The Islamic State's Territorial Methodology

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Since June 2014, when the Islamic State proclaimed itself a caliphate, a pattern has emerged in the way IS has attempted to expand, take over new territory, and then consolidate its control. The pattern is partly explained by IS's systematizing, bureaucratizing, and formalizing of its governance structures, which allow it to operate consistently and in parallel across its various *wilayat* (provinces).[1] Understanding this is useful, since the explanation can be equally applied to IS's provinces in its core territory of Iraq and Syria and in the archipelago of its provinces outside it.

With this understanding we can make a better assessment of IS's position with regard to expansion or recession than is afforded by the maps that circulate in the media, which show a large gray area across vast territory without providing deeper insights into IS's actual control over particular locales (figs. 1–4).

Examination of thousands of IS media products resulted in a framework that can help make better sense of IS's advances, irrespective of location. The framework is divided into two stages: pre- or partial territorial control and full territorial control. Within these two categories are five elements, or phases, of establishing control: intelligence, military, *dawa* (missionary activities), *hisba* (moral policing and consumer protection), and governance. Although *hisba* would generally be considered part of IS's governance apparatus, I separated the two to distinguish the level of advancement and sophistication associated with meting out justice versus that associated with actual services, administration, and economic

activity, since the former is easier to impose than the latter to set up. Overall, the process is linear, though that does not mean it fits perfectly in every scenario, since its progress depends on the speed with which IS takes control of a territory. If it is more rapid than gradual, the chances are greater of IS's skipping steps and/or their becoming more blurred, especially in the *dawa*, *hisba*, and governance areas.

Pre–Territorial Control

In the first phase of gaining control over a given area—the intelligence phase—IS is involved in the establishment of sleeper cells, the infiltration of other groups, and the creation of front groups. One can see this type of activity in Damascus, where Liwa Shuhada al-Yarmouk is believed to be a front for IS.[2] Part of the intelligence process is to learn about the local terrain in terms of identifying the notable players. Through intelligence activities, IS can also identify future enemies, for

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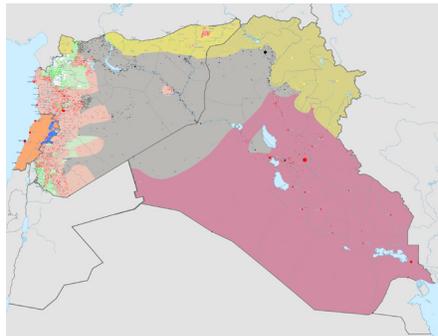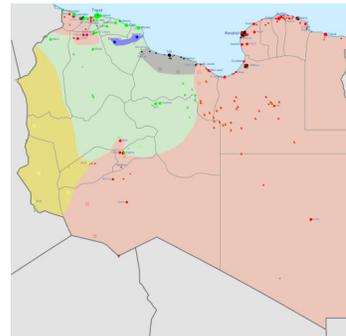FIGS. 1, 2 : Islamic State "imagined" control in Iraq, Syria, and Libya.

FIGS 3, 4: Gray areas show actual control by IS as of December 2015.

when it starts to campaign overtly in the area. Another aspect of this phase is an attempt to buy off or co-opt local clans and other insurgent factions. Following the announcement of the self-styled caliphate in June 2014, for example, IS is believed to have tried to entice with money jihadist groups that were pro-al-Qaeda in Somalia and the Caucasus to pledge *baya* (allegiance) to IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[3] Last, IS begins to set up training camps to prepare for the military campaigns to come.

Sometimes simultaneously with the intelligence phase, other times after it, IS begins to operate militarily in the specific area where it is attempting to gain influence. As seen with most insurgent factions, IS employs asymmetric warfare, with tactics that include hit and run attacks, sniper assassination operations, drive-by shootings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), car bombs, and suicide attacks. Many of these tactics are best exemplified in IS's infamous video, "Clanging of the Swords #4," which was released in May 2014.[4]

The beginning of control over small pieces of territory, usually villages or neighborhoods in larger cities, provides IS with the opportunity to commence its *dawa*

program, in which IS members start reaching out to the local population. In part, this is to show people that IS is not as bad as the media or others portray it to be. This initial softer approach includes *dawa* forums, where IS members not only talk about their interpretations of Islam and the necessity of jihad, but stage competitions with children, such as eating contests, Quranic memorization, "tugs of war," and other activities. The focus on youth is deliberate, since IS understands the future lies with young people, and so it does not necessarily attempt to win over the older population.

In addition to holding these forums, IS passes out in the streets, markets, and at checkpoints literature and pamphlets produced in-house by IS's al-Himmah Media. The media outlet publishes and distributes this information locally, although IS has also begun to release PDF versions online.[5] Dovetailing with these efforts is IS's provision of printed literature and SIM cards (memory chips for mobile phones) to its front-line fighters. IS also throws public video viewing parties for people to watch its official online releases, highlighting that while there is due focus on the spread of its materials online, much less attention has

gone to what this might mean for the local populations under its control. Last, IS seeks to gain support through its public relations office, where meetings and lavish meals are held with notable local clans and individuals to win over their support and gain buy-in for its program.

Beyond *dawa*, once IS has partial territorial control, it also begins its *hisba* activities. One of its most noticeable actions on this front is the burning of alcohol, cigarettes, hookahs, drugs, and what it deems items associated with sorcery. It also destroys Sufi, Shia, and pagan shrines, tombs, and historical artifacts, since they are viewed as connected with polytheistic practices that could lead one astray from *tawhid* (pure monotheism). Another aspect of the *hisba* in the pre–territorial control stage is to make sure residents are praying on time, attending prayers, and closing their shops. Lastly, the *hisba* also involves monitoring food and medicine to make sure it is neither spoiled nor expired; essentially, IS acts as a consumer protection body.

The final phase preceding full territorial takeover is the start of basic governance. This primarily involves the introduction of taxes and exertion of its judicial powers, including arbitration and reconciliation between different parties. Bringing speedy justice to the public and dealing with longstanding issues to show it can get things done efficiently is crucial to maintaining legitimacy for IS. Last, IS also is involved in basic social services, most specifically providing food and medicine on a limited basis to the neediest in the population.

