP) disgruntled affiliates rebranded as Leaders of the Mujahid in Khorasan and Jundallah; and the al-Tawheed Brigade in Khorasan and Heroes of Islam

Brigade in Khorasan (Afghanistan).<sup>63</sup> In July 2015, Hezb-e-Islami's leader, Gulbiddin Hekmatyar, called for his group to support ISIS in battles against the Afghan Taliban; however, the mercurial leader's history of allegiance reversals during the many wars in Afghanistan makes this pledge less than certain.<sup>64</sup>

Afghanistan-Pakistan splinter groups have supported the flow of some, but not many, fighters to the Syria-Iraq battlefields. Meanwhile, with inspiration but no direct material support from ISIS in Iraq or Syria, and with grievances and agendas matching Pashtun sub-tribal interests that are consistent over decades, these self-proclaimed pro-ISIS Afghanistan-Pakistan affiliates have engaged in territorial battles with Afghan Taliban outfits in Afghanistan's Nangarhar, Kunar, and Farah provinces without any clear pathway to victory.<sup>65</sup> Self-identified ISIS leaders – its emir, deputy emir, and spokesman – for its “Khorasan” province (or ISIS-Khorasan/ISIS-K) have been reportedly killed in US airstrikes.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the rebranded-as-ISIS entities have not generated any real counterweight to the dozens of Salafi jihadist outfits in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region with solid ties to AQ, including those like Harakat-al-Mujihadeen, the Pakistan Taliban, the Afghan Taliban, Jaish-e-Muhammed, Jamaat-e-Mukharat, and the many others found in Pakistan. The top U.S. Army officer in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, testified before the U.S. Congress in March 2015 that the ISIS presence in Afghanistan merely represented the rebranding of a few marginalized Taliban.<sup>67</sup>

The top U.S. Army officer in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, testified that the ISIS presence in Afghanistan merely represented the rebranding of a few marginalized Taliban.

In Central Asia and Russia, ISIS began acquiring affiliates and support far earlier than in other regions. At least four minor jihadist groups and group fragments based in Dagestan, Russia, and in the Caucasus declared themselves supporters of or in allegiance with ISIS from late 2013 through March 2014, before the IS Caliphate was declared (see Appendix A).

Then, in September 2014, ISIS garnered a major declaration of support that had immediate operational impact. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), with its leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan, declared itself to be “in support” of the IS caliphate in September 2014. Then, after the July 2015 announcement of the death of Mullah Omar, the IMU formally extended its affiliation to that of “allegiance” toward the IS caliphate. These declarations came after several years of increasing duress for this Central Asian jihadist movement in its longtime safe havens along the Afghan-Pakistan border. IMU was a major target of ongoing Pakistani military counterterrorism operations that began in

Pakistan's western frontier areas in June 2014, and was under constant pressure from NATO/ISAF and Afghan military forces in Afghanistan. IMU's pledge of support was quickly followed by an enhanced flow of often quite skilled fighters into Syria and Iraq from IMU recruiting nodes in Central Asia and from its increasingly troubled training bases in South Asia. These IMU cadres added to those already flowing from a half-dozen other smaller jihadist groups, thickening the Central Asian contingent in ISIS. London's International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ISCR) estimates that over 2,500 jihadist fighters came to Syria from IMU and other jihadist outfits in Central Asia and Russia during 2014 and early 2015, placing this wider region of Central Asia as a most significant contributor to IS Caliphate's foreign fighter pool (See Appendix C).

Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, ISIS has attracted jihadist groups with little capability and waning relevance in the jihadist global arena. Jihadist groups like Abu Sayyaf and the Bangsamoro Islamic Movement (Philippines) along with the Mujahideen Indonesia Timor (Indonesia) declared their support in late 2014. Yet these groups were basically shells of their once-prominent selves after a decade of decline and fragmentation under relentless pressure from government intelligence and paramilitary groups in their home states. They bring little in the way of material, financial, or personnel support for ISIS, and critics suggest that they made these declarations in the false hope that ISIS's aura of success might somehow bring back some relevance for their jihadist groups. The success of this aim remains uncertain at best.

In Africa, the Nigerian Salafist jihadist group Boko Haram's headline-hogging, early-2015 declaration of formal allegiance to ISIS is the exception that confirms the rule of less-than-substantive jihadist group affiliations.<sup>68</sup> A large and resoundingly ruthless jihadist group that has controlled territory in northern Nigeria and Cameroon, Boko Haram is a notoriously autonomous and erratic outfit in the international jihadist constellation. AQ leaders declined Boko Haram offers of affiliation for several years. Finally, in late 2011, Boko Haram made a unilateral claim of having joining al-Qaeda's ranks. Osama bin Laden feared there would be little mutual gain and too much to lose from association with Boko Haram, given its demographics and its reckless violence.<sup>69</sup> In August 2014, Boko Haram declared a "Caliphate." This set in motion a precipitous decline in the group's fortunes. An intense assault from a four-nation military offensive—which the Nigerian government has claimed will prove a knock-out blow—led to Boko Haram losing 80 percent of the territory it had held and an estimated 2,800 militant fighters in just a five week period.<sup>70</sup> In response, Boko Haram began to conduct increasingly desperate and unpopular actions like child suicide bombers, kidnappings meant to gain recruits, the use of livestock as shields when fighting authorities, and brutal public executions.<sup>71</sup> Boko Haram lacks the funding sources to benefit ISIS, and its role in providing fighters to ISIS is unlikely to amount to much because the group's ethnic profile makes it more difficult for its would-be jihadists to travel inconspicuously through Northern Africa, Arab nations, or Turkey enroute to Syria, Iraq, or the Levant. Additionally, Nigerians travelling to the Middle East



to fight with ISIS would not fit well into the dominant Arab, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern makeup of ISIS fighters there. The Boko Haram allegiance pledge appears to be little more than symbolism, devoid of any meaningful exchange of fighters, funding, or enhanced training. Ultimately, it may represent Boko Haram desperation as it faces large-scale military setbacks from the multi-nation offensive launched against it in 2014.<sup>72</sup>

Assessed closely, most of the 41 international groups declaring support for or outright affiliation with ISIS to date tend to be of low quality, and normally arising from one of two categories – minor splinters from standing affiliates of AQ, or “undesirables” deemed too undisciplined or too broken by successful national counterterrorism operations to warrant incorporation into the AQ affiliate constellation. With the exceptions of IMU, HiG, and Boko Haram, none of these groups are truly mainstream groups within the global Salafi jihadist movement. In contrast, AQ retains very tight affiliations with three dozen Salafi jihadist outfits possessing name-brand caché and substantive capabilities in their regions of principal operation (see Appendix B).