Post–Territorial Control

Once IS has been able to gain full territorial control over a particular area, it is able to function in a more sophisticated fashion in all the five phases. At this writing, this governance is more limited in scope than the pre–territorial control period, since "full territorial control" really applies only to some of its provinces in Iraq and Syria, as well as parts of Wilayat Tarabulus in Libya. IS's methods and program have, thus, not been fully exported outside its home base, while highlighting the potential difficulties of differing contexts. Also to be remembered is that IS has been in Iraq for thirteen years and Syria for four, as compared to having been in its outside provinces for only around a year and a half or less.

With that said, in the second intelligence phase,

a more Stasi-style apparatus operates to further IS's understanding of the local terrain and make sure no dissent arises within the territory. Its primary function, therefore, is to find enemies and engage in entrapment activities (as has been seen with gay men, among others).[6] The intelligence apparatus also strives to ensure former officials and other insurgents repent and give up their weapons, and it provides a stopgap against potential fighters (especially foreigners) defecting or fleeing its territory. It helps with the suppression of potential awakening-type uprisings against IS (such as those spurred by al-Shaitat in Syria, Albu Nimr in Iraq, and Firjan in Libya),[7] and it is a means for controlling information in the territory by, for instance, imposing strict rules regarding the use of the Internet and wi-fi.[8]

From the military standpoint, once IS controls territory, it may start to fight more like a state, as in state-to-state combat. Of course, this does not mean it abandons its asymmetric style; but with an area secure, it can maneuver more easily and take an open warfare posture. During this phase, larger and heavier weaponry, such as tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs), may be introduced. Larger-scale mobilizations and stormings may also take place, and caravans may be formed. So far, this level of military activity has only been seen in Iraq and Syria, although IS has been hindered since the beginning of the American-led aerial campaign against it in August 2014.

Of all the phases, the military one is likely the most difficult to complete, in part because of the enemies IS must fight and its lack of air superiority. During this phase, IS attempts to create buffer zones and disincentives for other parties to attack or invade its territory, and it places more *murabitun* (frontline fighters) in *thughur* (fortified strongholds) on the fronts to start the process of taking more territory in the future.

One area upon which IS is able to expand once it has full territorial control of a location is its *dawa* program, in particular through the proliferation of nuqtat al-alamiyah (or media points) in a number of the cities and villages it controls (fig. 5). These consist of stationary stalls, small shacks, or roving cars or Winnebagos that distribute printed literature, CDs/DVDs, and/or USB drives of IS official media to locals, with a target audience comprising primarily children and young teenagers. So far, the media points have only been found in

Iraq, Syria, and (on a much smaller scale) Libya.

Another feature of the broadening *dawa* phase is the erection of billboards in areas of control that further IS's narrative and message, which is mainly about its interpretation of Islam, its social mores, its enemies, and jihad (figs. 6, 7). For example, one of its main slogans, "The Caliphate Upon the Prophetic Method [*manhaj*]," is the invocation of a hadith (sayings and doings of the Muslim prophet Muhammad, found in *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*).[9] Also publicized is a series of emphatic statements about the alleged realities of the self-styled caliphate: "Here is the Abode of Islam. Here is the Land of the Caliphate. Here [the ideas of] al-Wala' wa-l-Bara' (loyalty to the Muslims and disavowal of the unbelievers) [stand]. Here is the Market of Jihad. Here are the Winds of Paradise. Here is the Glory. Here is the Dignity." The hope is that residents will see these messages constantly, and they will become self-reinforcing and second nature.[10]

In contrast to the softer approach of IS' *dawa* activities it continues to use after it takes full control somewhere, in the *hisba* phase, IS begins to institute more strictly the harsh judicial penalties it bases on its interpretations of sharia—namely, *ta'zir* (discretionary), *qisas* (retaliation), and *hudoud* (fixed in the Quran and hadith) punishments. The media have reported on many of these, including whippings, tying people to lampposts or fences along with signs naming their misdeeds to deter future transgressions, caging individuals, cutting off hands or feet, stoning, point-blank shootings, beheadings, and crucifixions.

The final and most sophisticated aspect of IS's state-building enterprise is its implementation of the second governance phase. Similar to what is done in many cities and capitals in other countries, IS raises its black flag on poles, buildings, lamp posts, and anywhere in between, not only to stake its claim to the territory, but also to show it is there to stay. IS also creates custom road signs, welcoming people to its cities and towns (sometimes even changing their names), as well as new custom gates to certain regions.

More substantially, IS begins a number of public works projects to demonstrate its ability to provide for the local population. For example, it has been paving new roads and converting gravel roads to blacktop; fixing and putting up electric and phone lines; fixing,

FIG. 5: Media point, 8/30/15.

FIG. 6: Installation of *dawa* billboards, 7/15/15.

FIG. 7: Inauguration of *dawa* billboards, 11/29/15.

painting, and cleaning roads (fig. 8) and medians; landscaping with trees, bushes, and plants that were either there beforehand or installed through IS's public "beautification" projects; and building new mosques, markets, and shops.

Last, IS has been attempting to restart many industries in the territories it holds. It has revived water cleaning facilities, stone quarries, and dairy and chicken

FIG. 8: Cleaning and landscaping roads, 7/9/15.

farms and resumed the production of glass, brick, marble, wood, gypsum, salt, and ice, among others; different types of metalsmithing; the growing of fruits and vegetables; seasonal harvests; and industrial-scale food production, which includes bread, pasta, potato chips, yogurt, and ice cream, among other foods. Although IS shows off these activities, it says nothing about how competently or consistently it is carrying them out. IS has only been able to achieve this final phase in different parts of Iraq, Syria, and Libya, but not the entire breadth of the provinces it has announced.

To elucidate further the framework described above, the following case studies will illustrate this process in action in three different areas of The Islamic State: its success in Wilayat Tarabulus in Libya, its failure in Wilayat Idlib in Syria, and its upstart activities in its various provinces in Yemen.

Case Study: Wilayat Tarabulus

INTELLIGENCE PHASE I

Before overtly operating in its self-styled Wilayat Tarabulus in Libya, IS secured the support of a number of key actors in the city of Sirte, as well as outlying towns to its west (al-Nawfaliyah and Harawa), which are located in its Wilayat al-Barqah. Most importantly, it was able to gain defections from Ansar al-Sharia in Libya's (ASL) Sirte branch, with all individuals having local ties.[11] By co-opting this network, IS could then reach out to ex-Qadhafi regime elements, arguing that individuals who showed repentance and pledged *baya* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi could join IS and regain some

of the status they had lost over the previous years.[12] For instance, on February 14, 2015, forty-two individuals from the Ministry of Interior repented and pledged (fig. 9).[13] Since those who repent must pay a fee, the act also serves as a source of revenue to IS, which further strengthens its hand in the area.[14]

Finally, the local and tribal links of both ASL elements and ex-Qadhafi officials were a means for IS to gain information on possible new recruits in their community. Through these ties, IS was able to set up a presence at the Ouagadougou Conference Center in Sirte, beginning in January 2015, despite still being weak at the time.

MILITARY PHASE I

What helped IS gain strength was its military advances outside of Sirte, which provided it a launching pad, at first to take neighborhoods and districts and later the entire city. IS's campaign to seize full control of Sirte was jumpstarted on February 8, 2015, when it took over al-Nawfaliyah some ninety miles to the east. It began making bolder moves in Sirte the following week, taking over the radio station, the Wataniya television studio, the immigration center, Ibn Sina Hospital, the University of Sirte, and local government buildings. By then, IS controlled more than half the city and had installed a local leader, Usama Karama, a relative of a former senior Qadhafi intelligence officer. Months later, in late May 2015, IS seized al-Qardabiya Air Base and the Great Man-Made River irrigation complex; then on June 9, it took Sirte's power plant, giving IS complete control of the city except for the

FIG. 9: Repentances of forty-two workers from the Ministry of Interior, 2/14/15.

third residential district, which it would eventually claim in mid-August. However, since the district was isolated, IS acted as if it controlled the entire city after June 9.

DAWA PHASE I

The swift takeover of territory left only a small period for *dawa*, *hisba*, and governance in the pre–territorial control stage in Wilayat Tarabulus, although a vast array of activities began to occur, from those three phases prior to full territorial control.

Between January and June 2015, IS conducted a number of *dawa* activities to spread its message to the local population. On January 25 and May 11, for example, it passed out different types of *dawa* literature (figs. 10, 11), including the leaflet shown in figure 12 on the topic of *taghout* (tyrant), a reference to local so-called apostate Arab regimes) to residents in Sirte.[15] Moreover, on January 28, IS claimed it had convinced[16] three African Christians to convert to Islam (fig. 13).[17]

HISBA PHASE I

The first nonintelligence, nonmilitary activity IS conducted in Sirte was a tour of a market on January 11 by its *rijal al-hisba* (men of *hisba*), who made sure the shops were following the correct sharia regulations in terms of morality, and that the shopkeepers' wares were not only appropriate, but unspoiled or unexpired if consisting of food or medicine (fig. 14).[18] Moreover, on January 16, less than a week later, IS destroyed so-called "polytheistic" (Sufi) shrines (fig. 15),[19] and on March 30, it confiscated cigarettes and other items it deemed "evil" and burned them (fig. 16).[20]

GOVERNANCE PHASE I

As for signs of governance, not many were publicly apparent before the full takeover, although it is certainly possible that prior to early June 2015, IS was keeping aspects of governance secret for security purposes. That said, on April 4, it highlighted the bustling activities at a vegetable market (fig. 17),[21] and on April 28, it showed off its security apparatus in Sirte (fig. 18), and how it was beginning to protect the city from thieves, bandits, and other threats.[22]

INTELLIGENCE PHASE II

The takeover of Sirte brought more repentances; for example, on August 11, 2015, so-called apostates signed repentance contracts with IS (fig. 19).[23] And for those who did not repent or flee,[24] IS would use its intelligence apparatus to track down and then kill them, as it did with Salem Mohammed al-Namli, a member of Khoms Court of Appeal, in early August.[25]

More important, similar to one way in which it consolidated power in Iraq and Syria (mentioned above), IS suppressed a tribal uprising in mid-August after killing Khalid bin Rajab Firjani, a Salafi imam at Cordoba Mosque in Sirte's third residential district, who would not submit to its demands.[26] Unsurprisingly, this led to an uprising by members of the Firjan tribe against IS. Up to two hundred individuals are believed to have been killed by IS in the days that followed, which culminated in its winning the third residential district and gaining firm control over the city. In the aftermath, IS took over and renamed Firjani's mosque, calling it the Abu Musab al-Zarqawi Mosque (fig. 20), in honor of its founder.

Although no reports have emerged of IS monitoring Internet cafés and wi-fi usage in Libya, as seen in Iraq and Syria, it is likely implementing a similar regime in Sirte, based on its usual methods for controlling information and gaining intelligence. Moreover, reports suggest IS cut telecommunications in Sirte by destroying a cable belonging to the Telecommunications and Information Technology Holding Company.[27]

MILITARY PHASE II

According to local sources in Misratah, 1,200 IS fighters are in the Sirte region.[28] The UN, on the other hand, claims that up to 3,000 IS fighters are in Libya.[29] IS has not engaged in state-to-state-like fighting in Libya—in part because no state, in fact, exists to fight—nor are big weapons present, such as tanks or APCs, as have been seen in Iraq and Syria. IS has been able, however, to maneuver to protect its base in Sirte and attempt to broaden its reach in the future. For instance, since June 2015 taken towns, including al-Wushka and Wadi Zamzam to its west and Bin Jawad to its east, to provide itself a buffer zone.

Additionally, IS has been testing the Misratans, one of the largest and strongest factions in the multiactor

FIG. 10: Passing out *dawa* literature, 1/25/15.

FIG. 14: The men of *hisba*, 1/11/15.

FIG. 11: Passing out *dawa* literature, 5/11/15.

FIG. 15: Destruction of Sufi shrine, 1/16/15.

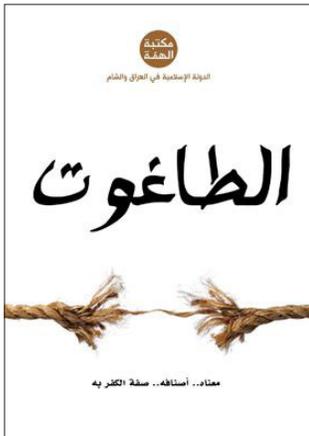FIG. 18: Security patrols, 4/28/15.

FIG. 12: Leaflet on the topic of taghout (tyrant).

FIG. 16: Destruction of cigarettes and other "evil" items, 3/30/15.

FIG. 19: "Apostates" giving repentances to IS, 8/11/15.

FIG. 13: Three African Christians convert to Islam, 1/28/15.

FIG. 17: Activity at the vegetable market, 4/4/15.

FIG. 20: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi Mosque.