### **Self-Defeating Foreign Fighter Recruitment Efforts**

At the same time, ISIS has undertaken a broad multimedia campaign to recruit and employ individual jihadist fighters from the Muslim diasporas of western and non-Muslim states. These efforts have been substantive and produced measurable – and often worrisome – results. ISCR estimates that ISIS’s massive and broadly aimed recruiting campaign at this target audience has induced some 20,000 foreign fighters to join in jihad and in jihad-support activities from 2013 to early 2015. These individual jihadists have mainly come from North African countries, west European nations, Gulf Arab states, and Australasia (see Appendix C).

While a worrisome story, ISIS’s notable successes have an increasingly visible countervailing effect. For the most part, recruits drawn from individually focused social media messaging arrive as an undisciplined and largely untrained rabble.<sup>73</sup> Recruits are mostly expected to be used for unglamorous support activities, suicide bombings, and the occasional gruesome murder of foreign hostages for ISIS publicity. As the realities of these fates get reported on unsecured social media, the allure of ISIS for naïve young adventure-seekers could well wane.<sup>74</sup> Given the reports that ISIS is losing and not gaining ground in Iraq and Syria (see figure 3), would-be-ISIS-recruits must now confront both personal dangers and the declining appeal of joining the IS caliphate.

In addition, the flow of foreign fighters reportedly has begun to produce antibodies in both Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, tensions between foreign fighters and local Iraqi Sunni militia fighters began cropping up in February-March 2015, with media coverage indicating a growing incidence of guerilla attacks against Islamic State foreigners.<sup>75</sup> In Syria, ISIS lost significant ground in the north to Kurdish forces backed by coalition air strikes, reportedly losing control of 215 villages and over 1,000 militants killed by Kurdish and

other rebel forces in January 2015 alone (see figure 3). Civil rights groups working in Syria began reporting in February 2015 that ISIS foreign fighters are being killed by rival groups – and suspected would-be defectors by ISIS itself – in Raqqa, the de facto capital of ISIS in Syria.<sup>76</sup>

ISIS also has encouraged unscrupulous violence against non-believers in secular western countries. As an example, in September 2014, Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the Islamic State’s chief spokesman, called on Muslims in Western countries such as France and Canada to find an infidel and “smash his head with a rock,” poison him, run him over with a car, or “destroy his crops.”<sup>77</sup> This exhortation was proximate to a horrific October 2014 attack by a Canadian Muslim that killed two Canadian military members, and to the planning period for radical Muslims leading up to the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre in Paris in February 2015, which led to the massacre of journalists employed by a satirical French periodical. While serious and troublesome, these horrific and unscrupulous actions have actually generated a western government intelligence and security forces response in cyberspace and in at-risk Muslim communities that will make ISIS messaging and recruitment tactics increasingly difficult to sustain.<sup>78</sup>

### **Precarious Finances**

ISIS has a narrowly constructed financial base – one where initially visible riches have masked long-term financial liabilities that, in the cases of other would-be terror groups, have proven fatal. The IS Caliphate’s financial resources have drawn on regional and local sources of funds in Syria and even more so in Iraq. ISIS’s early ability to ruthlessly poach funds and materiel from rival Syrian jihadist groups, collapsing Syrian Army units, and other less-ruthless participants in the Syrian civil war enabled the group to fill its war chests. Later, ISIS’s collaboration with and subsequent co-option of Iraqi Sunni smuggling networks and the graft-riven activities of former Iraqi Baathists set up a short-term windfall. It built up cash coffers from a combination of Sunni-area hydrocarbon production and exports, ransoms for foreign hostages, and from the toppling of multiple financial institutions in western Iraq.

Often reported as unbelievably wealthy, ISIS’s funding sources actually are far from durable and will likely be insufficient to sustain its caliphate far into the future.<sup>79</sup> Independent research establishes that ISIS now relies upon some \$2 billion in fixed assets seized during 2014 conquests in Iraq (\$875 million in assets from the capture of Mosul, \$500 million from state-owned Iraq banks, and \$600 million from extortion and taxation

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**ISIS has a narrowly constructed financial base  
- one where initially visible riches have masked  
long-term financial liabilities.**

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in western Iraq during late 2014).<sup>80</sup> It reportedly makes some \$1 million dollars per day in ongoing extortion and taxation in western Iraq, while relying upon oil smuggling for \$100 million dollars of revenue and \$20 million from kidnapping ransoms – and yet all of these figures have shrunk in 2015. Durable sources of funding from reliably sympathetic local and regional smuggling networks, from diaspora contributions, and from other wide-ranging money-making activities are invariably necessary to sustain sufficient sources of terrorist finances.<sup>81</sup> Asset-rich in 2014, ISIS has not established itself in any of these proven fund-raising areas, and is in fact facing active resistance in them from al Qaeda and AQ supporters.