Libyan war, by penetrating checkpoints and security infrastructure and establishing an intelligence network there.[30] It has also been testing the security at oil facilities, since taking any of them over, as it has already done in Iraq and Syria, could be a financial boon in the future.[31]

Also as in Iraq and Syria, IS has set up a training camp for "Cubs of the Caliphate" (a euphemism it uses for child soldiers).[32] Relatedly, one of IS's best-known training camps, where the individuals involved in both the Bardo Museum and Sousse Beach attacks in Tunisia were trained, is allegedly based in Sabratha, a town south of Sirte.[33]

DAWA PHASE II

Like it did in Iraq and Syria, IS has introduced media points in Libya, setting one up in Sirte, for example, on August 30, 2015. Unlike in its home base in the Levant and Mesopotamia, however, IS has not established a multitude of these points,[34] which illustrates the limited territory IS controls in Libya as compared to Iraq and Syria. Similarly, IS has not erected many billboards with its messaging in or around Sirte, as are seen in many locations in Iraq and Syria, although a few have appeared, such as those put up on July 15, about the virtues of female morality, and others more recently, on November 29.[35] IS has continued to distribute its *dawa* literature, however, since its full takeover of Sirte. For instance, on June 29, 2015, it passed out its literature to truck drivers (fig. 21), while on August 7 and 22 it distributed its *al-Niba* newsletter to individuals at the local market (figs. 22a, b).[36]

More recently, IS has begun testing potential imams and preachers with a qualifying exam (fig. 23), illustrating how it is beginning to reestablish religious structures under its guidelines through its Diwan al-Dawah wal-Masajid wal-Awqaf (Administration of *Dawa* Activity, Mosques, and Religious Endowments).[37]

HISBA PHASE II

As it did in Phase I, IS continued to burn cigarettes and engage in similar types of activities in phase II; however, it also began executing individuals for transgressions of its interpretation of sharia. For example, on July 19, and August 15, 2015, it crucified, respectively, an alleged spy

FIG. 21: Passing out *dawa* literature to truck drivers, 6/29/15.

A

B

FIGS. 22A, B: Printing and distribution of Islamic State's *al-Niba* newsletter, August 2015.

FIG.23: Qualifying session for imams and preachers, 12/8/15.

(fig. 24) and a member of the so-called "*sahawat*," the Firjan tribesman who attempted the uprising mentioned earlier.[38] More recently, on October 28 and December 5, IS beheaded "sorcerers," (fig. 25) while on November 2 it flogged a fornicator and a wine drinker (fig. 26).[39] Additionally, it destroyed gravestones (fig. 27) and small cemetery shrines on December 18, 2015.[40]

Besides carrying out executions and imposing physical penalties, IS began to go through the local university curriculum to excise anything, such as psychology and social studies, that it perceives to contravene its interpretation of sharia.[41] IS even abducted a barber in Bin Jawad as a warning to all barbers to stop shaving beards.[42]

GOVERNANCE PHASE II

Similar to its actions in Iraq and Syria, once it had full control of Sirte, IS put up black flags in a number of locations in the city (fig. 28), which it publicized in late June and mid-August 2015 as part of an effort to remake the city in its own image and to highlight that it was not going anywhere.[43] Unlike in Iraq and Syria, however, IS has not carried out too many public works activities or projects in Sirte, beyond one case in which it allegedly did work at the Ibn Sina Hospital and another in which it cleaned, landscaped, and decorated some of the streets.[44] Though it is known that IS has activated its police force and sharia court (figs. 29, 30).[45]

FIG. 24: Crucifixion of an alleged spy, 7/19/15.

FIG. 25: Execution of a "sorcerer" 10/28/15.

FIG. 26: Flogging for fornication and drinking wine, 11/2/15.

FIG. 27: Destroying graves, 12/18/15.

FIG. 28: Putting up flags in Sirte, 6/29/15.

FIG. 29: Islamic police, 11/21/15.

FIG. 30: The sharia court, 12/19/15.

That said, IS has been attempting to show daily life has returned to Sirte, and that the main industries of commerce have restarted and/or continued work that never ceased. For instance, it has drawn attention to the work of brick producers and of the milk, aluminum, and marble factories; the fruit harvests; the fish trade; the candy and pastry industry; metal and carpentry work; a car repair shop; and an office and school supplies store.[46] It has also highlighted the continued activity at the markets in town (figs. 31–36).[47]

Of course, it is difficult to know how often these industries are actually active and how much of their activity is for the camera. There is likely some truth to their carrying on, however, especially those industries that IS can use for its war machine and/or future public works projects. As in Iraq and Syria, IS's main sources of revenue are confiscation, taxation, and extortion, as well as weapons trafficking.[48] Furthermore, it does not have

FIG. 31: The milk factory, 7/13/15.

FIG. 32: Aluminum factory, 8/1/15.

FIG. 33: The fish trade, 9/15/15.

FIG. 34: Carpentry work, 10/24/15.

FIG. 35: Car repair shop, 11/29/15.

FIG. 36: Office and school supplies store, 12/14/15.

to worry about paying public employees, as it has in Syria and—until July—in Iraq, since the Libyan Central Bank continues to pay those salaries.

Case Study: Wilayat Idlib

The case of Wilayat Idlib in Syria is an interesting one, insofar as IS (ISIS at the time) never truly had full control over the entire area that was supposed to encompass the province. Furthermore, the events described below took place before the *fitna* (discord) between IS and the revolutionary, Islamist, and other jihadist forces in northern Syria in January 2014, which was the main reason IS lost its Wilayat Idlib. They also happened before its caliphate announcement, when IS would begin to systematically and fully formalize its structures.

Therefore, IS's process to gain control of Wilayat Idlib did not have the same linearity as would be seen in Wilayat Tarabulus. Even so, it is a worthwhile case to look at, not only to highlight this earlier evolution

of the patterns that make up the framework, but also to examine how one can judge IS's capabilities when it starts to lose or withdraw from an area, and how it might attempt to start the process all over again.