Surrounded by enemy governments, ISIS's hydrocarbon production facilities and smuggling operations are under serious duress. Anti-ISIS military operations by U.S./Coalition aircraft and on-the-ground actions in late 2014 and into 2015 destroyed dozens of IS Caliphate-held oil and gas production and refinery and transit facilities across western Iraq and northern Syria – severely constraining IS financial prospects.<sup>82</sup> Coalition participants and many other national governments agreed in late 2014 to end any ransom payments for hostage releases. By early 2015, most ISIS-held hostages had been sold or murdered.<sup>83</sup> ISIS's brutal treatment of minorities and infidels, coupled with the global media's intense focus on these atrocities, has turned off many one-time sympathizers and potential financial contributors to an IS caliphate.<sup>84</sup> All surrounding countries and most bordering sub-state actors have condemned the IS caliphate and refused to do any business with it. One-time sympathetic governments and religious leaders in wealthy donor countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE have banished ISIS from business interactions and charitable contributions, severely constraining this source of finance.<sup>85</sup> Finally, ISIS's feud with AQ has – in conjunction with these other factors – placed it in a spot where it cannot compete well for traditional sources of fundamentalist, Salafi charitable and covert funding mechanisms.<sup>86</sup> Taken together, this means that ISIS's wealth can only begin to erode, and will rapidly become a severe constraint on its abilities to govern or to stave off counterattacks. In March 2015, some analysts were reporting that ISIS may have already lost up to 75 percent of its revenues, causing it to begin an accelerating drawdown on its 2014 financial reserves and making it increasingly hard for the group to provide sufficient goods and services to the nearly 8 million people living in its caliphate.<sup>87</sup>

### **A Jihadist Pariah**

Above all, ISIS's clash with all neighboring states and its schism with AQ have made it a jihadist pariah to a degree never before witnessed in the global jihadist milieu. AQ's affiliates in Syria, including the Nusra Front, have begun reforming and reconstituting military activities that target IS Caliphate leadership and its territorial strongholds –

and with increasing effect.<sup>88</sup> In addition, appalled by ISIS's barbaric tactics and reckless campaigns of violence, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait have quietly encouraged – to the point of direct sponsorship - the activities of long-time state enemy Salafi jihadist leaders willing to denounce ISIS and organize fighting groups to go to Syria and confront ISIS there. In the summer of 2014, Jordan seemingly cut a deal with two longtime state enemy Salafi leaders, Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi (Zarqawi's former spiritual mentor) and Mahamad Shalabi (the leader of Jordan's banned Salafi jihadist movement).<sup>89</sup> Maqdisi was liberated from long-term incarceration and Shalabi had his prosecution for terrorism stayed after each declared ISIS to be illegitimate. Later, they were reported to be organizing jihadist outfits to confront ISIS in Syria, no doubt under the watchful eye of Jordan's intelligence service.<sup>90</sup>

For its part, Saudi Arabia has steadily increased support to a Syrian Sunni Salafist group, Jaish al-Islam (formerly known as Liwaa al-Islam), to counter ISIS from within. Heavily tied to Saudi Wahhabi mosques through its founder Shaikh Zahran Abdullah Alloush<sup>91</sup> – and certainly penetrated by the Saudi Miharabat (intelligence services) to guard against any jihadist blowback in the Kingdom – Liwaa was badly injured by ISIS violence in early 2014.<sup>92</sup> In late 2014 the Saudis, with some assistance from the Kuwaitis, steadily increased efforts to reconstitute Jaish al-Islam as an entity to strike back at ISIS inside Syria.<sup>93</sup> Such policies became a top priority for Riyadh. In this manner, ISIS has generated antibodies inside the Syrian jihad that will inevitably harm its cause.

### **Risky Social Media Messaging**

ISIS has used indiscriminate recruiting and undisciplined messaging on social media in a manner that makes it seem spectacularly successful, but that actually enables outside intelligence agencies and law enforcement to gain invaluable insights about its organization, structure, and aims – thereby creating opportunities for more precise and effective targeting by military and human intelligence assets. In effect social media is a double-edged sword for the IS Caliphate.<sup>94</sup> In turn, its reliance on radical violence in its dominant messaging has left it with no core base of empathy from a cohesive international diaspora – something vital to historically successful terrorist groups.<sup>95</sup>

### **An Ambitious and Unforgiving Territorial Timeline**

Most importantly – and by its own logic - the IS caliphate must grow robustly across the Middle East and the wider Islamic world to fulfill its promise. However, it has actually stopped growing in Iraq and Syria, and its claims of group affiliate attacks have yet to produce demonstrable territory gains elsewhere. Its most enthusiastic supporters are congenitally impatient, insisting that ISIS can only legitimize itself by holding and growing territory. These supporters have threatened to turn against ISIS should it fail to meet ambitious territorial growth timelines.<sup>96</sup>

And for all the attention ISIS has garnered for its ascent and for what that might mean in terms of catastrophic terror threats around the world, U.S. military and intelligence activities demonstrate that Washington views ISIS as a serious regional menace – but one not capable of catastrophic international terrorism. Consider that American airstrikes in Syria in late 2014 and 2015 targeted not only ISIS, but also the locations of the AQ-affiliated Khorasan Group – an organization with well-known “varsity level” bomb-makers and credible threats to do serious terrorist violence globally if left unmolested in Syrian safe havens.<sup>97</sup> The IS Caliphate poses no such comparable global catastrophic terrorism threat.

All these factors indicate that the IS caliphate of 2015 is akin to the ancient Greek myth of Icarus: It is flying high, but in doing so it has flown dangerously close to the sun, melting the wax on its proverbial wings and raising the likelihood of a dramatic fall in a short period of time.

## THE ISLAMIC STATE CALIPHATE: IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS IN SOUTH ASIA

The IS Caliphate’s impact in South Asia is highly illustrative of the degree to which ISIS represents a rupture with AQ for leadership of the international jihadist space. The AQ response to the ISIS challenge in South Asia has been both vigorous and important. The limited appeal of ISIS for long established South Asian jihadist outfits is also indicative of the inherent strengths of AQ and weaknesses of ISIS in the wider struggle for ascendance in the Salafi jihadist arena.

AQ’s response to the IS Caliphate challenge was most powerful and vigorous in South Asia. On September 4, 2014, AQ’s al-Zawahiri formally declared a new al-Qaeda of the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).<sup>98</sup> In this September announcement, Zawahiri clearly and cleverly focused his message on the wide array of Salafi jihadist groups and radically inclined Muslim individuals on the Subcontinent. Zawahiri reminded the jihadist faithful that AQ understood their issues in South Asia and was prioritizing jihad to resolve these issues. He appealed to the faithful to ignore wider distractions and to focus South Asian jihad against the infidels and apostates in Afghanistan, exploiting the projected departure of Western military forces from that country. He called out the civilian government of Pakistan as apostate and an enduring target of mujihadeen in the region. He also spoke about AQ’s dedication to jihadist causes in Bangladesh, in Muslim India, and with the Royhinga Muslim minority and refugees from Burma. In each of these message components, Zawahiri made it crystal clear that South Asia was inherently AQ jihadist space, that ISIS was not resonant or welcome, and that AQ would vigorously enforce a “hands off policy” against ISIS in South Asia.

Approximately one year later, Zawahiri's message seems to have worked, although not without some challenges in Afghanistan and especially in the aftermath of the July 2015 announcement that longstanding Afghan Taliban leader and AQ supplicant, Mullah Omar, died in 2013 without open acknowledgement. The September 2014 Zawahiri announcement of AQIS seems to have blunted across South Asia much of the appeal established by ISIS in several other parts of the world. Overall, the IS caliphate's impact in South Asia has been conspicuously less than in other regions both in general and on a per-capita Muslim basis.

Even more than in other parts of the world, ISIS's appeal for affiliate groups to join it in establishing what it calls "Khorasan" has not generated a response from quality regional jihadist outfits. Three jihadist splinter groups in Afghanistan along

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with the more established, yet very mercurial, Gulbiddin Hekmatyar, and a handful of disgruntled Pakistani Taliban commanders and the Jundallah terrorist group in Pakistan, have pledged allegiance (or support in the case of Jundallah) to ISIS since mid-2014 (see Appendix A). However, dozens of other longstanding jihadist outfits in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and

Bangladesh have remained firmly in the AQ camp, or, in cases like those of Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan, remained most affiliated with nationalist-Islamist aims of the security and intelligence services (see Appendix B). A modest number of disgruntled Pashtun tribal subgroups and affiliates on both sides of the border have loosely combined under the banner of ISIS-Khorasan (or ISIS-K), and engaged in battles against established Afghan Taliban elements in the northeast and south central parts of Afghanistan.

Despite some noisy claims of territorial conquest, these re-branded Pashtun jihadists have yet to demonstrate staying power or broad appeal. As mentioned earlier, ISIS-K self-declared leaders were reportedly killed by Afghan and US-led coalition forces in 2015, and ISIS-K sub-tribal elements were reportedly wiped out in Afghanistan's Farah province and pushed back in spring/summer 2015 battles in Nuristan and Nangarhar provinces.<sup>99</sup> These inauspicious results suggest that ISIS-affiliated groups in Afghanistan are in for some tough times, just like they would be if still understood as merely Taliban splinters or aggravated jihadist sub-tribes.

ISIS's pull on individual fighters from South Asia has been equally underwhelming. Independent estimates from the ICSR and the private Soufan Group record that in early 2015 no more than 50-60 fighters from Afghanistan, 500 from Pakistan, and at most a handful from India and Bangladesh were moving from South Asia to Syria in response to the IS caliphate call (see Appendix C). Given these estimates, the entirety of South

Asia jihadists reported going to the ISIS fight is actually less than those from the UK alone, less than Germany alone, and dramatically less than the flows from North Africa or Central Asia – especially when assessed on a per-capita Muslim basis. Even Australasia has a dramatically greater per-capita jihadist-to-the-ISIS-fight participation rate than all of South Asia.

Given the IS Caliphate’s intense global outreach, this conspicuously underwhelming response from South Asia – a region rife with militancy of all stripes – seems paradoxical. Precise reasons for this South Asian exception merit more detailed study. However, there are at least four important hypotheses that, when taken together, help explain why South Asia remains disproportionately unaffected by the ISIS appeal for leadership of the global jihad.

First, the AQ senior leadership remains in the region and has vigorously defended its space against ISIS encroachment. Zawahiri’s September 2014 declaration of AQIS was a keenly calibrated announcement that warned ISIS to keep away from an area AQ considered its own. This message spoke to disaffected Muslims in South Asia about their issues and grievances against local governments, putting would-be South Asian jihadist interests and issues first. The faithful were urged to join the fight in Afghanistan and told that their regional grievances and issues would be those of AQIS – thereby isolating ISIS as an outsider outfit with no real understanding or true concerns about Muslim aims in South Asia. Although Zawahiri’s credibility was challenged by the July 2015 announcement that Mullah Omar had died in 2013, Zawahiri’s August 1, 2015 message swearing an oath to Afghan Taliban successor leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour appears to have re-established AQ bonafides and primacy in a fractious jihadist landscape where ISIS remains a distinct outsider.<sup>100</sup>

Second, South Asia already features a robust array of options for those wishing to do jihad – options tolerated by certain regional states and ineffectively countered by others. Unlike jihad aspirants in North Africa, Australasia, Central Asia and western Europe – who are often alienated from their surrounding society and lack places to go and train for jihad in an environment where recruitment, vetting, training and operations enjoy a level of de facto tolerance – the constellation of active jihadist groups in Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan provides a conducive environment for radicalized Sunni Muslim groups or individuals to pursue jihad. Zawahiri’s message to the jihadist faithful reinforced this longstanding jihadist framework in South Asia, and provided a new institutional option with the announcement of AQIS.

Third, India, with the region’s largest Muslim population, benefits from a history of pluralism and tolerance toward those of its citizens that practice Islam. This is not to minimize the communal tensions and violence that have afflicted India over the years, including in the present. However, unlike Muslims in many other nations who feel ostracized, misunderstood, or alienated from their own governments, Indian Muslims – with some exceptions – are generally satisfied with state policies. India’s liberal democratic

credentials have reinforced a culture of social and political inclusion for individual Muslims and Muslim families. This has in turn helped contribute to a large-scale rejection of global cries for young Muslim boys, men, or women from India to come fight jihad elsewhere.<sup>101</sup> Only a handful of Indian Muslim youth have been reported to make the trek to do jihad with ISIS in the Middle East.<sup>102</sup> Those that have gone return disillusioned and say they are ashamed that they dishonored their Indian Muslim heritage by succumbing to the siren's song of ISIS social media propaganda.<sup>103</sup> India may have more to fear from domestic Muslim youth participation in retweeting and forwarding violent, vulgar, and sometimes seductive ISIS propaganda as a form of co-religionist thrill-seeking.<sup>104</sup> Addressing that problem may be tricky, but it is not on the same scale of risk or difficulty as facing a swarm of recruits departing the country to join ISIS's jihad.