The map in figure 37 shows twenty-four cities and villages in its self-styled Wilayat Idlib where IS had been in full control (dark blue), had taken a dominant position vis-à-vis other insurgents (medium blue), and/or, at the very least, was one among equal insurgents (light blue) before it was ejected in January 2014.[49]
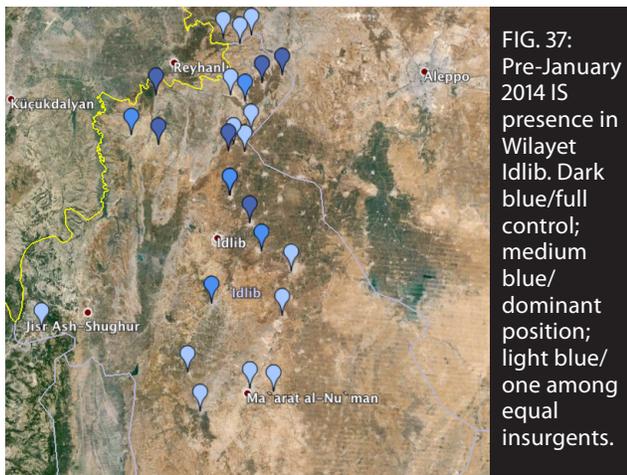

FIG. 37: Pre-January 2014 IS presence in Wilayet Idlib. Dark blue/full control; medium blue/dominant position; light blue/one among equal insurgents.

INTELLIGENCE PHASE I

In June or July 2013, the time around which IS began to make its presence known by starting to take over pieces of territory in Idlib governorate, its place and relations with other insurgent factions were different than they are now. Today clear lines are drawn between IS and any of the other insurgent groups, whereas then a "live and let live" arrangement prevailed with Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), relations were cordial with Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya (HASI), and IS was playing a waiting game with the more revolutionary and nationalistic local forces. In a sense, while the factions might have had different visions of the future, they were on the same "team" against the Assad regime.

That said, similar to other locations, IS was able to gain defections from members of JN after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's April 2013 announcement that he was extending what was then called the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) into Syria to become the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and that JN would be subsumed into ISIS since they were one and the same. Of course, JN's leader,

Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, rejected this, but many left JN for ISIS in the aftermath of the message. Even before ISI became ISIS or made its caliphate announcement, rallies calling for the caliphate to be restored were staged in cities under JN control, like Binnish, where IS would gain full control.[50] There are also numerous reports that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself went from Iraq into Syria (Aleppo and Idlib) in February-March 2013 to drum up support among foreign fighters in the lead-up to the ISIS announcement.[51] This gave IS a foothold in some of these areas, as well as elsewhere in northern Syria. It also facilitated IS efforts to gather intelligence on its opponents, whom it would later attack and kill (see below). A local source suggests IS created a network of informants to find weak targets.[52] Reports also surfaced at the time that IS was buying up land and property in the area to improve its foothold.[53]

MILITARY PHASE

IS's main military strategy at the time for bending some of these cities and villages to its will was to gain control of the key resources people needed for their day to day survival. One tactic was to occupy grain silos and other agricultural facilities to dictate the terms in a particular area. In the town of Termanin, for example, IS fighters in pickup trucks took over the agricultural ministry building, with help and information provided by a local preacher.[54] In turn, IS beheaded snipers from rival groups. Similarly, in another city in Idlib governorate, IS killed, wounded, or imprisoned members of Itihad Shabab Idlib al-Ahrar.[55]

DAWA PHASE I

As it would elsewhere, IS began conducting *dawa* activities in the areas it entered in Syria, passing out literature, staging events, or starting basic religious courses. As early as July 17, 2013, it set up a Quranic memorization competition for individuals in Selwah (fig. 38), while a week later it opened up a sharia institute in al-Dana (fig. 39), one of its main strongholds in its self-styled Wilayat Idlib.[56] Figure 40 shows an example of the *dawa* literature IS passed out at the time was a booklet entitled, "On Rulings for Those Who Curse God."

Moreover, IS conducted *dawa* forums in several locations, such as al-Dana, al-Qaah, Atmeh Refugee

Camp, Kafr Takharim, Killi, Ma'arat Dabsi, and Maarat Numan, among others (figs. 41–43). They were potent tools for promotion, as the pseudonymous Mahmoud explained: "I sat in the sermon when one of their sheikhs came to my village in Idlib. He blamed this war on the kafrs [sic], accusing Alawites and the West. But his speech was eloquent and powerful. When he came back the following week, a bigger crowd had come to the mosque, and by the next week, he had won followers."[57] This illustrates how IS was able to ingratiate itself with the local population at the time, especially since it was not involved in the systematic moral policing for which it would become known in Syria over the next few years in places to the east of Idlib.

HISBA PHASE I

The *hisba* aspects of IS at this point were not yet as mature as they would be after its caliphate announcement. No burning of cigarettes and the like took place, shops were not closed during prayer time, and food and medicine were not monitored to see if they had spoiled or were expired (although IS did warn in a September 19, 2013, statement in Talmenes that individuals selling cigarettes and tobacco had fifteen days to close their shops if they wished to avoid confiscation; see the notice in fig. 44).[58] Also reports at the time was that IS would distribute *niqabs* for women to wear in public in areas it controlled. [59]

GOVERNANCE PHASE I

During the first governance phase, IS provided basic services, although evidence suggests they were minimal in Idlib as compared to provinces such as al-Raqqa and Halab. Still, at the very least, it controlled the bread factory in al-Dana (fig. 45) and provided relief aid to people in Batabo (fig. 46).[60] IS also reportedly distributed 15,000 liters of diesel for the bread ovens in Saraqeb.[61] Similar efforts were likely made in other parts of Idlib governorate, as well.

INTELLIGENCE PHASE II

As it would later do in Wilayat Tarabulus, once it took control over certain villages and cities in Wilayat Idlib, IS began seeking out its enemies and executing them. This was a key reason for the eventual backlash and uprising against it. Unlike in the previously mentioned

failed tribal uprisings in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, a coalition of revolutionary and Islamist actors would, in January 2014, band together to push IS out of Idlib governorate as well as most of Aleppo governorate. This success demonstrated the degree of strength and firepower necessary to sustain a successful uprising against IS.