Finally, there may be a not insignificant impact from the fact that Gulf Arab states have sworn to destroy the ISIS threat and prevent any blowback in their own countries. As part of their anti-ISIS campaign, these Arab governments have signaled that Muslim immigrant workers from places across South and Southeast Asia will be carefully scrutinized and banned from the vital economic opportunities in the Gulf if they or any members of their families are determined to be participating in jihad with ISIS.<sup>105</sup> Although uneven in application, this general approach by Arab Gulf states' migrant worker agencies impacts over 20 million migrant workers and their families across South Asia – and accounting for some \$12 billion in annual remittances back to the home countries. This places a reinforcing, if not decisive, wet blanket on South Asian aspirants who might otherwise consider joining ISIS.

Combined, these four hypotheses appear to explain a lot about the uniqueness of South Asia when it comes to the pursuit of jihad. They emphasize that longstanding patterns of Muslim inclusivity in India, coupled with several decades of established jihadist and AQ-invested militant outfits in other South Asian states, have significantly undercut ISIS's appeal within the region.

To be sure, no state in South Asia should be complacent and conclude that the region will not suffer greater penetration from ISIS in the coming few months. Indeed, the announcement of Mullah Omar's 2013 death will certainly reverberate in the South Asian jihadist landscape for months to come – impacting some allegiances and affiliations – and might make ISIS's largely alien brand of jihad more appealing for some time. Moreover, ISIS's use of social media for a broad array of purposes – radicalization, recruiting, and resourcing – is both unique and far more penetrating in South Asia than anything seen from AQ over the past decade. ISIS has even produced a significant number of original messages in Hindi, a language seldom if ever used in AQ jihadist propaganda. Thus, it will behoove every regional government – including India's – to up its game in terms of social media monitoring to keep the appeal of these ISIS messages at very low levels.

Additionally, it will be important for all South Asian governments to work closely with the Gulf Arab states. With better interface, there can be greater barriers against



radicalized Subcontinental youth transiting the Gulf states enroute to do jihad in Syria or Iraq. Strategic intelligence sharing and persistent cross-talk with intelligence and police services in Gulf nations can help disrupt and eventually eliminate ISIS recruiting in South Asia.

Ultimately, however, the factors in play across South Asia suggest that this region will remain most dominated by AQ's version of global jihad. In turn, this AQ preeminence means that the priorities established by Ayman al-Zawahiri for jihad in his September 2014 message should remain the top-drawer concerns for South Asia policymakers: The conclusion of successful jihad on behalf of the Taliban in Afghanistan; support for the TTP's campaign to topple the civilian government in Pakistan; and support for persecuted fundamentalist Muslims in Bangladesh and solidarity with discriminated Muslim Rohingya refugees from Burma.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Like Icarus, ISIS has vowed to fly dangerously high, undertaking a brash and high risk strategy. This has exposed it widely, and made it many enemies.

Today, an intra-jihadist struggle pits the long-established global entity of AQ and its clear and disciplined – albeit possibly fatally flawed – approach to terror against an incredibly active and seemingly reckless ISIS, which boasts lots of multimedia appeal but no time-tested financial or organizational affiliates. ISIS is now battling a daunting array of secular and Salafi jihadist adversaries sworn to bringing about its demise. It is also battling against its own five-year timeline for establishing a pan-Islamic and territorial (rather than virtual) caliphate.

In South Asia, a particularly useful regional case study, ISIS has made less than impressive inroads against AQ ascendance despite the fact that countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and to a lesser extent Bangladesh are hotbeds of Islamic radicalism and seemingly ripe for recruitment to the ISIS cause. A curious combination of pre-established pathways for those aspiring to jihad, a relatively unreceptive Muslim community in India, and cunning AQ messaging combine to form a barrier to ISIS aims. Could ISIS soon face similar problems in other regions as its novelty and momentum slow in Syria and Iraq, and as evidence of wider territorial conquest fails to appear?

The struggle between the IS Caliphate and AQ will continue for much longer before the results become clear. Yet one thing is clear already: It is far too early to bet against AQ making an ultimately successful stand against ISIS. For all its troubles and setbacks, AQ remains a resilient and durable organization with a millennial vision and a generational horizon, capable of tackling big challenges—even those, perhaps, as formidable as ISIS.

## APPENDIX A

### Salafi Jihadist Groups Pledging Allegiance (or Support) to the Islamic State (IS)<sup>106</sup>

(as of August 2015)

		Date Pledged	Allegiance/ Bay'a	Support	Impact (As of July 2015)	Comments
<b>Central Asia &amp; Russia (6 Allegiance / 1 Support)</b>						
Abu Hanif's Jamaat	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia (Dagestan)	~2013	X		Flow of fighters from Dagestan into Syria	Observed Fighting in Raqqa, Syria
Caucasus Emirate (CE)	Russia (Dagestan)	December 2013		X	Newest Amir killed by Russians in Dagestan in Aug 2015.	In a regional struggle with Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)	Pakistan or Afghanistan	Statement issued in September 2014	X		Moved from ISIS support to "allegiance" in August 2015	Formal change shortly after Mullah Omar's death announced in July 2015
Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar	Russia (Dagestan)	November 2013	X		Hardened fighters in Syria; split from CE	Fought for ISIS beforehand as well
Jund al-Sham	Lebanon & Chechnya	~July 2014	X		Split from Jaish al-Mujahireen wal-Ansar	
Katibat Al-Aqsa faction	Russia (Dagestan) and Chechnya	~July 2014	X			Split from Jaish al-Mujahireen wal-Ansar
Sabiri's Jamaat	Uzbekistan, Tajikistan & Caucasus	March 2014	X			