The first signs for this potential appeared in June and July 2013, when IS began taking over areas in Idlib, and they became more serious in September 2013, when it detonated a car bomb outside HASI's headquarters in Sarmada and then a few days later killed Abu Ubaydah al-Binnishi, HASI's chief of relief operations.[62] This led to major grumbles, but the issue was resolved internally. The same would not occur when IS began making moves against revolutionary rebels in late December 2013, and the last straw was when it captured and killed Hussein al-Suleiman (Abu Rayyan), a doctor and HASI commander, in early January 2014.[63] This act led a number of insurgent factions to fight IS and push it out of Idlib and Aleppo governorate, and even to HASI's burning of IS's infamous sharia court in al-Dana (see fig. 47).[64]

While its ejection was the ultimate outcome of IS's intelligence activities in the area, in this second phase it also sought, as it did in other areas, repentances and pledges of *baya* from individuals and factions (fig. 48). In one case it publicized on November 20, a group of individuals gave its oath to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[65]

MILITARY/DAWA/HISBA PHASE II

Not many signs of an advanced military architecture or stance were apparent in Wilayat Idlib, which is one of the reasons for IS's defeat there: it did not have military superiority. A military phase II here was manifest only in IS's attempts to have its frontline fighters expand its reach and territory. In terms of *dawa*, nothing suggested IS had an advanced strategy, since it was prior to its caliphate announcement, so IS did not go beyond phase I types of *dawa* activities. As for *hisba*, numerous reports emerged of IS putting individuals on trial for corruption and of its executing elements from the Assad regime, but no large-scale show of meting out judicial writ took place, as it did after the caliphate announcement.[66] That said, a remnant cell of IS allegedly kidnapped a "sorcerer" on March 1, 2014, since IS was not fully defeated from all areas of Idlib until mid-March 2014.[67]
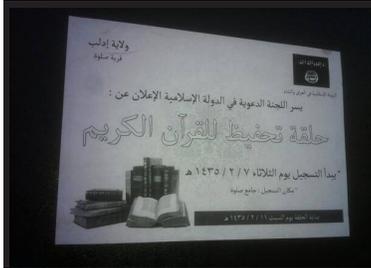
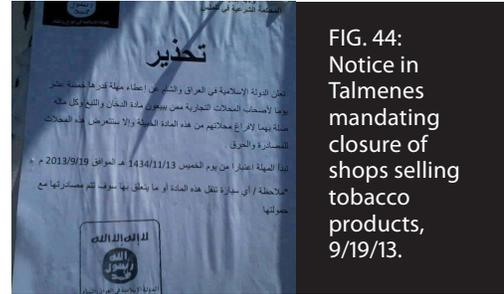FIG. 38: Notice for a Quranic memorization competition in Salwah, Syria, 7/17/13.

FIG. 39: Establishment of sharia institute in al-Dana, 7/24/13.
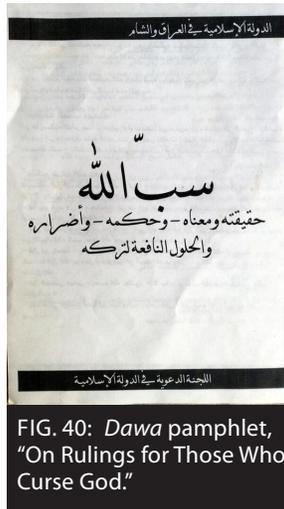
FIG. 40: *Dawa* pamphlet, "On Rulings for Those Who Curse God."

FIG. 41: *Dawa* forum in Maarat al-Dabsi 8/10/13.

FIG. 42: *Dawa* forum at the Atmeh Refugee Camp 9/19/13.

FIG. 43 *Dawa* forum in rural Idlib, 11/30/13.

FIG. 44: Notice in Talmenes mandating closure of shops selling tobacco products, 9/19/13.

FIG. 45: Bread factory, 11/18/13.

FIG. 46 Relief aid to individuals in Batabo, 12/10/13.

FIG. 47 Infamous IS sharia court in al-Dana after burning by HASI.

FIG. 48: *Baya* of individuals in Idlib.

GOVERNMENT PHASE II

During the time IS was in control of areas in its Wilayat Idlib, it pushed to project an image of already being a state by opening a number of offices. These in many cases were for mere show and/or were far less sophisticated than the apparatus seen after the formalization of processes and structures put into place following its caliphate announcement. The offices IS initially showed off were its sharia committee headquarters, municipal headquarters, and court in al-Dana; a *dawa* office in al-Karama Refugee Camp; a police station and court in Atameh; and a women's *dawa* outreach office (figs. 49–54). Similar administrative structures likely were established in other areas, too, though their presence was not publicly disclosed.

In addition, custom entrances and road signs began to be adopted in the territories IS held. It erected, for instance, a sign at the entrance to al-Dana on October 7, 2013, and one into the town of al-Najiya on December 7, 2013 (figs. 55, 56). Likewise, on December 8, 2013, IS highlighted its painting of Quranic verses on walls within its territory (fig. 57).[68] No signs were evident, however, of public works projects or attempts to run different local industries, as occurred after its caliphate announcement.

INTELLIGENCE/MILITARY PHASE I, TAKE 2

After its defeat in Idlib, IS began once again putting sleeper cells inside the province and conducting military attacks, as well as co-opting local factions. This is a perfect example of IS's adherence to a model; it does, indeed, have a plan, and even if it is pushed out from an area it has taken, it will start over from the beginning and try to rebuild its infrastructure. In early July 2014, for instance, the group Liwa Dawud, which is based in Idlib, pledged *baya* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[69] In September 2014, the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, a nationalist rebel group, caught a pair of IS suicide bombers before they could conduct their attack.[70] A month later came further reports of IS re-infiltration, though not until June 2015 would a spate of attacks occur.[71] During July 2015, a number of HASI and JN leaders were targeted by IS in Idlib.[72] While some survived, HASI did arrest a few IS cells.[73] Although in August IS was able to carry out bombings in both

FIG. 49: Sharia committee headquarters in al-Dana, 9/7/13.

FIG. 50: IS municipality in al-Dana, 11/25/13.

FIG. 51: Court in al-Dana, 11/18/13.

FIG. 52: *Dawa* office at the al-Karamah Refugee Camp, 9/22/13.

FIG. 53: Police station in Atmeh, 11/3/13.

FIG. 54: Court in Atmeh, 11/25/13.

FIG. 55: Entrance to al-Dana, 10/7/13.

FIG. 56: Entrance to the town of al-Najiya, 12/7/13.

FIG. 57: Painting walls, 12/8/13.

Haram and Kansafra, no other attacks have happened in recent months.[74] This suggests other cells have been compromised and had members killed or captured by JN, HASI, or other actors in Idlib governorate.

Yemeni Wilayat

Unlike the cases of Wilayat Tarabulus in Libya and Wilayat Idlib in Syria, IS has not yet been able to take control of territory in Yemen because it lacks the necessary military strength and material support to take over an area. It also has to contend with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which has a far longer history and deeper support base than IS currently has. IS activities in Yemen therefore represent attempts to follow its model for eventual takeover of territory.

IS has operated in seven so-called provinces in Yemen since mid-November 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed the expansion of his self-styled caliphate into that country: Adan-Abyan, al-Bayda, al-Liwa al-Akhdar, al-Sana'a, Hadramawt (where IS appears strongest), Lahij, and Shabwah. Since activities thus far have been sparse in each, all these *wilayat* will be examined.

INTELLIGENCE PHASE I

IS had early supporters in Yemen—some even within AQAP—before it had even announced its caliphate or expanded into the country. These included, in particular, the independent preacher Abdul Majid al-Hitari and an AQAP sharia official, Mamun Hatim.[75] The individuals who pledged *baya* and were accepted by al-Baghdadi in mid-November 2014 were also defectors from AQAP. This repeats the pattern seen in the other case studies, where IS has been able to work off networks already in place in particular locations without necessarily having to start from scratch.

IS set up a number of sleeper cells in various areas of Yemen, most notably in the capital al-Sana, where it conducted its first military operations in March 2015; this shows it had been planning in the five months between the official provincial recognition and the first of its attacks, which became more numerous and more frequent over time. As of this writing, IS is believed to maintain up to two hundred individuals in sleeper cells around Sana and Aden.[76]

MILITARY PHASE I

Since attacking four Houthi mosques, a Zaydi Shia revivalist movement, in late March 2015, IS has conducted a number of high-profile attacks in its various Yemeni "provinces," but many have taken place in Sana. Most recently, it assassinated the governor of Aden.[77]

In addition to staging these attacks, IS has opened up a number of training camps and workshops for its fighters (figs. 58–63).[78] It has its al-Shaykhayn Military Training Camp in Aden, for example, and its Sheikh Anas al-Nashwan Military Training Camp in Hadramawt, as well as an unofficially announced training camp in Lahij.[79] IS has, moreover, conducted three side sessions for fighters in the field on first aid, media operations, and handgun training in Hadramawt.[80]

Beyond its terrorist attacks and training, IS appeared in the early fall of 2015 not yet to be seriously involved in the insurgency in the south of the country. According to locals, IS "loiter[ed] at the rear,

[then] they swooped in as the fighting subsided to loot heavy weapons and ammunition left behind when the Houthis fled."[81] In early December 2015, though, IS seemed to have become more involved with insurgent activities against local army posts in the towns of Shibam and al-Qat, located in Hadramawt.[82] It even summarily executed two individuals it claimed were in Yemen's Central Security in Seiyun (fig. 64).[83]

DAWA PHASE I:

One of the earliest signs that IS was attempting to make inroads in Yemen was a photo leaked in

FIG. 61: Fiirst aid training class, 9/23/15.

FIG. 58: Training camp.

FIG. 62: Field media training, 10/3/15.

FIG. 59: al-Saykhayn military training camp, 7/25/15.

FIG. 63: Handgun training, 10/24/15.

FIG. 60: Shaykh Anas al-Nashwan military training camp, 9/15/15.

FIG. 64: Liquidating soldiers from Central Security, 12/2/15.

mid-December 2014 of fighters taking a break to pray.[84] Then, in late February 2015, IS began passing out statements on sectarian issues (fig. 65) to residents in its Adan, Hadramawt, and Lahij "provinces," as well as one in Wilayat Shabwah on the importance of the caliphate.[85] IS also began passing out *dawa* CDs to individuals in Hadramawt.[86] All of these efforts were local, though, and not pushed by IS's official media outlets online.

That said, on March 24, 2015, IS released a *nashid* (Islamic a-cappella music), directed at Yemen. In the *nashid*, titled "Oh Sons of Yemen,"[87] IS exhorts members and/or potential recruits in that country to "arise and prepare your [suicide] belt…the banner of tawhid (pure monotheism) is the object of your desires…thus, there appears the light of the generation, the most complete goodness."[88]

IS also has visited patients at its medical center and passed out its *dawa* literature to residents in Aden (fig. 66); manufactured its black flags (fig. 67) and had a viewing partying for its Gold Dinar video in Shabwah; and showed off the breaking of the fast for Ashura in Hadramawt.[89]

In short, its activities in Yemen are very minor and not terribly sophisticated compared with those mentioned in the case studies of Wilayat Tarabulus and Wilayat Idlib, nor can they measure up to IS activities in other provinces in its core territories in Iraq and Syria. If IS continues these types of activities in Yemen, it could gain new supporters there, but it would still have an uphill battle because of the strong presence of its rivals in AQAP.

HISBA AND GOVERNANCE PHASE I

No evidence suggests IS has yet been involved in any type of proto-governance in Yemen. IS's *hisba* phase in Yemen also appears still to be in its infancy. Disputed local reports claim IS shut down an Eid party set up for children by the United Arab Emirates' Red Crescent in Aden;[90] and on December 4, 2015, for the first time, it blew up a shrine it deemed polytheistic in Wadi Jul al-Rayidah (Shabwah) (fig. 68).[91]

Time will tell how much farther IS can take itself in Yemen, but to date it has primarily advanced only in the first three phases (intelligence, military, and *dawa*)

FIG. 65: Statement on a sectarian issue.

FIG. 66: Passing out *dawa* literature, 9/7/15.

FIG. 67: Manufacturing black flags, 8/12/15.

FIG. 68: Bombing of polytheistic shrine, 12/4/15.

of the pre–territorial control stage. Signs are definitely appearing, though, that it is becoming increasingly advanced and more sophisticated militarily, which could be a harbinger of more to come on all fronts, such as the beginning of active involvement in *hisba* and governance activities and possibly even the taking over of territory in small villages and towns. Such movement could well lead to the growth of these activities in the five phases of the second stage of the process.

Conclusions

From all of this, we can better understand and assess how IS is doing in terms of its control and expansion in a multitude of locations. Since it is a nimble and learning entity, aspects of its situation will likely shift in the future; but, overall, a pattern has emerged in a number of the locations in which it operates indicating its success is not dependent on its proximity to home base.

Of course, how everything plays out is contingent on the terrain in specific areas and how the local actors interact with, perceive, and judge their interests vis-à-vis IS, which can help explain whether it has been successful, could be successful, or has so far failed in its attempts to advance its cause. Once IS has a full stranglehold on an area, anyone in its territory is highly unlikely to be able to challenge its monopoly, unless the challenge comes from individuals, factions, nonstate actors, or states outside of its control, as we have seen from Iranian proxy and local Shia militias and Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Iraqi governorates; from revolutionary and Islamist rebel factions and the Kurdish PYD in Syrian governorates; and from the al-Qaeda-aligned group Majlis Shura al-Mujahedin Darnah in Libyan cities like Darnah. This is why if actors locally, regionally, and globally continue to have higher priorities, The Islamic State will remain and become further entrenched within the region.