		Date Pledged	Allegiance/ Bay'a	Support	Impact (As of July 2015)	Comments
<b>Europe</b>						
None Identified						
<b>Middle East, Levant &amp; Gulf States (8 Allegiance / 2 Support)</b>						
Ansar al-Islam	Iraq	January 2015	X			
Faction of Kattibat al-Imam Bukhari	Syria	October 2014	X			
Jaish al-Sallah in the Levant	Syria	July 2014	X			
Jamaat Ansar Bait al-Maqdis	Egypt	June 2014	X			Looking to expand into Gaza
Jund al-Khilafah in Egypt	Egypt	September 2014	X			
Liwa Ahrar al-Sunna in Baalbek	Lebanon	June 2014	X			
Mujahideen of Yemen	Yemen	November 2014	X			
Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSCJ)	Egypt	October 2014		X		
Supporters of the Islamic State in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques	Saudi Arabia	December 2014		X		

		Date Pledged	Allegiance/ Bay'a	Support	Impact (As of July 2015)	Comments
Supporters for the Islamic State in Yemen	Yemen	September 2014	X			
<b>North Africa (8 Allegiance / 5 Support)</b>						
al-Huda Battalion in Maghreb of Islam	Algeria	June 2014	X			
al-I'tisam of the Koran and Sunnah	Sudan	August 2014		X		
Al Murabitoun	Mali	May 2015	X			
Ansar al-Sharia	Libya	September 2014	X			
Ansar al-Sharia	Tunisia	September 2014	X			Linked to Libyan Ansar
Boko Haram	Nigeria	March 2015	X			
Islamic State Libya (Darnah)	Libya	November 2014	X			
Islamic Youth Shura Council	Libya	June 2014		X		
Jund al-Khilafa fi Tunis	Tunisia	December 2014		X		
Lions of Libya	Libya	September 2014		X		Rumored allegiance pledge remains unconfirmed
Okba Ibn Nafaa Battalion	Tunisia	September 2014		X		

		Date Pledged	Allegiance/ Bay'a	Support	Impact (As of July 2015)	Comments
Shura Council of Shabab al-Islam Darnah	Libya	October 2014	X			
The Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria	Algeria	September 2014	X			
<b>South Asia (6 Allegiance / 1 Support)</b>						
al-Tawheed Brigade in Khorasan	Afghanistan	September 2014	X			
Ansar al-Tawhid in India	India	October 2014	X			
Heroes of Islam Brigade in Khorasan	Afghanistan	September 2014	X			
Hezbi-e-Islami (HiG)	Afghanistan	Statement by Gulbiddin Hekmatyar, HiG leader, in July 2015	X		Complicates struggle in Afghanistan – but mercurial Hekmatyar unlikely a hardened ISIS convert.	Infamous for hedging bets and switching allegiances in Afghan power struggles, Hekmatyar likely stated support for ISIS because the Taliban are sworn enemies of HiG
Jundullah	Pakistan	November 2014		X		
Leaders of the Mujahid in Khorasan	Pakistan	January 2015	X			(10 former TTP commanders)
Tehreek-e-Khilafat	Pakistan	July 2014	X			

		Date Pledged	Allegiance/ Bay'a	Support	Impact (As of July 2015)	Comments
<b>Southeast Asia (2 Allegiance / 3 Support)</b>						
Abu Sayyaf Group	Philippines	June 2014		X		
Ansar al-Khilafah	Philippines	August 2014	X			
Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)	Philippines	August 2014		X		
Bangsamoro Justice Movement (BJM)	Philippines	September 2014		X		
Mujahideen Indonesia Timor (MIT)	Indonesia	July 2014	X			

## APPENDIX B

### Salafi Jihadist Groups with Formal Allegiance to al Qaeda (AQ)<sup>1502</sup>

(as of August 2015)

Group Name	Base Country	Date Pledged	Comments
<b>Central Asia &amp; Russia</b>			
Eastern Turkistan Movement (ETM)	China (Xinjiang)	1999	Formerly known as Eastern Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Bin Laden first pledged AQ support funds in 1999
Emarat Kavkaz	Russia (Caucasus)	2011	On the fence. Parts have splintered. Designated by UN as AQ affiliated in 2011
Islamic Jihad Union	Pakistan	2005	Splinter of IMU, strong AQ ties since 2005
Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs	Russia (Dagestan)	2009	Part of Caucasus Emirate, announced 2009.
<b>Europe</b>			
None Identified			
<b>Middle East, Levant &amp; Gulf States</b>			
Abdallah Azzam Brigades	Lebanon, Syria, Arabian Peninsula	2009	Associated with AQ as an offshoot of AQI – led by Saudi national al Qaraawi
Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant	Syria	2013 (to Zawahiri)	AQ's preferred umbrella group for Salafi jihadism in Syria
Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	Yemen	2009	AQ affiliated since inception in 2009 from merger of previous AQ Gulf State branches

Group Name	Base Country	Date Pledged	Comments
Ansar Al-Islam	Iraq	2011	AQ affiliate since 2001 (provided safe haven to those leaving Afghanistan), most joined ISIS in 2014
Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ)	Egypt	2001	Formed in 1980 from previously active Salafi jihadist groups; longtime AQ associate, merged with AQ in 2001 by EIJ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
<b>North Africa</b>			
Al Mourabitoun	Mali	2013 (Belmokhtar has fought with AQ since 1991)	AQIM affiliate, formed in 2013 from merger of Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa and Mokhtar Belmokhtar's Masked Men Brigad.
Ansar Eddine	Mali	2012	Leader is cousin of AQIM commander, formed in 2012
Ansar Ul Muslimina Fi Bilaudis Sudan	Sudan	2012	AQIM affiliate splinter of Boko Haram formed in 2012
Djamat Houmat Daawa Salafia	Algeria	1996	Formed 1996
Libya Shield Force	Libya	2012	AQIM affiliate group, formed from anti-Qaddafi groups.



Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group	Morocco	~2004	Veterans of Taliban in Afghanistan, active in Morocco since 2000, formed in 1998
Muhammad Jamal Network	Egypt & Libya	2012	Formed in 2000, leader made connections with AQAP & AQIM in 2012, fought in Afghanistan in 1990s and for Zawahiri in Egypt
Mouvement pour l'Unification et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest	Algeria, Mali, Niger	2011	AQIM affiliate active since 2011, formed from break from AQIM (but still associated), part split off to join Al-Morabitoun
The Organization of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb	Algeria	2007	AQ central franchise, formed 2007.
Tunisian Combatant Group	Tunisia	2000	"Loose network," most fighters are in Afghanistan & Western Europe. Co-founder Tarek Maaroufi current leader of Ansar al Sahria-Tunisia

## South Asia

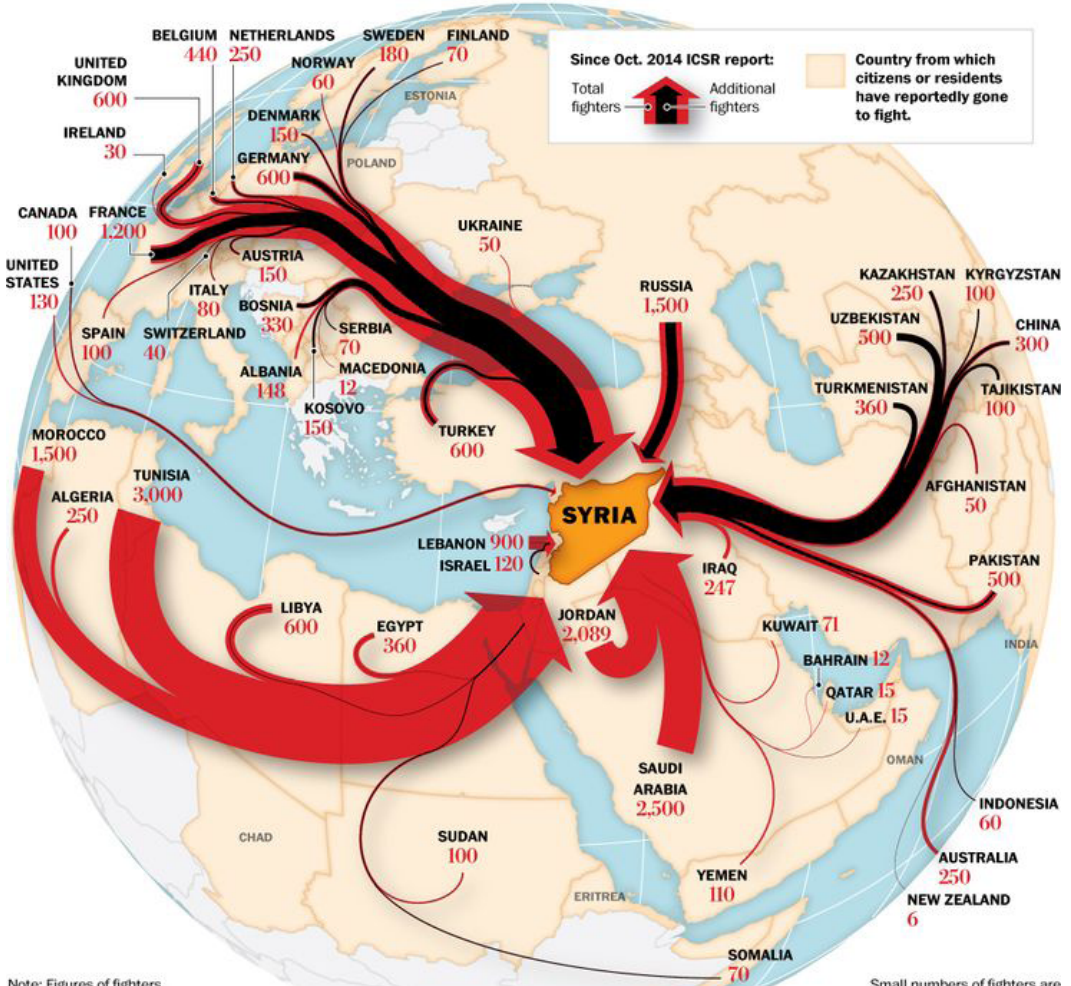
Afghan Taliban	Afghanistan/Pakistan	1996	Hosted UBL, UBL swore Bay'at to Mullah Omar. Zawahiri pledged allegiance to Mullah Mansour in August 2015
Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)	Pakistan	2014	Announced by Zawahiri in September 2014.
Haqqani Network	Pakistan	~1980	Jalaluddin Haqqani had close ties with bin Laden; fought together during anti-Soviet Jihad

Harakat-Ul Jihad Islami	Pakistan	~1984	Associated with AQ since Soviet invasion; many joined AQ in 1998 after bin Laden fatwa.
Harakat Ul-Mujahidin	Pakistan	~1994	Successor of Harakat ul Ansar. Primary operations in Kashmir.
Jaish-e-Mohammed	Pakistan	2000	Active since March 2000. Banned by Pakistan in 2002, but operates under aliases
Lashkar-al Zil	Pakistan	2002	Paramilitary umbrella organization- TTP, Afghan Taliban, Hezb-e Islami.
Lashkar-e-Tayyiba	Pakistan	~1990	Increasingly active from 1993 onward – accused as being a surrogate for Pakistan intelligence; terrorist activities in Kashmir and across India
Lashkar-e Jhangvi	Pakistan	1996	SSP breakoff- formed 1996
Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan	Pakistan	2009	Loose support since 2001; “went loud” in 2007 when organization officially established; some commanders broke off to ISIS in 2014
<b>Southeast Asia</b>			
Jemaah Islamayah (JI)	Indonesia	~1998	Formally founded in 1993. Associated with both AQ and ISIS.
Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah	Indonesia	2014	Splinter of Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid, itself a splinter of Jemaah Islamayah (due to leader’s bayat to ISIS), 2008.

## APPENDIX C

### Estimate of Foreign Fighter Flows to Syria & ISIS<sup>108</sup>

(as of January 2015)



Note: Figures of fighters from Western Europe are from the ICSR high estimate category. All other numbers are from the Soufan Group. Per-country fighter estimates determined from a date range of December 2013 to the second half of 2014.

Small numbers of fighters are also reported to have come from Bangladesh, Chile, Ivory Coast, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Philippines, Senegal, Singapore and Trinidad and Tobago. These countries are not shown because they are off the map.

# NOTES

1. The term Salafi is used to describe a particular type of fundamentalist thought in Sunni Islam. In Arabic, the word Salafi is a reference to the first three generations of Muslims venerated as “the forefathers” and best generations in the history of Islam. Contemporary Sunni Muslim groups that are Salafi in orientation believe that imitation of the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad and his closest followers and descendants should be the basis of modern social order. Wahhabi Islam, practiced predominantly in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, is a variant of Salafism, but not its sole manifestation. Many Salafis are zealous in their beliefs, but few pursue violence as the principal means to achieve their aims. Salafi jihadists are a small minority of Salafis who believe that violence and terrorism are essential to purge the Muslim world of non-believing westerners and to correct those of the Muslim faith who insufficiently practice fundamentalist Islam in their daily lives or in the management of Islamic communities. Al-Qaeda is the most notorious of the deadly Salafi jihadist groups in the Muslim world. For a more detailed discussion of Salafism and Salafi jihadists, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, “A Genealogy of Radical Islam,” in Russell D. Howard, Reid L. Sawyer, and Natasha E. Bajema, eds., *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment* – 3rd Edition (New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2009), 225-44.
2. “Al Sham” is Arabic for “the Levant.” Thus, I will use the abbreviation of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham) when referring to what is alternatively called ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). When referring to ISIS after its June 2014 declaration of an Islamic State “caliphate,” I will sometimes refer to it as the IS caliphate.
3. Bryan Price, Dan Milton, and Muhammad al-`Ubaydi, “Al-Baghdadi’s Blitzkrieg, ISIL’s Psychological Warfare, and What It Means for Syria and Iraq,” CTC Perspectives, June 12, 2014, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/ctc-perspectives-al-baghdadis-blitzkrieg-isilis-psychological-warfare-and-what-it-means-for-syria-and-iraq>.
4. Ibid.
5. See Joel Rayburn, *Iraq After America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance* (Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Press, August 2014) and Emma Sky, “How Obama Abandoned Democracy in Iraq,” *Politico Magazine*, April 7, 2015, [http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/04/obama-iraq-116708\\_Page2.html#\\_VSUmC6ocS2x](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/04/obama-iraq-116708_Page2.html#_VSUmC6ocS2x).
6. The critical role of former Ba’athist Iraqi military officers and political leaders in the successes of ISIS in Iraq is detailed in Liz Sly, “The hidden hand behind the Islamic State militants? Saddam Hussein’s,” *Washington Post*, April 4, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/the-hidden-hand-behind-the-islamic-state-militants-saddam-husseins/2015/04/04/aa97676c-cc32-11e4-8730-4f473416e759\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-hidden-hand-behind-the-islamic-state-militants-saddam-husseins/2015/04/04/aa97676c-cc32-11e4-8730-4f473416e759_story.html) and Sky, “How Obama Abandoned Democracy in Iraq.”
7. Price, Milton and al-`Ubaydi.
8. Brian Fishman, “The Islamic State: A Persistent Threat,” testimony to the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), July 29, 2014, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20140729/102590/HHRG-113-AS00-Wstate-FishmanB-20140729.pdf>.
9. Ibid.
10. See Bruce Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2008), and especially 99-101.
11. Joby Warrick, “ISIS, with gains in Iraq, closes in on founder Zarqawi’s violent vision,” *Washington Post*, June 14, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/isiss-gains-in-iraq-fulfill-founders-violent-vision/2014/06/14/921ff6d2-f3b5-11e3-914c-1fbd0614e2d4\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/isiss-gains-in-iraq-fulfill-founders-violent-vision/2014/06/14/921ff6d2-f3b5-11e3-914c-1fbd0614e2d4_story.html).
12. Daniel Byman and Jennifer Williams, “ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism’s Global Civil War,” *The National Interest*,

February 24, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/isis-vs-al-qaeda-jihadism%E2%80%99s-global-civil-war-12304>.

13. Aaron Y. Zelin, "Al-Qaeda in Syria: A Closer Look at ISIS (Part I)," Policywatch 2137 - The Washington Institute Policy Analysis, September 10, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaeda-in-syria-a-closer-look-at-isis-part-i> and Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*, 102-05.
14. "Zawahiri's Letter to Zarqawi (English Translation)," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, July 9, 2005, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/zawahiris-letter-to-zarqawi-english-translation-2>.
15. Ibid. Also see, "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi," July 9, 2005, GlobalSecurity.org, November 1, 2005, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter\\_9jul2005.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2005/zawahiri-zarqawi-letter_9jul2005.htm) and "Letter Exposes New Leader in Al-Qa'ida High Command," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, September 25, 2006, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/letter-exposes-new-leader-in-al-qaida-high-command>.
16. "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi." The word "umma" is Arabic for "whole" or "community." It is used here to connote the complete community of Sunni Muslims worldwide bounded by their religious ties.
17. See Emily Hunt, "Zarqawi's 'Total War' on Iraq Shiites Exposes a Divide among Sunni Jihadists," Policy Watch 1049, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 15, 2005, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/zarqawis-total-war-on-iraqi-shiites-exposes-a-divide-among-sunni-jihadists> and Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*, 103-05.
18. See Steven Brooke, "Strategic Fissures: The Near and Far Enemy Debate," in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman eds., *Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within al-Qa'ida and its Periphery* (West Point, New York: Harmony Project, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2010), 45-68.
19. Reidel, *The Search for Al Qaeda*, 102-104. Also see Bernard Haykel, "Jihadis and the Shi'a," in *Self-Inflicted Wounds*, 215-223.
20. Although some of Zarqawi's successors interchanged references to AQI with the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and flustered the AQ leadership in South Asia with an absence of communication or seemingly undisciplined jihadist activities, there was no formal rupture between the two groups until later. See Will McCants, "State of Confusion: ISIS' Strategy and How to Counter It," *Foreign Affairs*, September 10, 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141976/william-mccants/state-of-confusion>.
21. Zelin, "Al Qaeda in Syria;" and Warrick, "ISIS, with gains in Iraq..."
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