Notes

1. The Islamic State even put out a position paper outlining how it hoped to accomplish this sometime in 2013 or 2014, which was leaked online by Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi. The original Arabic with English translation can be found in the *Guardian*, "The ISIS Papers: A Masterplan for Consolidating Power," December 7, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/07/islamic-state-document-masterplan-for-power.

2. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "Liwa Shuhada' al-Yarmouk: History and Analysis," *Syria Comment*, September 18, 2015, http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/liwa-shuhada-al-yarmouk-history-and-analysis/.

3. The original tweets have since been taken down, but the author has saved copies. Original links: https://twitter.com/abua-beida/status/521728491617013760; https://twitter.com/CaucasusAffairs/status/489939852008632320.

4. Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham, "Clanging of the Swords #4," *al-Furqan Media*, May 17, 2014, http://jihadology.net/2014/05/17/al-furqan-media-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham-clanging-of-the-swords-part-4/.

5. Examples of the type of literature IS has produced can be found at http://jihadology.net/category/dawah-literature/.

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7. Liz Sly, "Syria Tribal Revolt against Islamic State Ignored, Fueling Resentment," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syria-tribal-revolt-against-islamic-state-ignored-fueling-resentment/2014/10/20/25401beb-8de8-49f2-8e64-c1cfbee45232_story.html; Alice Fordham, "Despite a Massacre by ISIS, an Iraqi Tribe Vows to Fight Back," NPR, November 20, 2014, http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/11/20/364942169/despite-a-massacre-by-isis-an-iraqi-tribe-vows-to-fight-back; Aiman Mufta, Adam Ali, and Ajnadin Mustafa, "IS Seizes Sirte's District No. 3, Executes Locals, Burns Local Medical Centre: Report," *Libya Herald,* August 14, 2015, https://www.libyaherald.com/2015/08/14/is-seizes-sirtes-district-no-3-executes-locals-burns-local-medical-centre-report/.

8. Here are some of these rulings: https://twitter.com/kovandire/status/622830693064790016/photo/1 and https://twitter.com/p_vanostaeyen/status/630149845513306113/photo/1.

9. Here is the section of that hadith in full: "There will be Prophethood for as long as God wills it to be, then He will remove it when He wills, then there will be Caliphate upon the Prophetic method, and it will be for as long as God wills, then He will remove it when He wills, then there will be biting Kingship for as long as God wills, then He will remove it when He

wills, then there will be oppressive kingship for as long as God wills, then he will remove it when He wills, and then there will be a Caliphate upon the Prophetic method."

10. For more on the Islamic State's media campaign, see Aaron Y. Zelin, "Picture or It Didn't Happen: A Snapshot of the Islamic State's Official Media Output," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015), http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/445/html.

11. For more on the relevance of IS coopting the ASL network, see Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Islamic State's Burgeoning Capital in Sirte, Libya," *PolicyWatch* 2462 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 6, 2015), http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-states-burgeoning-capital-in-sirte-libya.

12. Ruth Sherlock, "Islamic State: Inside the Latest City to Fall under Its Sway," *Telegraph*, March 10, 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/11460124/How-Gaddafis-home-city-in-Libya-fell-under-the-rule-of-Islamic-State-jihadists.html.

13. "Repentance of 42 Elements Working in the Ministry of Interior," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, February 14, 2015. All primary sources are saved on the author's computer, and examples are noted in the appendix of content cited.

14. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "Repentance: Financial Income for the Islamic State," *Pundicity*, September 28, 2015, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/09/repentance-financial-income-for-the-islamic-state.

15. Islamic State, "Distributing Da'wah Leaflets," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, January 25, 2015; Islamic State, "Daw'ah Tour: Distributing Leaflets to Muslims in General," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, May 11, 2015.

16. Although the conversions were possibly coerced for propaganda purposes.

17. Islamic State, "Convert Three Christians of Africa to the Islamic Religion," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, January 28, 2015.

18. Islamic State, "Activity of the Men of Hisbah," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, January 11, 2015.

19. Islamic State, "Demolishing Shrines and Removing Polytheistic Attractions," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, January 16, 2015.

20. Islamic State, "The Burning and Destruction of Cigarettes and Some Evil Things," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, March 30, 2015.

21. Islamic State, "A Vegetable Market," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, April 4, 2015.

22. Islamic State, "Aspects of the Spread of Caliphate Soldiers in the Streets," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, April 28, 2015.

23. Islamic State, "Repentance from a Group of Apostates," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, August 11, 2015. For more on this, see http://en.alwasat.ly/en/news/libya/1013/Over-50-policemen-have-presented-themselves-to-the-ISIS-repentance-office-in-Sirte.htm.

24. IS began to loot and destroy the homes of the local politicians among those who fled.

25. Ajdnadin Mustafa, "IS Kills Captured Judge: Report," *Libya Herald*, August 5, 2015, https://www.libyaherald.com/2015/08/05/is-kills-captured-judge-report/; Missy Ryan and Hassan Morajea, "How Justice Is Delivered in the Islamic State's New Capital along Libya's Mediterranean Coast," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/10/09/how-justice-is-delivered-in-the-islamic-states-new-capital-along-libyas-mediterranean-coast/.

26. "IS Kills 38 in Sirte, Threatens to Use Gas; HoR Members Call on International Community for Help," *Libya Herald*, August 13, 2015, https://www.libyaherald.com/2015/08/13/is-kills-38-in-sirte-threatens-to-use-gas-hor-members-call-on-international-community-for-help/.

27. "IS Stops Phone Communications between West, East and South Libya: Report," *Libya Herald*, August 26, 2015, https://www.libyaherald.com/2015/08/26/is-stops-phone-communications-between-west-east-and-south-libya-report/.

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37. Islamic State, "Qualifying Session for Imams and Preachers," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, December 8, 2015.

38. Islamic State, "Implementation of the Rule of God upon an Apostate Spy in Downtown Sirte," Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, July 19, 2015; Islamic State, "Crucifying 'Sahawat,'" Wilayat Tarabulus Media Office, August 15, 2015. "*Sahawat*" is a term used by IS for its Sunni enemies, in reference to the *sahawat*, or awakening, councils that arose against its predecessor organization, the Islamic State of Iraq, in the previous decade.

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